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2017 FLEET MANAGEMENT

GUIDE

CONTRACTORS DISCUSS THE
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TRACKING THEIR VEHICLES. 81





There are a few things to consider before selling a landscaping business. By Domenic Rinaldi

HAVE YOU THOUGHT of selling your landscaping business now or in the future? If so, have you thought about what it takes to prepare for the sale? It can be a long and complicated process without proper planning or advisors.

Landscaping businesses have been popular sellers the last few years, and the buyers might surprise you. Our firm, Sun Acquisitions, recently sold a commercial landscaping business in the Chicago area. This business had been operating for more than 50 years, and it had long-standing relationships with clients. During our confidential marketing of this business, we generated multiple

offers. However, the ultimate buyer with the highest offer was someone completely outside of the industry.

This buyer might come as a surprise. We received other offers from existing landscape contractors, but none of those came close to the offer we received from someone outside of the industry.

The owner of the company we represented was just as surprised. He could not imagine that the ultimate buyer was not from the industry - a possibility that we had mentioned in our very first planning session with him.

Head to bit.ly/prepareforthesale for a few things to consider before you sell.

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s our 2017 Turnaround Tour comes to an end, Ed LaFlamme and Bill Arman are gearing up for more consulting in 2018. They'll bring their expertise and \$25,000 of



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Visit bit.ly/Turnaround2018 to check out the trailer for the 2018 Turnaround Tour.



WAY BACK WHEN

THIS ISSUE FEATURES OUR 2017 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY REPORT, but do you remember how the green industry was doing in 2007? Dive into our archives at bit.ly/Industry2007 and get a look inside the industry 10 years ago.

INSTAGRAM

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We like to highlight the events we attend and the places we get to travel. Recently, we got to check out new snow products at the Ariens Company headquarters in Brillion, Wisconsin.



"We're glad to see landscapers in Texas getting back to work. We hope they stay safe." @MachineryAH

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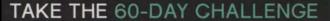


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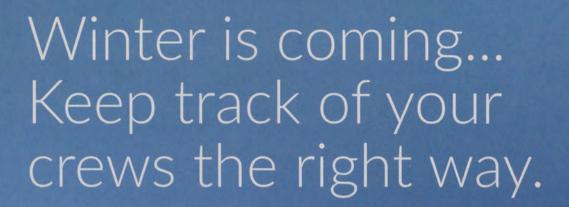
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Brian Horn Editor | Lawn & Landscape

While your numbers may look good on the surface, maybe it's time to dig a little deeper to confirm they are as they appear.

A \$250,000 lesson

t's easy to get lost in the numbers, but it's even easier to ignore them. While I'm writing this column (mid-September when I'm writing this) I find myself doing the former.

For our State of the Industry report, we collect a ton of research data that's placed in a spreadsheet. It's numbers on top of numbers on top of numbers, and it's easy to get sucked into a vortex of green industry geekdom.

While my problem right now is focusing too much on numbers, contractors seem to have the opposite problem. We hear from a lot of contractors who don't look at their numbers enough. Money is coming in, and that's all that matters.

Such was the case with Rob Atema, owner of Rivertop Contracting. He thought he knew his numbers and had processes to make sure everything was on the straight and narrow, but found out he didn't.

He was so confident things were going well that he was excited to talk to us a couple of years ago about how he turned his company around after the Great Recession forced him to lay off most of his staff. It was such a great story, that we put Rob on the cover of our September issue in 2015.

But a few months ago, he reached out to tell us a different story – an employee had been stealing money from his company for more than a year. In fact, while Rob was filling us in back in 2015 about how the company was turned around, his office manager was committing the crime.

It started off small, but by the time the employee was caught, the company was out \$250,000. You can read more about it on page 138.

I give Rob a lot of credit. Some people would have wanted to keep that quiet, but he learned a valuable lesson, and wanted others to avoid going through what he did.

His company was growing fast so he and his executive team were concentrating on operations and sales. They'd look over the profit and loss statement, but it looked good because of the way the office manager was stealing.

"As landscape professionals we, or at least most of us, would much rather be in the field than the office," Atema says. "But what I have learned is you must force yourself to have office time and learn your numbers – all of them."

While your numbers may look good on the surface, maybe it's time to dig a little deeper to confirm they are as they appear. Set aside office time to understand the financials of your company. It could save you from losing \$250,000, or losing your entire company. — *Brian Horn*

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storm EFFECTS

Landscapers and industry associations discuss the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey in Houston and Hurricane Irma in Florida.

By Megan Smalley

awn & Landscape reached out to landscapers and industry associations in Texas and Florida to learn about the damage from two devastating storms in August and September.

HURRICANE HARVEY HITS HARD. Days after Hurricane Harvey hit Houston in late August, many Houston businesses closed temporarily – including landscape contractors.

"Everyone (was) simply shut down," said Jason Mathers, owner of Houston-based Monarch Landscape Management. He said many Texans and Houstonians "stood tall" the week the storm hit, helping one another to safety and protecting property during flooding.

Most businesses, including landscapers, managed to return to work by mid-

September in Houston as floodwaters from Hurricane Harvey subsided. "Most of the water subsided (by Sept. 8)," Mathers said. "(But Monarch) returned to work Aug. 31, and worked purposefully ever since Harvey's departure. My team accepted the challenge."

Although floodwaters subsided and road conditions improved, cleanup efforts remained underway at many residential and commercial properties in Houston throughout September. The Texas Nursery & Landscape Association kept busy in late

HEADED SOUTH

Some businesses in the industry, like Davey Tree, relocated workers to perform storm cleanup jobs in Texas and Florida.

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Widespread power outages in Florida caused a large need for generators to get business back up and running.

August and early September by connecting with its members in the Houston area to make sure they were OK.

"We had just been calling everyone, at least leaving a message or email to see how (our members were) doing," said Amy Graham, president of TNLA. "We really need to try to make connections (with members) the best we can. When people connect and talk to someone who has gone through this, it makes all the difference in the world moving forward."

Graham anticipates the flooding in some parts of Houston could have an impact on the color of plants in landscapes. "The effects of the water and what that will do to trees and landscapes is yet to be determined," she said.

While Mathers said his home and business property were in good condition, a handful of his employees experienced severe flooding. "We (had) 13 team members displaced from their apartments and homes. We are supporting our families with financial aid and with donations from the Native Texas Nursery and Weathermatic."

Many other Houston-based

landscapers like Mathers also prepared as best as they could, according to TNLA.

"People knew to prepare, so that was good news," Graham said. "Many of our companies prepared to the degree they could. But we just didn't know that the hurricane would sit on top (of the city) that long, and some of the aftereffects of the storm could not have been predicted."

Mathers said having a hurricane recovery plan proved helpful for his business. Monarch developed a hurricane recovery plan in 2008 after Hurricane Ike. "For us, the plan worked. We minimized property damage and had equipment and people staged, ready to go in the event of the storm," he said.

This involved moving equipment to places that were less likely to flood. He also advises other companies to assess their hurricane recovery plans, or if they don't have a plan to make one.

HURRICANE IRMA SWEEPS THROUGH FLORIDA. Before Hurricane Irma even hit Florida, the Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association responded



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by developing a web page with hurricane preparation tips, along with links to report needs or to provide assistance to FNGLA members.

"We're trying to match people who can give with people who need," said Jennifer Nelis, director of marketing and public relations at FNGLA. "It's sad to see people incredibly impacted, but it's also nice to see those who are focused on helping those who need help."

Greg Gathers, owner of Custom Tree Care in Topeka, Kansas, is one of those individuals who came to help. His tree care company operates a disaster response division, which he introduced at his company after

Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

"(Helping with Katrina) opened my eyes to a completely different side of the business versus what I knew up until that point, which was the residential side," Gathers said.

Gathers mobilized 22 of his crew members, along with eight bucket trucks, five grapple trucks and some skid-steer loaders, to help with cleanup in Broward and Miami-Dade counties. He said his crew members would be paid for working in the two counties to clear roadways with skid-steer loaders.

Several landscapers in Florida shared their stories of how Irma impacted them. Degory Roll, owner of Palm Garden Nursery & Landscaping in Brevard County, noted that his company was still in the recovery process as of Sept. 19, trying to meet customer needs.

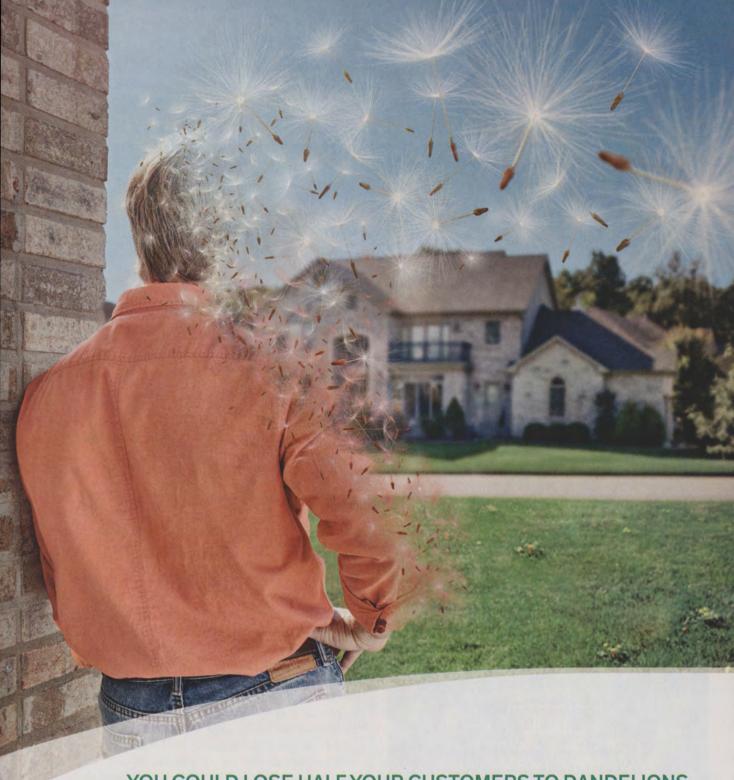
"This issue is not fully resolved," he said. "Every customer's need is different immediately after the storm and keeping in contact right before and after the storm will put a lot of customers at ease since you are playing a role of a first responder to protect your customers' investments."

George Kennedy, president of Terra-Scape Enterprises in Edgewater, said his employees performed a lot of cleanup work after the storm. While power outages caused some setbacks, he said damages at customer sites from Hurricane Irma were not nearly as bad as what he saw last fall during Hurricane Matthew. "When Matthew came through last year, it took us almost two months to get properties cleaned up," he said. "(But with Irma), the debris and damage wasn't nearly as bad."

FNGLA also encourages those who can help to visit www.fngla. org/irma/ to provide supplies.

"If you have resources and are willing to provide that, if you can ship things, if you have a truck, please post that to the I Can Help page," Nelis said. "That will be beneficial."





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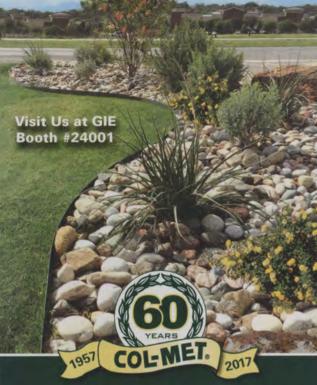


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RISE's annual meeting in Florida focused on embracing changes within the industry, including the new generation.

EYES ON THE PRESENT AND FUTURE

Appealing to younger consumers was a main topic at RISE's annual meeting in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. By Brian Horn

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla.—A big win on pesticide regulations in Maryland's Montgomery County and a focus on appealing to a younger generation were two key takeaways from the 2017 Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment Annual Meeting.

"This is one of the biggest wins in many years for this organization," said Aaron Hobbs, president of RISE, about Montgomery County, where local officials tried to ban cosmetic lawn care products.

Hobbs said RISE focused on getting local businesses involved and "packed the courtroom" to help convey their message about responsible pesticide use.

"We learned a lot of positive

things that when the next Montgomery County comes, we'll be ready," Hobbs said.

Hobbs also said 90 percent of RISE's resources protect the lawn space because people won't put up with cockroaches in their house, but they will tolerate weeds in their lawn. Even though most of the resources go to protect the lawn, the group must be unified when problems arise.

"If we don't stand together, we'll get pulled apart," he said.

EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY. Failure to adapt to technology in the workplace can cause you problems in your current job, and may leave you searching for one, said Gina Schreck of SocialKNX,



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a content and digital marketing company. Schreck, president of the company and one of the keynote speakers at the event, cited a study that said one in three people will be unemployable or out of business because they refuse to adapt. "To me that's a frightening number," she said.

Schreck said video is king right now, and landscapers and LCOs should use that to their advantage. She recommended contractors think of the 10 questions they're asked the most, and make one-minute videos to answer them. Those videos don't need to be professionally shot.

"We want real people telling us answers," she said.

"IF WE DON'T STAND TOGETHER, WE'LL GET PULLED A PART."

- Aaron Hobbs, president, RISE

A YOUNGER PERSPECTIVE. Karen Reardon, vice president of public affairs at RISE, said the group ran a social media campaign geared toward reaching young families. The "And Not Or" campaign ran from April to June on Facebook and Twitter targeting millennial families in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Reardon said the results from the campaign proved that the next-generation homeowner wants to hear from the industry. Negative conversations about member products also decreased from the same time in 2016 compared to the pilot's 2017 performance time.

The idea behind the campaign was to get the message out about the positives of a healthy lawn and change the perception about chemicals to a younger generation. This is in line with the group's effort to be more proactive on issues.

"When they are making those decisions – taking their own money and buying a product we provide and have to decide how they will control pests or grow their own tomatoes – (we want to) give them the opportunity to be engaged by us," Hobbs said.

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FOUR STEPS TO COMBAT SPRING WEEDS NOW

Did you know that fall is the perfect time to treat for spring weeds? Summer herbicide applications have likely burned down top growth, but weeds will reappear once air and soil temperatures start to drop. With warm days and cool nights, weeds begin to store energy and send it to the crown and roots — and the herbicide moves with it, making it an ideal time for application. Many annuals and perennials will be present in the turf during this time, giving you the perfect opportunity to attack a broad spectrum of weeds. Follow these handy steps to create a fall weed control plan:

1. Identify problem weeds.

Don't waste time and money trying to control the wrong weeds. It's important to know your offenders ahead of time. Here are some weeds you can target with a fall application:

- Winter annuals, including chickweed, henbit and speedwell.
 They germinate in late summer and fall, survive through the winter and produce seed in the spring.
- Perennial weeds, such as dandelion, white clover and broadleaf plantain.
 They live for more than two years and reproduce by seed and the spread of vegetative parts. It is best to use systemic herbicides as they control the plant — roots and all.

2. Note weed hot spots.

Identify the places where you've had difficulties in the past. These weak spots will indicate when you should start your broadleaf weed control program in the fall.

3. Select the proper herbicide.

If you make your application prior to germination, you'll want to use a

preemergence herbicide, such as Dimension® or Gallery® specialty herbicides. Gallery prevents broadleaf weeds that germinate in the fall, winter and spring. Dimension controls crabgrass and other grassy weeds. In the North, lawn care operators can make preemergence applications as early as Labor Day. In warmer climates, they can apply as late as October.

If you are targeting perennials or weeds that have already germinated, try Defendor® specialty herbicide, a postemergence herbicide that works at preemergence timing. When applied in late fall or early spring, it will eliminate plant growth and prevent bloom.

4. Determine application timing.

This step gives you your application window for the most effective control. Preemergence herbicides should be applied two weeks prior to weed seed germination. If you are using a postemergence herbicide, such as Defendor, you can make applications into late November.

DANDELION, A PERENNIAL, OVERWINTERS IN THE TURF.



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WHITE CLOVER, A PERENNIAL, THRIVES IN COOL TEMPERATURES.

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burn from the 105th floor of the South Tower on 9/11, he knew he had to get out of the building. He detailed how he was in a meeting in a room with no windows and at 8:48 a.m. the lights flickered. No noise or movement of the South Tower. Someone told them they needed to evacuate, but the group figured it wasn't anything major.

Eventually they were convinced to come out of the room where he saw the destruction of the North Tower.

Having still thought it was an accident and not a terrorist attack, one of his colleagues decided to use the restroom before leaving the South Tower. As Dittmar made his way down flights of stairs, the second plane hit the floor he was just on, killing his colleague.

Dittmar said his speech had noth- i story," he said. "They knew."

ing to do with the industry, but the lesson everyone should take from his talk was that every decision, no matter how small, can have major results.

"Making the right decision is not easy," he said. "But if you trust source data, you can make successful critical decisions. You don't need to be on the 105th floor during a terrorist attack. You can be anywhere and by listening you can make critical decisions that have effects on peers and partners."

He can still recall vivid details from the event, including passing rescue workers on the 35th floor who were going up to save people, even though the workers recognized there was a slim chance of survival.

"The looks in their eyes told the story," he said. "They knew."

TRUGREEN ACQUIRES LAWN DAWG

TruGreen expanded its reach in the northeast by acquiring New Hampshire based-Lawn Dawg last month. Lawn Dawg had 10 branches throughout Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut and New York. All Lawn Dawg locations will be closed and integrated into the nearest TruGreen branch location, with some employees retained.

"The majority of Lawn Dawg associates were offered positions at TruGreen with the exception of Lawn Dawg corporate and call center associates, and a select number of field associates who did not pass TruGreen's pre-hire screening requirements," Simpson said, adding that TruGreen offered immediate benefits and will honor original hire dates so that associates can keep their tenure.

Jim Campanella, president, started the company in 1997 after his previous company, Barefoot Grass was acquired by TruGreen. Brighton Partners, a private equity firm based in Nashua, New Hampshire, acquired a 70 percent stake of Lawn Dawg in 2009, according to a 2009 Lawn & Landscape article.

Lawn Dawg had more than 100 employees and posted more than \$14 million in 2016 revenue.



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WATER KNOWLEDGE

The 2017 Irrigation Show kicks off Nov. 6, in Orlando, Florida, with extensive education sessions and certification opportunities.

vents from past shows, like the Pitcher's Mound, will return to this year's Irrigation Show, hosted by the Irrigation Association.

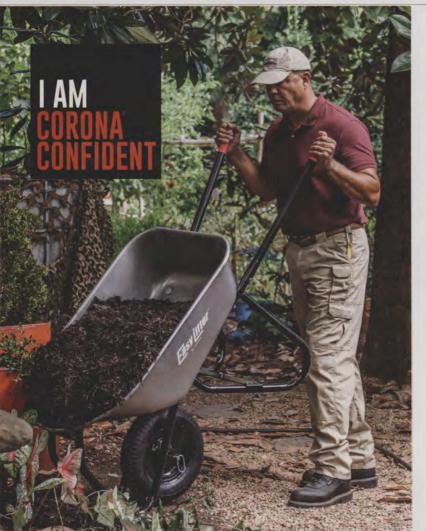
Attendees will have the chance to take certification exams throughout the week and attend education sessions on pumps and soils, agriculture, landscape and golf and business basics.

The general session kicks off with a keynote speech by Doug Rauch, former president of Trader Joe's. Rauch has 14 years of experience running the grocery chain, and will share insights into leadership and building a brand in a competitive marketplace.

The Pitcher's Mound gives entrepreneurs a chance to have their new products evaluated by successful industry professionals.

After a 10-minute pitch and a Q&A session, the "umpires" will decide whether the product is a "strikeout," "base hit," or "home run." Attendees are invited to watch this event inspired by the TV show "Shark Tank."

New products will be on display at the New Product Contest on Wednesday, Nov. 8, with winners announced the following morning.



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Q: The recent hurricanes got me thinking about our back-up plans for the office and basically, we don't have much of one. What plans should we have in place in case of disasters or major business interruptions?

A: Think about what you would do if you couldn't get to your office, or access your computers or files. Do you have systems in place that would let you recover faster?

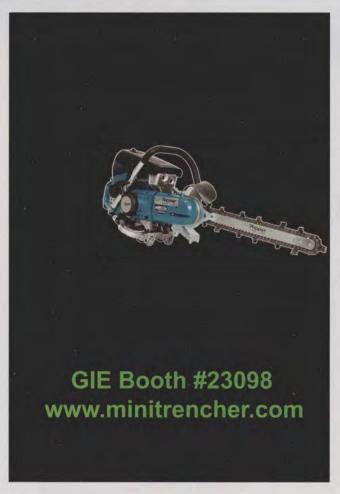
Make a list of what all you would want to back up. Some of these are obvious, but some are often overlooked.

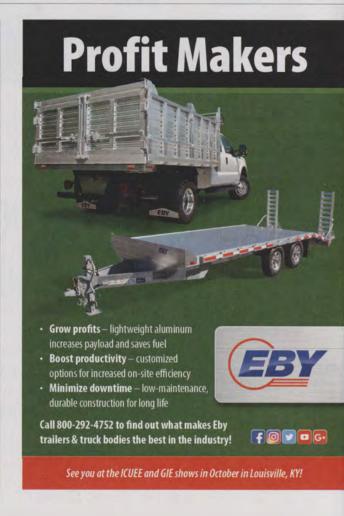
1. ACCOUNTING SOFTWARE. Especially in tough times, you want money to continue to flow in, so



that means being able to invoice or at least collect on receivables. But you also need to keep up with payables. Some products include offsite backup – but it does need to be set up.

2. WEBSITE. It's common for business owners to rely on their webmaster to have a backup of their website, but this is often not within the scope of the webmaster duties. Check with your webmaster to get a backup of your website files so that you are protected against hackers, hosting problems and more.









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3. EMAIL. Your email should be backed up daily, if not hourly. The location of your email file varies, and some people have more than one.

It's worth double-checking to see if this file is included in your regular backup routine. You may also want to create a separate, more frequent backup routine for this critical file.

4. ONLINE BANK AND VENDOR ACCOUNT INFORMATION. Most banks and vendors have made it super easy to download PDF versions of your invoices and statements. Get used to doing



this on a regular basis and be sure you do that before your access to them expires or becomes an extra charge.

5. LOCAL AND CLOUD DRIVES.

Every business' technology setup is different. If you have a server, chances are you're getting it backed up regularly. If you have employees, make sure each of their hard drives is backed up so they don't lose any files that are not on the server. If you have

your files centralized in the cloud, make sure you have a backup of those files in an off-site location and/or in the cloud.

6. CONTACT INFORMATION. In an emergency, it is critical to have access to all the contact information for your employees and clients. Make sure that lives in the cloud somewhere so that you always have it at your fingertips and make sure employees know how to reach you and know the system to share information.

Periodically check the accuracy and effectiveness of your backups and see if you can recover a file or two. If not, you're back to the drawing board. Being a business owner is all about taking calculated risks. Having all your important business data backed up helps you reduce your risks and protect what's perhaps your most important business asset.

Monica Muir Muir & Associates NALP Consultant Member

ASK THE EXPERTS is brought to you in partnership with NALP, the National Association of Landscape Professionals. Questions are fielded through NALP's Trailblazers, the industry's leading company mentoring program. For more questions visit Landscapeprofessionals.org.

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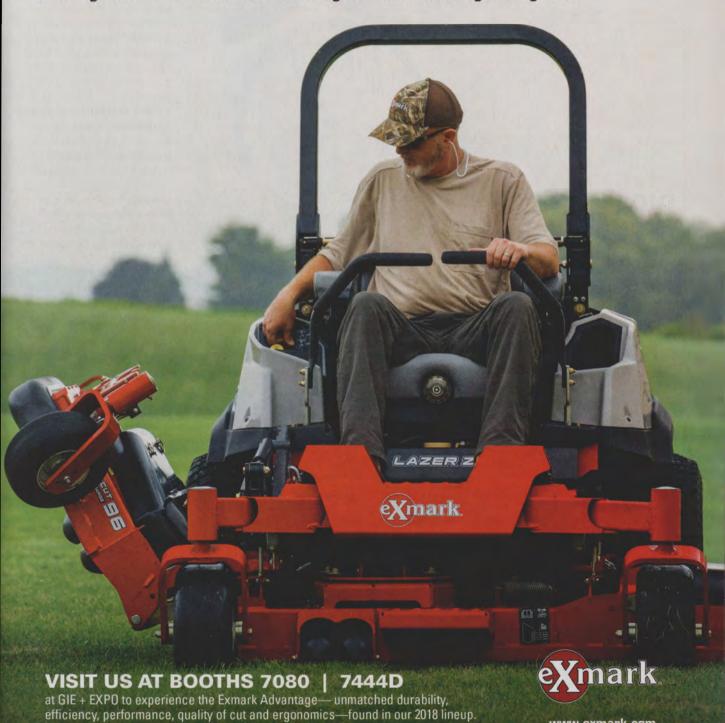


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WHETHER YOU'RE A CEO or a dedicated team member, I bet you often feel as if there are never enough hours in the day to get done all you need to do. And now, with the rise of digital, when you're virtually reachable 24/7 and your email inbox fills up nonstop, it can get overwhelming real quick.

At my business consultancy, we've been hearing this complaint more and more from our clients. How, they ask, can they get and stay ahead of it all? What should they be doing every day to move their business forward? How do you separate the signal from the noise?

There are a number of timemanagement strategies championed by business gurus but the one that has served me the best in running Grunder Landscaping over the years is to delineate a morning routine and then to rigorously stick to it. Research shows that willpower is at its strongest in the morning. The longer you delay your task list, the less likely you are to accomplish it. That's also, incidentally, why studies have consistently shown that those who work out in the morning are the most likely to stay fit over the long term. (Full disclosure: I stubbornly remain an evening athlete.



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

You can't do everything the way you're supposed to all the time!)

Here are the six tasks I do every morning after I arrive at my office to set myself and my company up for success:

1. I REVIEW MY TO-DO PILE. Before I leave the office at night, I organize my inbox into three categories: do now, delegate and save. That way when I get into my office in the morning I'm not wondering what awaits me. Instead, I do a quick review and attack the most pressing items first. Accomplish a few tasks right out of the gate and you'll feel empowered to meet the rest of your day head-on.

2. I HANDWRITE TWO THANK-YOU NOTES AND TWO BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT NOTES. These are simple, quick and solicitation-free — just a few lines thanking clients for their business, congratulating an area resident on their success or following up with a new contact I've made. It only takes a few minutes to plant a seed. Do it right and you can reap the benefits for years.

3. I ASSESS BILLINGS, WORK
ORDERS AND PROPOSALS, AND
COMPARE OUR SALES TOTAL TO
OUR BUDGET. I'm the CEO but I also
remain the sales manager. Every
morning I look at where we're at,
what sales we need to close and
what's in the pipeline. Is my sales
team hitting the numbers they need
to? If not, what can I do to help? No
matter how big or successful your
company or career gets, always
keep an eye on the finances.

4. I CHECK IN ON CLIENT RELATIONS.

Are there any outstanding issues I need to address? Are we really exceeding our clients' expectations every step of the way? Are we actually doing what we said we'd do? Did my team leader follow up and follow through on the angry call we got yesterday? Do our new hires understand our commitment to our clients?

5. I SEND TWO FOLLOW-UP EMAILS TO LONGTIME CLIENTS. My business has grown a lot over the years and with size comes distance. This is my regular, daily way of checking in with clients I may not have seen in a while. Are they still receiving the same level of service from us as before? Do they know how much I appreciate their continued business? No one wants to be taken for granted, especially those who helped get you where

6. I SCHEDULE TWO CALLS TO PROSPECTS AND CLIENTS. Never

you are.

stop hustling. You can't win at landscaping or at sales by sitting behind your desk, no matter how big a team you have to delegate to. I make sure I'm always getting in front of people whether it's a scheduled consultation, grabbing lunch with another business owner or getting coffee with a community leader. When you make friends, you make sales. It's so simple, and yet it never ceases to amaze me how many people overlook this.

I do my best to accomplish this list every workday morning without fail. With these crossed off my list, I feel prepared to meet whatever challenges the next 10 hours bring because I know we're heading in the right direction. L&L

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Before going into the tree care industry, Jim Gollnick was an auto mechanic. He knows machines. So when he started Gollnick and Sons Tree Service, he bought Vermeer brush chippers, stump grinders and mini skid steers because he wanted the best. Gollnick says the productivity of Vermeer equipment helps him hold his prices in a cost-competitive industry. For example, Vermeer brush chippers save his crews from the tedious work of cutting brush into small pieces to feed into a less-powerful chipper.

FROM THOSE WHO KNOW. Visit TreeViews.com to learn more.

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BERNARDO WAS A NEW LANDSCAPE INSTALLATION client of mine.
He and his company were young and located in a major lake resort market. His
clients were in the upper income bracket who owned at least one second home, and
many owned multiple second homes.

Growth for Bernardo and his company was not a problem. There was more than enough installation work available to keep his two three-man crews busy throughout a 40-week season. His two crews were producing about \$600,000 of work annually. He knew that he could install 20 to 30 percent more work if he had the qualified labor to do so. Labor was a serious problem for him. Qualified crew leaders were virtually impossible to find. Laborers were easier to find but usually didn't last more than a week or two.

Bernardo thought mechanization might be part of the solution. He considered purchasing a miniexcavator. However, at \$60,000, it was a big purchase and he needed to answer three questions:

Could he afford the payments of approximately \$900 per month? How much should he charge for the mini-excavator? How much would it impact the production of his two crews and increase his sales capacity?



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

IS IT WORTH IT? To answer Bernardo's questions, we need to calculate the cost per hour (CPH) for the mini-excavator. To do so, we need to calculate its acquisition CPH, its maintenance CPH and its fuel CPH. Then, total the three to get its total CPH. I try to overestimate the costs for a piece of equipment while underestimating its lifetime billable hours. This increases the CPH, but I'd rather be a little high.

We calculate the acquisition CPH by adding the purchase price to the interest paid and then subtracting any salvage value for the mini-excavator. We divide this figure by the projected lifetime billable hours for the machine. It would look like the box to the right.

THINK IT THROUGH. Bernardo thinks that he will use the mini-excavator

approximately three billable hours per day or 15 billable hours per week. During a 40-week season, this would translate into it being used about 600 billable hours per season. You can calculate the useful lifetime years for this machine by dividing the lifetime billable hours by the annual billable hours used. (3,000 lifetime billable hours ÷ 600 billable hours per year = 6 lifetime years).

Assuming Bernardo bid his mini-excavator at \$35 per hour and

used it on jobs 15 hours per week, he would generate 600 billable hours or \$21,000 (600 hours \times \$35 CPH) annually. The acquisition cost portion generated would be \$11,100 (600 \times \$18.50). This equates to \$925 per month (\$11,100 \div 12 months) — more than enough to cover his monthly payment of \$900.

Bernardo's crews are currently generating \$100,000 in revenue per man per year (\$600,000 sales per year ÷ 6 men). While it's impossible to precisely calculate how much this \$100,000 figure would increase, it's safe to assume that supplementing his crews with a mini-excavator that generates 15 billable hours per week would do two things. It would more than pay for itself and it would improve productivity. I'd estimate that the \$100,000 per man per year would increase from 15 to 25 percent or from \$115,000 to \$125,000. His annual sales would increase to a minimum of \$690,000 and perhaps as much as \$750,000.

Mechanizing your crews can add significantly to your top line and your bottom line. It can also make you less reliant on labor. Because your crews are producing more, they are more valuable, and you can afford to pay them more. In the process, you make your company more competitive, your labor more productive and your average wage paid to labor more appealing. It's a win, win, win, situation for everyone. L&L

THE NUMBERS

\$60,000 + \$7,500 - \$12,000 = \$55,500

\$55,000 \div 3,000 LIFETIME HOURS = \$18.50 ACQUISITION COST PER HOUR

We'll estimate the maintenance cost (repairs, insurance, mechanics, etc.) to be roughly \$4,500 per year for six years (3,000 hours \div 500 hours per year) = \$27,000. We then divide the \$27,000 by the lifetime hours.

\$27,000 ÷ 3,000 = \$9 MAINTENANCE COST PER HOUR

Let's estimate that this machine will burn two gallons of fuel per hour at \$3.50 per gallon

\$3.50 PER GALLON FOR FUEL X 2 GALLONS PER HOUR = \$7 FCPH

We add the three to arrive at the total CPH.

\$18.50 + \$9 + 7 = \$34.50

Let's round this up to \$35 CPH.

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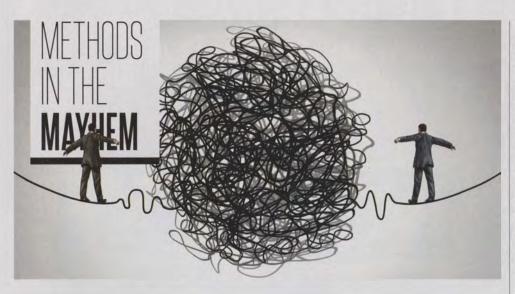
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 FOR MOST CEOS IN THE LANDSCAPE WORLD, late fall is the planning season. Owners and their management teams are running contingency scenarios and looking for new opportunities that can be leveraged for profitability.

These planning exercises include how they want to grow, where they want their customers to come from and what type of customer will continue to be the most profitable.

YOU HAVE IDEAS, NOW WHAT?

Idea generation is the easy part.
Converting sticky notes into a clear path forward requires real work.
Prioritize your notes around solutions to problems, suggestions for process improvements and big ideas for the future of your business into the following chapters of your plan:

ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT.

Clear lines of responsibility, authority and accountability will make it easier to track progress. Ensure internal alignment between sales and operations. To avoid disruptions and loss of productivity, determine the type of work operations that can support profitability and which types of customers best fit the company's operational model.

MARKETING. The marketing and



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

communications piece of your plan will establish a consistent messaging baseline across service segments. Marketing is the strategic customer-facing piece that will include a tool kit to drive your brand in the community, reach your revenue goals, shape your conversation with the public and keep you out in front of customer preferences, buying behaviors and trends, instead of chasing them.

SALES. A good strategic sales section in your overall plan will include creating ways to acquire new clients and maintaining existing ones, a plan for service recovery, an analysis of both your high- and low-margin customers, identifying your ideal customers and the customers you don't want, and what to do with slow pays. Include thinking around

ENCOURAGE STAFF TO OWN KEY PROGRAM INITIATIVES AND MEET REGULARLY FOR PROGRESS ON GOALS.

your competition, your expectations and a fresh look at your region's demographics. Consider a consistent program for customer surveys and how you can use that insight.

REFERRALS. Most companies want to grow, and grow profitably. Growth is not hard for most good companies because they do good work and grow by referral. Unfortunately, profits are not automatic, so growing profitably is different. The problem with referral-driven growth is not all referrals are equal. Density is compromised since referrals can come from anywhere and are not limited to profitable clients. As companies get bigger, lost contracts can become numerous and referrals may cover the losses but not enable growth.

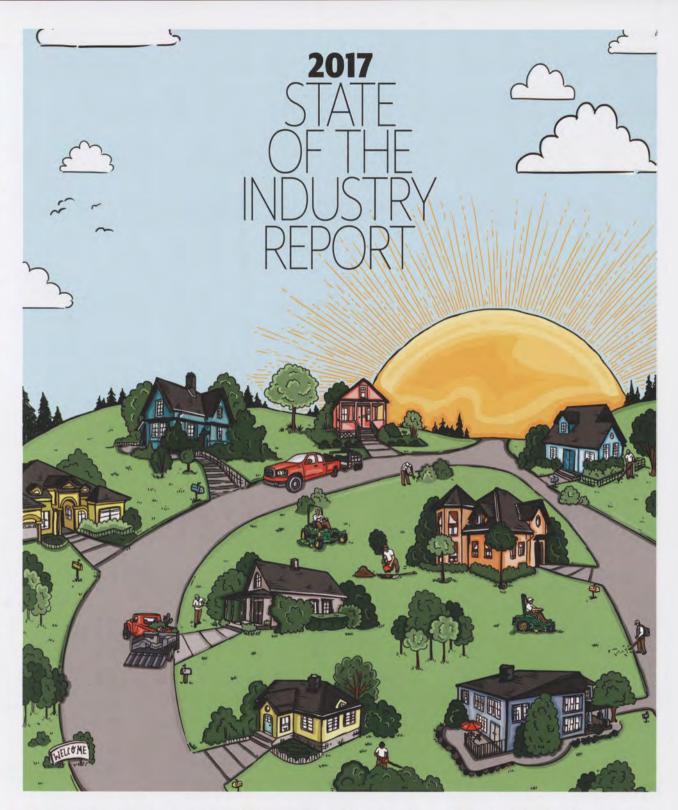
STAFFING. Integrate HR and a coherent plan for bench-building to ensure that you have the right number of people with the right skills to help you grow. Consider business trends, legislative regulations regarding H-2B, workforce demographics, turnover, compliance and screening. An integrated approach to hire, onboard, train and retain talent more imaginatively is critical.

FINANCIAL PLANNING. Planning how your business will grow requires forward-looking financials and metrics. Without this piece, your strategic plan is only interesting ideas. Once you start looking at your organization in a financial context, you will know what can be realistically achieved and where you can factor in stretch goals. The financial section of your plan should include an expense budget, cash flow, income projections, projected balance sheet and a breakeven analysis.

FACILITATING. There are a lot of good DIY tools and templates for strategic planning. However, an experienced professional can often bring objectivity to the process and ensure that your plan is executable, includes organizational priorities, a focus on how the plan will engage your workforce, ways to improve culture and eliminate complacency, and insight to help you manage your plan.

IMPLEMENTATION. While technology exists to automate business systems, there is no self-driving mechanism that allows a strategic plan to run on its own. Encourage staff to own key program initiatives and meet regularly for progress on goals.

As a final step, run your plan by a CEO peer or a trusted adviser for a reality check or to challenge your thinking. It could result in a better plan. L&L



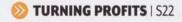


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WE KNOW MANY OF YOU STARTED your

businesses with a truck, trailer, mower and most of all, a passion for creating, enhancing and maintaining outdoor spaces. From those humble beginnings, you have grown your business into a trusted brand within your communities.

Founded 180 years ago in 1837, John Deere started with one blacksmith driven by innovation, integrity, quality and a commitment to help his customers become more productive. Now, we're a company that employs more than 60,000 people, but we still maintain our core values and passion to help those with close ties to the land, including this great industry of landscape professionals.

Over the years, we've all experienced challenges and refined our businesses by moving and evolving with the times and taking advantage of new opportunities to build and grow our people and our brand.

Today, the landscaping industry is strong and there is anticipated growth in the foreseeable future, as reported by 94 percent of those surveyed for the State of the Industry Report. I've personally heard many of you comment that there is plenty of work and that the only factors limiting further growth are the availability of qualified labor and the rising costs associated with attracting and retaining quality workers.

As I talk with lawn care and landscape professionals, I also hear about optimism and focus. As reflected within this State of the Industry Report, 86 percent of those surveyed said they turned a profit last year, and 93 percent are confident that they will grow next year, but growth isn't always easy. Growth often calls for new and innovative approaches, and at John Deere we are committed to providing you with the support and business solutions to help you succeed.

Our commitment to your business goes beyond providing you with quality products through our experienced dealer network. The John Deere dealer is there to support your business needs after the sale with certified factory trained service technicians and knowledgeable staff. We have one priority: To ensure product uptime in the most responsive manner, because downtime is not an option when you are running a business.

Sustainable and profitable growth is important for all of us, and many opportunities lie ahead. There has never been a better time to clearly define your brand, and your offerings, which will lead to further growth for your business.

I wish you a safe and prosperous year!



KEN TAYLOR, CLP

Sales Manager John Deere Corporate Business Division



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STEADY CELINIB

CONTRACTORS CONTINUE TO SETTLE BACK IN –

and then some – since the end of the Great Recession, making it another solid year for the green industry. Landscaping companies had a median revenue of \$291,000, which is up from \$256,000 in 2015 and \$217,000 in 2014. Slightly more contractors turned a profit in 2016 (86 percent) than in 2015 (84 percent) and 2014 (78 percent).

Landscape maintenance stayed the most profitable service offered, and it regained the top spot as the most popular service provided after losing that spot to lawn care last year.

A lack of quality labor continues to be the top concern in the industry, especially for companies making more than \$1 million in revenue. On a 1-10 scale (10 being a major concern), those companies ranked hiring a 7.8, compared to the average ranking from all companies, which was 6.5.

Personal stress, low-ball competitors and high health insurance costs also ranked as major concerns for landscapers. Bad weather fell in the middle of the pack this year as a concern, though this survey was taken before the hurricanes in Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico.

But even with those concerns, respondents have a bright outlook on their companies and the future of the industry with 94 percent saying they are at least somewhat confident the industry will grow. When asked about the confidence in their company's growth, 93 percent had the same answer. – Brian Horn





HOW MANY YEARS HAS YOUR COMPANY BEEN IN BUSINESS?

Fewer than 5

12%

10-19

20-29

25%

30 or more

18%



HOW OLD ARE YOU?

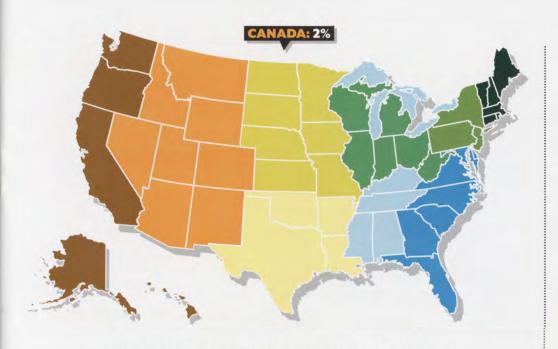
65 or older

45-64

25-44

Under 25

2%



IN WHICH STATE/PROVINCE IS YOUR COMPANY LOCATED?

NORTHEAST

New England: CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT	5%
Middle Atlantic: NI NY PA	13%

MIDWEST

East North Central: IL, IN, MI, OH, WI	17%	0
West North Central: IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD	11%	6

SOUTH

South Atlantic: DC, DE, FL,	MD, NC, PR/VI, SC, VA, WV24%
East South Central: AL, KY,	, TN

West South Central: AR, LA, OK, TX

WEST

Mountain: AZ, CO, ID, MT, NM, NV, UT, WY6%	Mountair
Pacific: AK, CA, HI, OR, WA6%	Pacific: A

APPROXIMATELY WHAT WAS YOUR LOCATION'S GROSS REVENUE IN 2016?



\$1 million - \$999,999 - \$499,999

\$200,000

\$199,999

Less than \$49,999

CONTRACTORS ARE GROWING THE SERVICES

they provide across the board compared to last year. Maintenance (79% last year) and design/build construction (71%) saw the largest jump while lawn care (82%), tree and ornamental (59%) and irrigation (44%) also saw slight increases. As far as what new services contractors are adding, design/build grabbed the top spot from last year's leader lawn care.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SERVICES DOES YOUR **LOCATION OFFER?**

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING **NEW SERVICES DOES YOUR** LOCATION PLAN TO OFFER

WHICH SERVICES HAS YOUR LOCATION STOPPED OFFERING IN THE PAST THREE YEARS?

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF **YOUR LOCATION'S 2016 GROSS REVENUE CAME** FROM EACH OF THE **FOLLOWING SERVICES?**

LANDSCAPE AND MOWING MAINTENANCE

LANDSCAPE DESIGN/ CONSTRUCTION

LAWN CARE/CHEMICAL APPLICATION

SNOW AND ICE MANAGEMENT

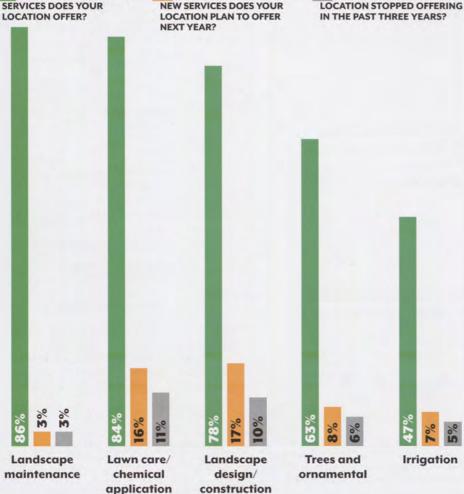
IRRIGATION INSTALLATION/ MAINTENANCE/SERVICE

TREES & ORNAMENTAL

OTHER

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR LOCATION'S **2016 SALES CAME** FROM EACH OF THE FOLLOWING PROPERTY TYPES?

SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL	62%
COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL	26%
MULTI-FAMILY STRUCTURES	7%
GOVERNMENT/INSTITUTIONAL	4%
OTHER	1%





RESPONDENTS WERE VERY CONFIDENT/CONFIDENT THEIR BUSINESS WILL GROW

RVICE



SURVEY METHODOLOGY I

The survey sample of 8,501 was selected in systematic fashion by GIE Media and Readex Research. The sample represented 17,002 individuals at the time of selection. The survey ran from July 6-17 and the margin of error for percentages based on 521 landscape contractors/lawn care operators is ±4.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

NEXT YEAR. 6% WERE NOT CONFIDENT AT ALL.

FUTURE FEARS

LACK OF QUALITY LABOR

is still the top challenge contractors face this year and expect to face in the next three years. The good news is the concern is slightly down from our 2016 report. Last year, 45% of contractors responded that they were very concerned (scoring it as an 8-10) about the issue compared to 42% this year. In fact, all but one category showed less of a concern compared to our 2016 report – regulation of or ban on equipment noise/emissions rose from 17% in last year's report to 18% this year's report.

THE PERCENTAGES SHOW HOW MANY RESPONDENTS RANKED AN ISSUE AS A MAJOR CONCERN IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS BY SCORING IT AS AN 8, 9 OR 10.

42%	QUALITY LABOR SHORTAGE
37%	HIGH HEALTH INSURANCE COSTS
33%	PERSONAL STRESS
33%	HIGH WORKERS' COMPENSATION COSTS
32%	LOW-BALL COMPETITORS
27%	DIFFICULTY RAISING PRICES FOR WORK
25%	HIGH FUEL PRICES
23%	LOWER MARGINS AT WORK
21%	REGULATION OF OR BAN ON PESTICIDE/FERT. USE
20%	REGULATION OF OR BAN ON WATER/IRRIGATION

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR CONCERN WITH EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ISSUES AND THEIR IMPACT ON YOUR LOCATION'S BUSINESS IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS?

(10=VERY CONCERNED, 1=NOT CONCERNED)

6.5 QUALITY LABOR SHORTAGE	5.6 DIFFICULTY RAISING PRICES FOR WORK
5.9 PERSONAL STRESS	5.5 HIGH FUEL PRICES
5.9 LOW-BALL COMPETITORS	5.3 LOWER MARGINS ON WORK
5.8 HIGH HEALTH INSURANCE COSTS	4.9 REGULATION OF OR BAN ON PEST./FERT. USE
5.8 HIGH WORKERS'	4.8 BAD WEATHER



STATEWDE SPOTLIGHT

HIRING CONTINUES
TO BE A MAIN CONCERN
IN THE INDUSTRY,
BUT OTHER ISSUES
ARE AFFECTING
CONTRACTORS AT
A REGIONAL LEVEL.

Story by

Megan Smalley & Lauren Rathmell



LANDSCAPING BUSINESSES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

have reported that 2017 has been a good year for business, and many, such as **Steve Christy's LEI Corporation** in Boylston, Massachusetts, have experienced a substantial amount of growth. However, it's no surprise that labor has been the No. 1 issue for many in the industry. Aside from labor, which you can read about more on page S14, contractors and LCOs across the country talked with Lawn & Landscape to share what has affected their business most in 2017.

2017 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY REPORT

MIDWEST

HUNTLEY, ILLINOIS

CHUCK STRADA, OWNER, MY LAWN GUY CHUCK

CONCERNS: LOW-BALL
COMPETITION, GROWING PAINS

SERVICES PROVIDED:



COMPETITION IS GOOD FOR AN INDUSTRY, but

poor competitors can give an industry a black eye.

"It's nice to have competition, but today it seems like anybody can get a truck and a mower," says Chuck Strada, owner of My Lawn Guy Chuck, which serves as a lawn maintenance business to residential and commercial clients in northwest Illinois.

The past few years, Strada has seen quite a few "bad competitors" popping up to do business in Illinois. The state experienced a drought a few years ago. Once the drought ended, business boomed and new companies emerged. While Strada doesn't mind competition, the poor-quality service some of his competitors perform has hurt the landscaping industry in his area. It gives Strada

additional business from unsatisfied customers, but he noticed that the customers tend to have a poor perception of the industry after that type of experience.

"I've seen guys come in, undercut and don't do the job right. Then I come in to the client to do the job right and they already have a bad taste in their mouth about landscaping," Strada says. "I get so much new business from people who say, 'My landscaper won't return my call' or 'My guy moved back to another country.' That gives me a bad name when they do this."

Strada's Illinois-based landscape maintenance company is small, having only launched business about nine years ago. Although he wants to grow, he needs a business loan to invest in new equipment. "I'm at a point where in order to grow, I need a second crew, a second truck, a second mower. To grow, I need to take a loan, but I can't because it's much harder to get a loan as a small business."

My Lawn Guy Chuck is a two-man business that posted \$112,000 in revenue in 2016 and Strada anticipates that figure to increase for 2017.



"IT'S NICE TO HAVE COMPETITION, BUT TODAY IT SEEMS LIKE ANYBODY CAN GET A TRUCK AND A MOWER."

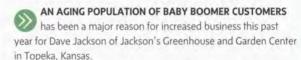
CHUCK STRADA, OWNER, MY LAWN GUY CHUCK

TOPEKA, KANSAS

DAVE JACKSON, OWNER, JACKSON'S GREENHOUSE AND GARDEN CENTER

CONCERNS: NEW BUSINESS, HEALTH CARE LAWS

SERVICES PROVIDED: DESIGN, INSTALLATION, LAWN CARE



With Baby Boomers approaching their 60s and 70s, many of them are turning to landscape contractors to perform residential landscape maintenance jobs. Jackson notes the population in Kansas is somewhat older compared with other states, as well, so he has received more calls from this population the past year.

While there's no shortage of business opportunities, Jackson says there are limits on how much individual landscape contractors can grow due to a tax increase in Kansas and impacts from the Affordable Care Act. In July, Kansas lawmakers passed a tax increase that repealed legislation that gave a 100 percent tax break to limited liability corporations, sole proprietorships and S corporations.

"Those of us incorporated in the state as an S corporation were exempt from state income tax since 2012," Jackson says. "The reason they did that was to stimulate business growth. What I had done before with the promise of now income tax was purchase new equipment, using our savings to defray the cost." He adds that the income tax regulation may impact his company's ability to grow.

Jackson also worries growth for him may be stunted temporarily because of the Affordable Care Act. "We're not taking any new customers because with our divisions, I have to stay under 50 employees because of Obamacare. If I go over that, Obamacare will kick in, which is not good in terms of cost – the enormous cost that Obamacare would saddle on my business."

Jackson's Greenhouse and Garden Center's primary focus is its nursery and greenhouse business, but the company dedicates about 10 percent of its business to design/build landscape services. The landscaping division achieved about \$150,000 in revenue last year, Jackson says. To date, it has reported higher profits in 2017 compared with 2016.

JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

JIM HAWKINSON, PRESIDENT, TLC TOTAL LAWNCARE

CONCERNS: QUICK GROWTH, BAD WEATHER

SERVICES PROVIDED: LAWN CARE, MAINTENANCE, INSTALLATION IN NORTHERN FLORIDA,
TLC Total Lawncare grew this
year, but the growth wasn't easy.

"Things have been harder this year (compared to 2016)," says owner Jim Hawkinson. "We grew a lot so we are dealing with those growing pains."

TLC has been able to take on more clients so the company has seen an increased workload. Hawkinson says the workers have been putting in a lot of hours and the company has had to spend more during the growth process, as well.

"We're balancing the work we're getting with the workers we have right now," he says. The low unemployment rate in the area has also slowed their ability to get good workers.

Weather in Florida hasn't helped businesses, either. Hawkinson says the weather has been terrible for business. A drought plagued the region in winter, and it dealt with an early heat wave until rain events occurred almost daily by summer. With rainy conditions most mornings, maintenance jobs quickly backed up.

"Everything grows fast and we run out of time to deal with it," he says.

TLC employs about 80 people,

WEST

RIPON, CALIFORNIA

AARON STEWART, PARTNER AND VICE PRESIDENT OF STEWART LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

CONCERNS: MINIMUM WAGE LAWS, WATER MANAGEMENT

SERVICES PROVIDED: MAINTENANCE, INSTALLATION, IRRIGATION, LIGHTING

ALTHOUGH HIRING IS THE NO. 1 CONCERN

for Aaron Stewart, partner and vice president at Stewart Landscape Management, minimum wage is a second concern. It jumped from \$10.50-\$12 in July and will be \$15 by 2021.

Stewart says his company pays more than minimum wage to secure employees, but the escalating minimum wage standards will put more pressure on his business. "Last year, it went up about 50 cents an hour, but it will start increasing \$1 an hour each time until it hits \$15," he says. "So, for us, we have to provide a service that warrants these (wage) increases to cover the labor and remain cognizant of our customer base. We always evaluate what we pay every year and increase as we need to."

With minimum wage standards rising, Stewart also anticipates hiring will become tougher. "We're not unique to this issue. Everyone is going through the same thing (in California), be it a landscape contractor, a carpenter or a farmer." Stewart adds

that he makes sure his pay remains competitive in order to attract and retain employees.

This past year also marked the end to a lingering drought that plagued most of California the past few years, thanks to a rainy winter season from January to April. While some pockets of California still have restrictions on water use, Stewart says most areas have lifted restrictions.

Reflecting on California's drought, he says it taught many in the industry ways to improve water management. "We saw a lot of conversions from overhead sprays to drip. We have seen more water-efficient sprinklers and lawn sprinklers installed. Smart controllers have been installed. One of the main things it did was it created a sense of urgency to aid broken sprinklers, and there was very little tolerance for runoff or water waste. You had to be service oriented, which isn't a bad thing."

Stewart Landscape Management, which employs 25 to 30 people, focuses on landscape maintenance, installation and irrigation jobs.

FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

CARA DOYLE, OWNER, SUMMIT HARDSCAPING

CONCERNS: LOCAL LEGISLATIONS, NEW BUSINESS

SERVICES PROVIDED: DESIGN/BUILD, HARDSCAPING WESTERN LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS also express concern over other laws and regulations. Cara Doyle, owner of Summit Hardscaping in Fort Collins, Colorado, said a few legislations seem to be in the forefront of mind for her, including dust laws, silica rules and permeable paver percentages.

"Our city is trying to cut down on dust at construction sites, and we also get some neighbors upset when there's a lot of dust. Our crews are doing what they can to reduce this – wearing masks, running wet saws," Doyle says.

Like other regions, business also boomed this past year compared with 2016. More residential customers are looking for landscaping services. For Doyle, this means she can be more selective with the jobs and customers she takes.

"The quality of jobs is better," she notes. "We're getting to do the jobs we want to do versus when we were in the Recession, we were in survival mode." Instead of clients shopping for the best contractor, contractors are shopping for the best clients, Doyle says.



"WE'RE GETTING TO DO THE JOBS WE WANT TO DO VERSUS WHEN WE WERE IN THE RECESSION, WE WERE IN SURVIVAL MODE." CARA DOYLE, OWNER, SUMMIT HARDSCAPING

and its workers have had to stay later and work additional hours to play catch up. And with the company's primary clients being commercial, Hawkinson says it was harder to keep a flexible schedule when the weather didn't cooperate.

Still, with the growth they've experienced, he says the company plans to make \$6 million in revenue this year.

DAHLONEGA, GEORGIA

SUZANNE BROSCHE, OWNER, ART OF STONE GARDENING

CONCERNS: UNCOMFORTABLE WEATHER, LABOR MARKETS

SERVICES PROVIDED: HARDSCAPE INSTALLATION, DESIGN IN GEORGIA, Art of Stone Gardening has grown, but the region experienced extreme heat, making its work harder. The company does landscape installations with heavy stone work and masonry.

"We've doubled in size this year," owner Suzanne Brosche says. "Right now, we are about three or four months out on any new work." With business booming, Brosche says the only issue the company has had is finding and keeping employees.

Brosche wanted to focus efforts on hiring more women into the industry, but Art of Stone still experienced labor shortages.

"We're located about an hour out of Atlanta," she says. "So the market just isn't the same in the mountains."



BOYLSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

STEVE CHRISTY, PRESIDENT, **LEI CORPORATION**

CONCERNS: LATE SNOW, STATE REGULATIONS

SERVICES PROVIDED:

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT. SNOW MANAGEMENT, DESIGN/BUILD THE LANDSCAPING INDUSTRY IS BOOMING - it's possibly the busiest that Steve Christy,

president of LEI Corporation in Massachusetts, has seen it in 30 years.

"There are so many new office buildings, apartment communities, shopping centers, colleges, universities and distribution centers," he says. "All of these need to have their landscaping installed when they are built and they have to have their landscaping maintained and their snow plowed. It's a great thing."

LEI Corporation provides landscape maintenance and site construction like stonework and masonry to a mostly commercial client-base.

Late-season snow in the northeast made it hard for landscapers to get out and start their spring cleanups. And, after the snow, the area was deluged with six weeks of rain. Christy says the rain caused workers to miss quite a few days stretching into early June.

"With the late snow, it was hard to find people to

work. Our guys had to be putting in more overtime," he says. "And, we've had to make sure to properly communicate with our customers with all the rain."

On those rainy days, Christy says his employees take the time to work on their equipment and the company sometimes holds meetings or training sessions.

Christy says the industry in Massachusetts specifically has had to deal with regulations such as mandatory sick leave.

"It's been kind of a nuisance to us," he says. "I think a smart businessman will give his employees the benefits that they need to attract and keep them already."

Massachusetts' Earned Sick Time law mandates that employees must accrue at least one hour of sick time for every 30 hours worked. Employers with fewer than 11 workers are not required to offered paid sick leave, but those who employ more than 11 have to provide compensation. LEI employs over 100 workers and expects to do \$16 million in revenue this year, so this law would apply to the company.

VEST VIEW, PENNSYLVANIA

SARAH RIZZITANO, PRESIDENT, A&N LAWN SERVICE

CONCERNS: SCHEDULE SETBACKS

SERVICES PROVIDED:

DESIGN/BUILD, MAINTENANCE. LAWN CARE, SNOW REMOVAL

WET WEATHER CAUSED ADDITIONAL STRESS

for A&N Lawn Service in Pennsylvania. Sarah Rizzitano, president, says the company fell behind in its mulching services because of the rain.

"It took us a long time to finish our mulching services. Our customers don't want us mulching in the rain," she says. "And, most of them get the browndyed mulch, and the dye runs off in the rain."

Rain hit the Pittsburgh region in May, with nearly three rain events each week, Rizzitano says.

"We were still trying to get work done in the rain, but our capabilities were very limited," she says.

With the mulching services pushed back, work crews were still busy mowing in July, when Rizzitano says mowing typically slows down.

As a result, more crews had to be added to the mowing jobs so that lawns were being cared for efficiently. A&N plans to achieve around \$3.8 million this year, with higher profits than what was reported in 2016.



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ABOR PA

FINDING AND KEEPING LABOR CONTINUES TO BE A PROBLEM, BUT THAT FACT HASN'T STOPPED



Story by Lauren Rathmell

MARK LEAHY AND HIS BROTHER, BRAD,

had to come to terms with the fact that they just weren't good at hiring people. Their company, Blades of Green, didn't use H-2B and they couldn't seem to get anyone in the door who would stick around. After looking at the numbers and realizing their retention rate was 35 percent, the Leahy's decided it was time to act.

So, they visited other companies that weren't having those labor issues, and they hired people to improve an area where they were weak. In the Leahy's

case, it was forming a human resources staff, who possessed the skills to help bring in workers. Blades of Green needed employees who were willing to work with a growing business, as the company was experiencing annual growth rates of 25 percent.

The HR staff at Blades of Green is comprised of human resources manager, Angela Heironimus, and a part-time assistant. Together they developed a strategic protocol for potential employees.

Mark, president of the Edgewater, Maryland, business compares it to the way a company handles its sales program. They test their help wanted ads on job boards like Craigslist to find out what time of day will get the most results. They've set up an online application that helps them narrow down candidates before an interview and focus their job ads on company culture.

PERCENT
The amount of respondents who believe a lack of quality employees hinder their location's growth.
34 percent believe that it hinders a lot.

When Heironimus joined the company in 2015, the retention rate had already improved from 35 percent to 50 percent. But it continued to rise with her involvement, and in September of this year, the retention rate for employees was at 80 percent – hitting the Leahy's long-term goal.

"When you're running around trying to run your business, it's hard to find the time for hiring," Heironimus says.

The unique approach to hiring at Blades of Green begins with the job ad. If someone is searching a job site, a Blades of Green ad will say something like "Do you want a career?"

The ad then leads to a pre-screening questionnaire that will auto-reject an applicant based on the answers. Once the applicant fills out the entire form, the information will either be sent to Blades of Green, or essentially kick the person off the questionnaire site. Approximately 25 percent of the applicants are auto-rejected, and Heironimus looks at that as having saved 25 percent more time.

Blades of Green is now nearly fully-staffed with 67 employees, and 26 of

When asked to rate on a scale of 1-10 (with 10 as a major concern) the concern with a number of industry issues, respondents ranked labor at the top with a score of 6.5. It was also at the top of those who score it 8-10 with 42 percent of respondents doing so.

Here's a breakdown by revenue of how companies ranked their concern over lack of quality labor:

5.5/10

\$300K-\$999K

7.8/10

them were hired just this year. The company credits that increase in part to widening its search from beyond the industry. For instance, someone with an HVAC background may be a good fit for pest control.

Heironimus says the company has also partnered with a program that helps veterans find jobs.

"Hiring vets is something we really try to do," she says. "Right now, about 20 percent of our staff is made up of military veterans."

H-2B WOES. Dave Peabody, president of Peabody Landscape in Columbus, Ohio, had to rely on a temporary staffing company to reach his full workforce of 150 employees.

"We applied for 50 H-2B workers before the cap increase," he says. "When the cap was reached to meet the 65,000 visa maximum, we were completely shut out of the H-2B program in the spring." In July, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security increased the number of H-2B worker visas allowed for the year.

The staffing company was not completely reliable, and workers weren't staying on long. Peabody found it hard to find workers with valid driver's licenses and solid background checks.

He expects the company to do \$10 million in revenue this year, despite the labor issues.

With labor shortages, he says it's been harder to compete with companies offering more money and companies that use informal ways to acquire their work force.

"This business is a profession," he says. "And I don't think a lot of people think that way. You have to run it like a business to get good results."

Peabody Landscapes ended up getting 21 H-2B workers to finish out the season.

DIFFERENT STATE, DIFFERENT PROBLEMS. Paul

Wagner, president of FitTurf, which has two locations in near Denver and two near Detroit, noticed that different locations come with different problems when it comes to his work force.

The company, which specializes in turf fertilization, has about 60 employees. Wagner says the stability of his employees is better in the Michigan compared to his Denver locations.

"The economy is a little bit more robust (in Denver)," he says. "So, it's hard to attract those workers."

According to the latest numbers released in April, Denver's unemployment rate is around 2.1 percent compared to Detroit's 8.4 percent rate.

He says FitTurf is constantly hiring, but its core

office staff remains stable. To keep a good retention rate, Wagner says that benefits are key. High competition for labor in the Michigan area prompted Wagner to extend incentives to his employees, like perfect attendance rewards.

"We try to pay more and offer more for our employees," he says. "However, we know we can realistically only pay so much."

RAISING WAGES. In order to compete with other businesses in the labor market, some companies have had to explore raising wages, which often means raising their prices.

Wagner says he has built relationships with his customers, so he knows how much he can raise prices without getting cancellations. "You get what you pay for," he says. "My customers know the type of service they get and they are willing to pay for that."

Wagner also pays slightly above the average wage for the area and includes a sales commission.

Drewe Schoenholtz, president of The Green Scene in New Jersey, says his newest employee started with the landscape design/build firm eight years ago.

The company doesn't do maintenance, so his workers are skilled in areas like hardscaping and landscape installation.

Schoenholtz has been in the industry for 43 years, and credits the longevity of his employees to offering good incentives and benefits, like full health insurance.

"Because we don't do mowing and trimming and all that, I need good skilled workers," he says. He's always paid his workers above the industry average, too.

The team recently celebrated a 30year anniversary for one of its workers. "We're kind of a big family," he says.





CONTRACTORS
WEIGH THE
POSITIVES
OF OFFERING
HEALTH CARE
COVERAGE
AGAINST THE
COST OF IT.

Story by Catherine Meany

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, A VALUABLE PART-TIME EMPLOYEE

came to Parkway Lawn Service CEO Bob Kroth with an ultimatum. The employee told Kroth he was putting in his two-weeks notice to leave the Minnesota company for another that was offering health insurance. Not wanting to lose this key employee, Kroth turned to his health insurance company to add the employee to the deal, only to find out that the coverage could only be applied to full-time workers.

"I thought it was very strange, but I talked with our broker and he said that's basically what any insurance company would tell us," Kroth says.

Kroth ended up keeping the employee by giving him both full-time hours and insurance coverage. But, like so many other landscaping employees in the industry, the caveat is that 90 percent of his staff that are on call throughout the winter season remain ineligible.

CAN HEALTH CARE BOOST RETENTION?

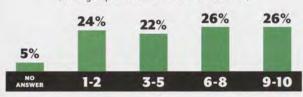
Some business owners, like Barry Denton of Denton's Landscaping and Nursery in Arkansas, believe offering health insurance may help attract a higher quality job candidate and may even encourage them to stay.

"In the type of work we have, we seem to get a lot of people who don't stick with it a long time. It might help to offer health care or some other benefits as well. I'm sure Obamacare/Trumpcare



HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR CONCERN WITH HIGH HEALTH INSURANCE COST AND ITS IMPACT ON YOUR LOCATION'S BUSINESS IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS?

(10 being very concerned and 1 not at all concerned)



(6-10 concern)

<\$300,000 **46%** \$300K-\$999K

> \$1 million 68%

has factored in with potential employees whether to take our job or another job," Denton says.

Denton's company doesn't currently offer health insurance, but the company has recently added a nursery division that brought its employee totals to four full-time and four part-time employees, he says.

"I know health insurance is something that some of them might be interested in and something that we would definitely need to offer in the future if we continue to grow like we want to," Denton says.

For other businesses, offering health care doesn't seem to be worth the cost. A & J Complete Lawn Care in Red Bluff, California, uses a temp agency to handle payroll,

workers' compensation and health insurance for its three full-time employees, including owner Jeff Sybrant and his wife.

"Offering health insurance might attract a higher quality candidate but I don't know that it would keep them around," he says. "If you don't have the passion for working outside and doing lawn care, its not going to last."

Rusty Ruckstuhl, president of Grass Roots, estimates just two out of 30 landscaping companies in his city of Lafayette, Louisiana, pay for employee health care. Grass Roots has offered health insurance for 15 years through Blue Cross Blue Shield. Currently, his 16 employees all take advantage of the insurance. Ruckstuhl finds that it makes a big difference in employee retention.

"I have three key people who have been here a long time and they would not be here if I didn't offer health care," he says.

FACING THE COST FACTOR. Ruckstuhl decided to offer health insurance after 22 years in business when it was put to a vote in the company's profit-sharing program. "It comes out of the bottom-line profits. It's one of the biggest line item expenses that we have," he says.

When the Affordable Care Act was introduced, Grass Roots was grandfathered into its coverage options with Blue Cross Blue Shield. While the company's deductibles and preferred provider organization all remained the same, Ruckstuhl has noticed a steady increase in rates ever since.

He currently pays \$6,000 a month to insure employees only. Employee dependents can be added to the plan, but the company does not cover that cost.

"We probably average 42 years in age for our whole company. Anybody over 40 or 50 it's almost a necessity now," he says.

UTILIZING RESOURCES. Both Ruckstuhl and Kroth use an insurance broker to navigate the insurance market in their states and find them the best prices. Kroth suggests asking your liability or equipment insurance broker for a referral to someone who deals with health insurance.

"We were with Blue Cross Blue Shield, but we just had a conversation with our broker last month regarding our upcoming renewal in October and he shopped around and showed us various plans. And as it turns out, Health Partners came in as the best price point," Kroth says.

Kroth pays about \$4,500 per month for health insurance coverage for five employees and five dependents, up 10 percent from previous years. The company's deductible has also increased from about \$3,000 per person or \$6,000 combined to \$3,500 per person or \$7,000 combined.

LEGISLATIVE INFLUENCE. After the ACA was rolled out, Ruckstuhl's discontent drove him to contact his state senator to voice his concerns.

"I rarely ever write in to my senator, but I did because I believe the laws need to change," he says. "Hopefully they will tweak what we have in place right now and make it so we can be able to go across state lines to buy insurance and make it a competitive market."

Kroth also finds issue with not only the Affordable Care Act, but also with local laws in Minneapolis.

The city recently passed legislation to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, as well as legislation requiring employers to provide sick days, one hour for every 30 hours worked, and up to 48 hours a year.

"We were offering vacation and pay equal to or better than that, and we would oftentimes offer a few days paid leave if someone was sick or if there was a death in the family," he says. "But now that the city is requesting that of all employers, we don't have the one-up on our competitors."

In Lawn & Landscape's State of the Industry report survey, 52 percent of businesses with revenues \$1 million or more rated concern for high health insurance costs as an 8, 9 or 10, on a 10-point scale with 10 being very concerned. For businesses making \$300,000 - \$999,000, the number was 36 percent, and for businesses making under \$300,000, it was 31 percent.

To ease these concerns, contractors can consult a professional adviser to see if they qualify for tax credits or subsidies and use resources like the Small Business Health Options Program (SHOP) to find an insurance plan in their state.

"We would hope there is a fair cost option out there for a small business," Denton says. "I know that's getting harder and harder to find."

The author is a freelance writer based in Kentucky.



SOME BUSINESS
OWNERS BELIEVE
OFFERING
HEALTH
INSURANCE MAY
HELP ATTRACT
HIGH-QUALITY
JOB CANDIDATES
AND MAY
ENCOURAGE
THEM TO STAY.



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Equipment Cost

Cash Flow Savings

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400	400
\$152	\$213
\$4.57	\$6.40
\$2,199	



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It's fairly simple: with leasing, you're running newer equipment, so your machines are spending more time in the field and less time in the shop, especially with our loaner program! So your equipment will always be up and running.

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- ** To be eligible for the offer, purchaser must be or become a GreenFleet member and meet qualifying purchase levels. Amount's shown above are based on Platinum Level 3 savings. Qualifying levels and savings will vary depending on the quantity and combination of equipment purchased. See complete membership information and discount details at JohnDeere.com/GreenFleet or a participating John Deere dealer. Offer ends 10/31/17.
- Programs available only at participating dealers and dealer participation will vary. Loaners used for commercial purposes provided within 24 hours. Some conditions and restrictions apply. See participating dealer for complete details and program offerings.

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If you end up using fewer hours than what your lease stipulates, we will give you a credit for the unused hours toward your next Commercial Mowing Lease.



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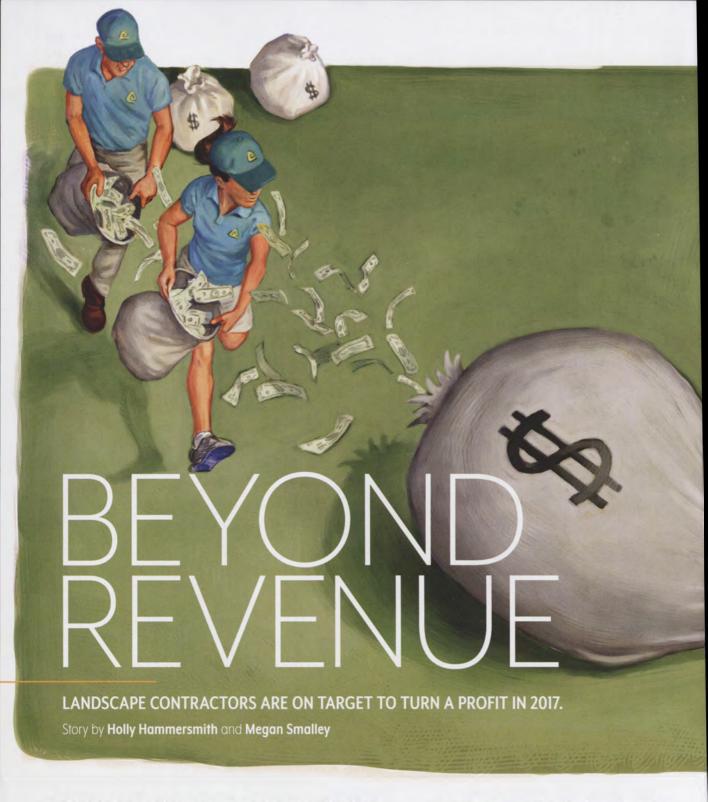
Consider other needs, like parts, handheld equipment and attachments, that John Deere allows you to wrap into your desired financing or leasing package and provides the most bang for your buck. Many customers do not realize routine maintenance can also be included. Your dealer will be able to help identify other additions, making it a one-stop solution.

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John Deere eliminates the stress of downtime with its Commercial Loaner Program, which allows commercial customers to receive a loaner unit in the case equipment needs warrantable repairs. This program allows flexibility in keeping your business up and running, even when facing machine downtime.



LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS WHO TURNED

A PROFIT IN 2016 say they expect to end 2017 in the black and are hopeful this trend will continue. From a service that was unexpectedly popular, to new construction in their area, contractors discuss some of the reasons they were profitable, and when they usually turn a profit during the year.

SEAL OF APPROVAL. Landscape Artistry had an annual revenue of approximately \$341,000, which was an increase of about \$100,000 over the prior year – a higher-than-normal leap, says Paul Ruggiero, owner.

"Each year it seems to get a little bit better," Ruggiero says. "I'm already up 11 percent (this year) over last year at this time. I know I have a couple of really good size jobs coming in. I'd



say probably 20 percent, again, is what I'm hoping for." Landscape Artistry is a design/build company primarily providing hardscaping, along with a small amount of landscape installation and maintenance in the Stevensville, Maryland, area. Customers are mostly residential and all of the work is subcontracted out. Ruggiero is the only full-time employee.

Ruggiero has been in the industry for 20 years and started by offering landscape maintenance. He later began focusing on design/build. He hopes to earn \$400,000 in annual revenue in 2017 and bringing on a second subcontractor has helped with building revenue, he says.

When looking at his 2017 numbers, Ruggiero has already noticed an interesting trend. Revenue is up 966 percent with one service – cleaning and sealing of pavers.

"It seems like I'm the only company in my area that does cleaning and sealing of pavers," he says. "I'm not physically going after that market, but it just seems like that's taken off."

The cleaning and sealing jobs themselves are not the highest-paying, but Ruggiero says he has welcomed the uptick in calls for that service. In addition, he says planting almost always yields a strong profit margin.

"It's quick and easy. You get in, get out," he says. "Planting generally gets you like a 40 percent profit margin. As long as the plants don't die, you do pretty well."

Ruggiero says he also typically turns a profit in October of each year. When he started his company, the first year wasn't profitable due to the cost of equipment purchases. He later took on a partner, and it wasn't until about five years later that the company became profitable.

As far as next year, Ruggiero says new housing also continues to provide ample opportunities for work. "There's a lot of building going on in the area, so I would say all these people are looking to get outside, out back," he says. "I don't see it slowing down anytime soon."

14 YEARS AND COUNTING. At Browder-Hite in Belle Haven, Virginia, landscape maintenance accounts for the bulk of the jobs based on dollar volume. Maintenance, including mowing, accounted for 39 percent of sales in 2017 so far, says Benjamin Lewis, president. Next to that, landscaping has accounted for 23 percent of sales.

Browder-Hite is a full-service landscape company offering landscape maintenance, pool installation, irrigation work and more. The company employs 26 people and it serves residential and commercial customers. The company also operates a retail nursery.

"Maintenance is the bread and butter," Lewis says. "It pays the bills as we wait to get to that break-even point."

Lewis says his company did better in 2016 than in 2015, with an annual revenue of \$1.47 million in 2016, compared with \$1.1 million in 2015. "2016 was a big year for us, as far as gross revenue," he says. "Every year except for one, in the 14 years I've been in business, we've grown."

Despite some challenges with finding qualified personnel for open positions, Lewis says he sees 2017 ending successfully, too.

"Year to date right now, we're up 11 percent," he

2017 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY REPORT

says. "Middle of August last year compared to middle of August this year, we're up 11 percent. We're projecting \$1.5 million."

Lewis says his company typically moves to the black by mid-October.

His company has been profitable all 14 years since he started it, even though he started small with only \$110,000 in annual revenue the first year.

Browder-Hite is slated to break ground in November on the construction of a new office. Lewis hopes this new facility will help his company really stand out among the competition.

"I really think that that's going to bring a new level of excitement and attract a certain type of person to our business," he says.

One large commercial project with a new hospital contributed to Browder-Hite's bottom line in 2016 and will add to annual revenue in 2017.

Some of the revenue from the commercial project didn't flow in until 2017, so it will be part of the 2017 total revenue.

"We are in a rural area of Virginia. Those kinds of projects just do not come around often," Lewis says.

In addition, the opening of a garden center is expected to grow the company's revenue.

"(We are using the garden center) as a lever to gain brand recognition, get our name out there and project ourselves as landscapers," he says.

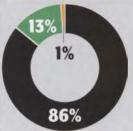
"Customers, as a whole, are not as afraid as they used to be to spend money for capital projects. We're getting ready to renovate the landscape at a local bank. In previous years, they shot down the prospects of doing that."

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS. For MSE Landscaping Professionals, 2017 marked a strong year for business. The California-based company even sought help from an outside firm to get a new perspective on its profitability this past year.

"We're a small business, and we're not accountants," says Mike Seymour, president of MSE Landscaping. "We understand numbers, but we wanted to be very intentional about analyzing our profitability."

MSE Landscaping has been in business





- YES
- NO
- **NO ANSWER**

WHAT WAS THE MOST PROFITABLE SERVICE YOUR LOCATION OFFERED IN 2016?

LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE (MOWING, EDGING/TRIMMING.

(MOWING, EDGING/TRIMMING, PRUNING)

30%

DESIGN/BUILD SERVICES

25%

LAWN CARE/ CHEMICAL APPLICATION

15%

SNOW & ICE MANAGEMENT

9%

IRRIGATION INSTALLATION/ MAINTENANCE/SERVICE

5%

TREE & ORNAMENTAL INSTALLATION/CARE

4%

LANDSCAPE LIGHTING

3%

WATERSCAPES/FOUNTAINS

1%

OTHER

6%

NONE

1%

NO ANSWER

1%

since 2007, and Seymour says the company has continued to grow since it started. The company has about 70 employees and makes about \$4.5 million in revenue.

MSE Landscaping serves customers in the San Diego and Los Angeles areas with divisions for landscape maintenance, landscape enhancement, design/build and urban tree management services.

Through the study, Seymour wanted to make sure all four of the company's divisions were profitable and that one single division wasn't the only moneymaker.

"We just finished and the result is that our net profit is 19 percent, which is outstanding," he says. This is up one percent from last year, where the company made a net profit of 18 percent.

The study showed that each of the four divisions was profitable this past year. He says its maintenance division was least profitable and its enhancement division was the most profitable.

Although MSE Landscaping's maintenance division had the lowest profits, that division managed to grow the most this past year. The maintenance division achieved about \$2.5 million in revenue by itself.

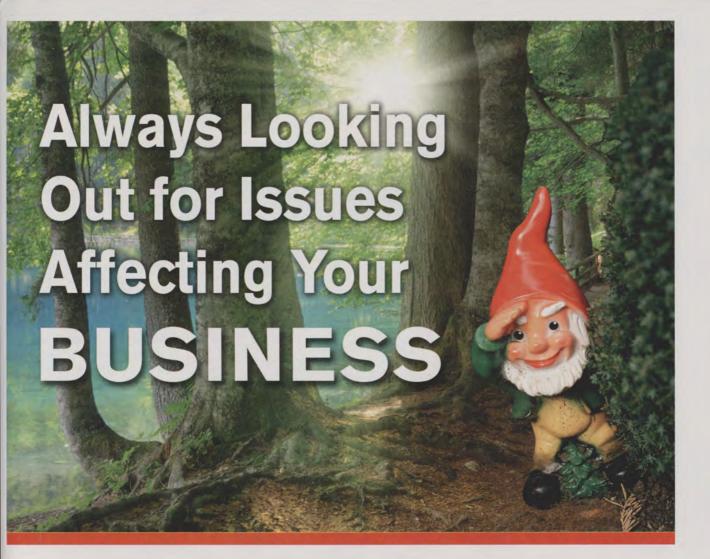
Seymour adds that when this division does well, it attracts more business to the company's enhancement and design/build segments.

Seymour raised prices the last couple of years as a result of new services offered and the escalating cost of living in California. This has shifted the clientele the company serves.

Today, MSE Landscaping focuses on serving customers willing to pay a little bit more for quality work. While the company faces additional costs such as higher minimum wage costs and surging insurance costs, profitability still increased a little because the company raised its prices.

"What's been interesting is regardless of what situation we face like a drought, that created a new market for us," he says. "Everything from drought-tolerant plant material to converting irrigation systems to drip irrigation. While our market has changed, revenue is still good as each of these challenges presented an opportunity."

Hammersmith is a freelance writer based in Ohio. Smalley is an associate editor at Lawn & Landscape.



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OFFSEASON QUESTIONS

IT NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE ME when people think that in the summer I'm busy in the lawn care business. They think that since our workers are busy out treating lawns, I'm just as busy making sure they're doing their jobs or maybe out working myself. Fact is, for more mature businesses, if things are going as planned, summer should be the easiest time of the year. It's a matter of execution at this point in the game.

For owners and leaders, fall and winter should be the busiest and most important time of the season. This is the time to analyze and reflect on this past season's plan and performance, while beginning to formulate strategy for next spring. And that strategy and plan must always start with a simple, basic question: Why are you in business?

IT STARTS WITH WHY. As 2017 begins to wind down, it's a great time for business owners and leaders to take assessment of why we do what we do. This needs to happen before we even begin trying to determine the exact numbers to hit for 2018. So many people jump right into the details, procedures and plans before taking a hard look at the "why" of businesses. Where are we going? What's the end game? What's the



BRAD JOHNSON is founder of LawnAmerica.

reason for our existence?

And notice that it's we, not just the owner. Team members need to know the "why" of the business they work for, understand it and believe in it. And it has to be more than just for the benefit of ownership. Good ownership is vital, and owners should be rewarded for the risks and responsibilities they take. However, employees and customers are both equally as important.

THE THREE-LEGGED STOOL.

always communicated to our staff that we were like a three-legged stool with customers, employees and ownership representing each leg of the stool. The business existed to care for each of the three legs equally. If one leg was weak or absent, the stool would fall. If the emphasis fell too much on one part, such as making ownership happy, the other two would be short-changed, and the stool would become weak. So, providing ownership rewards for their risks, providing employees a great place to work and giving customers great-looking, hassle-free lawns and landscapes is a huge part of the "why" of any business in the green industry. So, take assessment annually as to the wants and needs of each of the three legs of the "business stool."

WHAT ABOUT A FOUR-LEGGED STOOL? As I look back after selling

the majority stake of my business last fall, I'm convinced more than ever that there is a fourth leg on that stool, with another important reason for the existence of a business. A business also exists for the good of the community, our nation and the world. At LawnAmerica, we've always tried to give back to our community with donated services and cash donations from profits. It was more than just PR and trying to build a positive brand. It's just the right thing to do. And personally, along with much of our staff, it's a matter of being true to our Christian faith while in the world of work. It's more than just the quality of the grass and the environment, while as important as that is in what we do. It's also about helping people in our community and beyond, and leaving our world a better place than we found it.

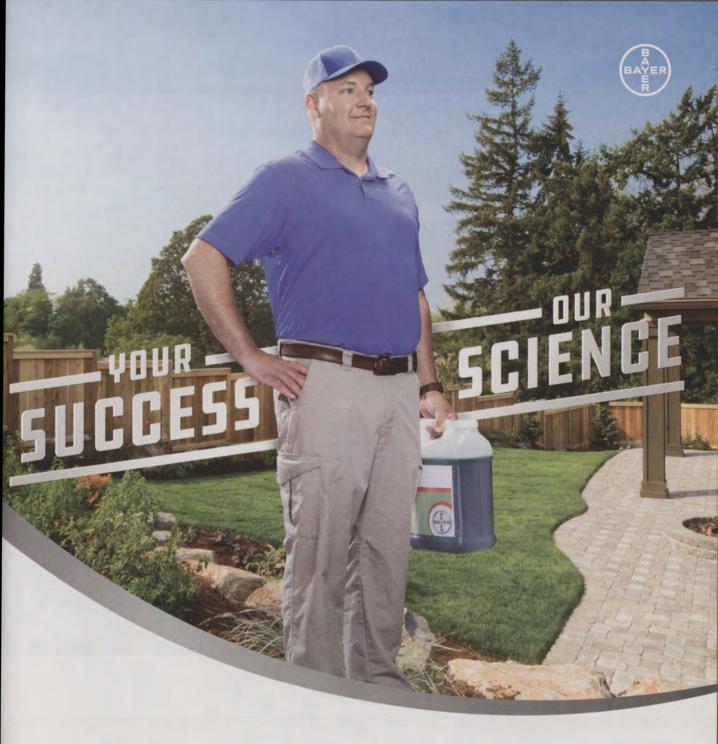
I find that most team members really take pride in being part of a company that is about more than just growing and turning a nice profit, as important as those are. Most employees like to be a part of something that is bigger than themselves and that makes a difference in our world. And it doesn't have to be huge things to make a difference. If all businesses did more and took seriously their commitment to our communities, collectively, we'd help change the world.

TAKE ASSESSMENT OF YOUR WHY.

So this fall, before you start creating the spreadsheets and documents in planning, take a deep breath and spend some time soul-searching to get to the base of your business. Why does it exist, and for whom? All decisions then need to be made with this in mind, whatever that is for you. LEL

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LEVELING THE FIELD

Level Green Landscaping reduced turnover through a focus on recruiting and training.

By Brooke N. Bates



HEN DOUG DELANO STARTED

Level Green Landscaping in 2002 at age 44, he and co-founder Bill Hardy planned to build the business into a "retirement"

vehicle" that they could sell when they turned 65.

At first, Delano thought he'd just hire a couple of guys to help him with gardening projects around Capitol Hill, where he lives. But, he says, "I realized as I got older that I wouldn't be able to do that type of work."

Instead, he had to build a team of employees who could

consistently deliver service to his standards as the company grew. Now with more than 200 employees, Delano and Hardy are committed to providing for them long-term by growing a stable business.

Now that he's nearing 60, Delano says, "Maybe I'm not going to retire after all, because we enjoy what we do."

Although he's not thinking about leaving anytime soon, Delano is focused on developing the next generation of leaders at the Maryland-based commercial landscape management firm.

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"We could do things for the short-term, make the company really profitable and sell it for a decent amount of money," he says, "but that's not what it's about. It's not just about making money. You're trying to make people's lives better – not just the people you're servicing, but also the people that work for you."

Over time, they've developed processes to recruit, train and retain the best talent at Level Green.

commercial core. When Delano got married and moved to Washington, D.C., in the mid-1980s, he had "absolutely no experience in the landscape industry." A former high school

math teacher with a philosophy degree, Delano had grown up on a farm, where he inherited a love of gardening from his parents.

At age 28, Delano decided to trade in his teaching role for a landscaping job at Ruppert Landscape in D.C. After only four months as a field laborer, Delano was promoted to assistant supervisor, then supervisor, and then management within two years.

Delano was at Ruppert for 12 years before the company was acquired by TruGreen. He stayed at TruGreen for a couple of years before he left. Eventually, he decided to start Level Green with Hardy—who initially hired Delano at Ruppert years earlier and left

TruGreen around the same time.

For the first few years, to honor Hardy's non-compete agreement, Level Green did residential landscape installations around Capitol Hill. They started doing a few commercial installations before switching entirely to that market.

"We found that residential installations ate up a lot of resources that we could use elsewhere – and we really needed those resources to support commercial customers," Delano says. "So we decided to get out of (residential work) in 2010."

Although Level Green still does some commercial installations for existing customers (accounting for 10 to 15 percent of overall sales), the company is

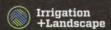
almost entirely focused on commercial landscape management.

Level Green maintains commercial properties like shopping centers, office buildings, condos, HOAs and government buildings through core services like mulching, weeding, fertilization and leaf removal. Upsells include enhancements, redesigns and snow removal; snow services can account for as much as 20 percent of Level Green's revenue per year.

FAST TRACK TO GROWTH. For most of Level Green's history, the only advertising was through logos on trucks parked at properties around D.C. As demand for commercial maintenance services







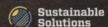






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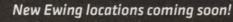








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grew, Delano had to hire quickly to keep up.

"My biggest problem is getting the right people to work for us and keeping them," he says. "It was a problem when I started in this industry 30 years ago, and I think it will always be a problem."

To combat the problem, Level Green has been rolling out new recruiting and training programs. The company amped up its internship program by attending more college career days to recruit interns. The company also introduced a management training program that fast-tracks recent grads into management positions. Level Green has account managers, who oversee client interactions and customer service, and operations managers, who lead and train crews.

After trainees select one of those two management tracks, they're exposed to the responsibilities for six to 12 months, while they shadow other managers, visit job sites and observe crews to learn the job. The company has been adding one new account manager and one new operations manager each year, so Delano hopes the program will keep the talent pipeline full.

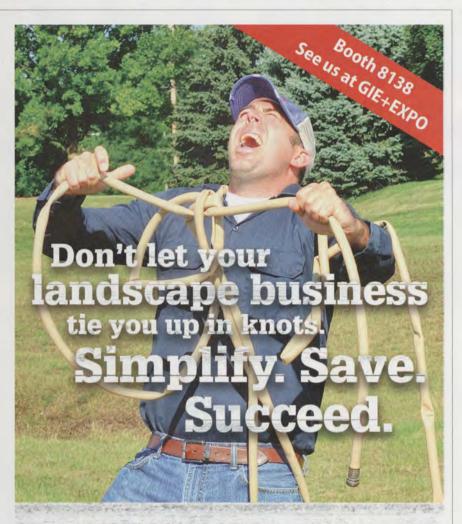
SLOW CHURN. By focusing on hiring the right people and training them to excel, Level Green has been reducing turnover as it grows.

"One of the primary things we hear from customers who are looking to make changes (to their landscape contractor) is that they don't know who to call," Delano says. "They've had three different customer service reps in the last year and it's frustrating for them because they have to explain their preferences over and over again."

Level Green began tracking its turnoverrelated costs in 2015. In one year, they reduced crew turnover rates by 5 percent, cutting associated company-wide replacement costs from more than \$600,000 to just over \$400,000 annually.

Keeping employees means keeping customers, too, as the company's renewal rate stays above 90 percent. Those numbers are more important to Delano than the dollars. Although, as a result, revenues have been growing, too – around 30 percent annually, to about \$15.7 million in 2016.

"It's a people industry," he says. "If you want to make more money, you have fewer people doing the work and less customer contact. We're willing to accept a little less profitability to be competitive in customer service. With our focus on that, we'll continue to grow in the D.C. market." L&L



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Onsite fuel reduces costly windshield time and minimizes the risk of theft – if you plan properly. By Kristen Hampshire



TRUCK WITH A CREW PULLS INTO A GAS STATION.

Three guys get out. One crew member gasses up the vehicle and fills some small fuel tanks for equipment. Another guy goes into the gas station store to buy a cup of coffee. The third waits in the truck.

How many man-hours were spent at the gas station? Now, multiply that per crew per workday – per month, per season. Yikes.

Some crews at Level Green Landscaping in Marlboro, Maryland, include six team members. If two of them are fueling the vehicle and equipment, there are four others on the clock. "Figure that times 50 crews, that's a lot of money on lost labor," says Craig Fugate, shop

manager. Fifteen minutes of time at a gas station times four employees and 50 trucks – you're up to 500 hours on a daily basis.

The good news: onsite fueling can cut that dead windshield time where employees are clocked in but unproductive. There are other benefits like reducing fuel theft, fuel discounts and better oversight of crews' time.

That's why Level Green has three fuel tanks at each of its three locations. What prompted the decision at one of the locations was not just labor savings, but \$2,000 in fuel charges from a former employee who took advantage of a company gas card. "Now, we have more control over our fuel expenses," Fugate says.

PUMPED ABOUT THE PROS. Owning property was key for Level Green when the company was adding onsite fuel to its locations. "We started at our first location, where we put in a 500-gallon 89 octane tank for fueling equipment," Fugate says. At the time, Level Green was renting that space and there was no place for additional tanks. Once the business



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FUEL MANAGEMENT

moved locations, it added tanks for fueling.

The tanks are double-walled to prevent leaks, and the fuel supplier provides them, Fugate says. Insurance is required on the tanks at one location. "Every state or county or landlord has different regulations," he says.

Bob Grover, president of Pacific Landscape Management in Hillsboro, Oregon, has three locations and onsite gasoline for fueling equipment only. "We buy mobile fueling trailers that are DOT-approved, but they don't ever move," he says of complying with state regulations. "Because they are mobile fuel stations, we don't have to go through the same compliance issues as having an onsite tank."

After navigating the restrictions and figuring out what you can do, there can be real cost savings per gallon associated with onsite fueling. Fugate says Level Green sometimes pays up to \$0.10 less per gallon. When the company gave all of its fuel business to one supplier, it realized a greater cost benefit.

Plus, Level Green has an auto-fill agreement with its fuel supplier. "So, we never run out of fuel," Fugate says. "And when it snows if the power is out, you can't go to a gas station to get fuel. Here, we fire up a generator and we can still get fuel from our pumps."

The sheer size of the company at \$18 million justifies the need for onsite fueling. That number of crew members, vehicles and equipment is too costly to fuel up even at cardlock stations, Fugate says.

Though Grover has found that onsite fuel for equipment saves time at the gas station, using convenient cardlock stations for vehicles is most cost-effective due to the expense with having large onsite tanks. "We do monitor cardlock use," he says, noting that vehicle mileage is tracked and compared with fuel purchases at cardlock stations. "If the miles per gallon goes way down, maybe not all the fuel is going into our vehicles. The other thing we watch is the (way) time cards are used. If it tells me a vehicle was fueled up at 9 p.m., it's very possible that gas didn't go into our truck off-hours."

Systems are also in place for Pacific Landscape's onsite mobile fuel tank. "There has to be some methodology on nights and weekends we lock ours up after the workday so no one can access it," Grover says.

PREPARING FOR ONSITE FUEL. To gain the benefits of onsite fueling, there need to be some systems in place, points out Ben Collinsworth, CEO of Native Land Design in Cedar Park, Texas. Native Land Design does not yet have onsite fueling, but that's only because the business will move in the short-term.

But Collinsworth has done his homework on what's necessary to maximize the benefits of onsite fueling. For one, there's property location and accessibility. "The fuel tanks have to be in an area where your guys can still come in and out and not be in the way of 18-wheelers or fuel delivery trucks," he says. "Not all properties have that. If you are trying to get 15 crews out of a one-acre site, onsite fueling might not be for you. It has to be done safely."

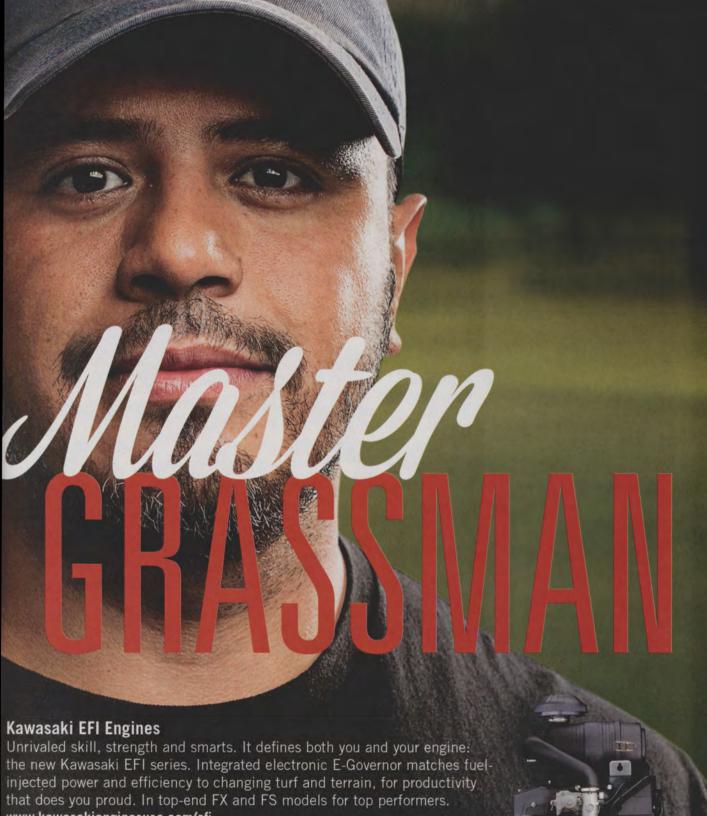
Also, the actual location of the business can impact the cost of fuel delivery, Collinsworth says. "If you are 30 miles out in the middle of nowhere and they're going to charge you a ton to deliver the gas, maybe that doesn't make sense financially," he says.

And, how many tanks will you need? If you use diesel for vehicles, propane for mowers and 89-octane gasoline for handheld equipment, do you have room for three tanks onsite? Or, will you bring on type of fuel onsite and rely on gas stations or cardlock stations for other uses?

Who will police the system on site? Someone should be in charge of overseeing fueling, whether that's a shop manager, mechanic or crew supervisors. At Level Green, Fugate oversees the fueling and crew supervisors are responsible for fueling up vehicles and equipment. No one gets a gas card now that there's fueling on site.

Another key consideration is whether you have the GPS systems in place to monitor vehicles in the field. However, with GPS tracking and a policy of no stopping, onsite fueling can save wasted windshield time.

"The reason most businesses chose onsite fuel is because we are trying to reduce the nonproductive stop times and windshield time as much as humanly possible," Collins worth says. "The onsite fuel makes sense all day." LEL



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Firepits that come with customizations enhance outdoor living spaces.

By Holly Hammersmith



S FIREPITS AND OUTDOOR FIREPLACES maintain their popularity, customizations to these outdoor entertaining spaces are where contractors are looking to make their mark.

A decade ago, Rob DelGandio would build half a dozen firepits per year. Now, he builds 15 to 20 per year.

"I would say they're far more popular now than they were even say 10 years ago," says DelGandio, owner and vice president of Four Seasons Landscaping, based in Damascus, Maryland.

A custom-built firepit costs \$5,000 10 years ago; it costs about \$2,500 today, he says. "Now it's no longer the upperend class that have access to it."

OUTDOOR LIVING. Four Seasons Landscaping has been offering firepit and outdoor fireplace installation for close to 15 years.

"Entertaining has moved from indoors to outdoors," DelGandio says. "And homeowners like to have their neighbors over, they have kids, they like spaces that are suitable for families so there's things for kids to do and things for adults to do. A firepit is something that's communal to all of those things."

Enhance Designscapes, based in Teton Valley, Idaho, and Jackson, Wyoming, has been offering firepit installations since 2010. The company employs six people and has an annual revenue of about \$500,000. They typically install two to three outdoor fire features per year. They primarily serve high-end residential clients and offer landscape design-build services.

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FIREPITS

Dan Sanders, co-owner, has personally been installing this type of hardscaping since 2004. He says the popularity of outdoor fire features is hotter than ever.

"The whole outdoor living space phenomenon's what it's all about, and creating nice little destinations around your property is something that's really appealing to our clients," he says. "But more specifically, there's some cool new technologies out there."

NEW TECHNOLOGIES. One of those new technologies is a more natural fire ring.

"Traditional firepits that are gas-fired have rings that kind of just put up a uniform fire effect,"

Sanders says. "They've actually created an infrastructure for gas firepits, or propane or natural gas, where they have little emitters that essentially set up flames a lot more natural as opposed to just coming off of that ring."

These flames create different elevations, as well as a naturalappearing flicker. For clients who do not have a natural gas connection, Sanders offers a remote setup with a small propane tank.

"You can hide (the tank) somewhere in an enclosure and put it far away, so it kind of lends a little more flexibility," he says.

DelGandio also installs outdoor lighting alongside firepit and outdoor fireplace installations.

"You've got to be a little bit careful about it because you've got wiring that runs through a structure that's going to create a lot of heat, but with fireplaces, we're definitely putting more lighting into the mantels, into the hearth, the part at the bottom. Illumination is key," he says.

MINOR DETAILS. Sanders says clients are also asking for their firepits to match their homes.

"We're trying to build these and design them so that they're congruent with the existing architecture, as far as materials," Sanders says.

Those small details can also

make a fire structure stand out. "We're doing more intricate inlays now. We're taking the same structures that we've been building for the last 10 or 15 years, and we're just making them more custom," DelGandio says.

Custom radius caps around firepits can also offer detail. "It's two or three large slab pieces that go around the parameter of that cap that allow you to put drinks and stuff on," he says. "Those types of things that would signify it was different. Same with the fireplaces, inlays in the face and the neck of the fireplace, different types of arches in the opening, all things that make it slightly different than the neighbor."



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POPULAR MATERIALS. The trend toward "green living" is not ending soon, DelGandio says. To capitalize on this trend, he offers natural materials when building firepits.

"We can build anything out of natural stone whereas block and segmental block, those types of materials, we're very limited as to what we can do," DelGandio says. "We have way more flexibility to be more custom with stone, and really the cost is not that much greater. It's maybe 10 percent more, but what you get in the value for that makes it seem worth it."

Four Seasons Landscaping employs about 25 people and

has an annual revenue between \$2.5 million and \$3 million. The bulk of clients are residential.

Recent installations have featured natural materials such as wood mantels on the outdoor fireplace using material such as Brazilian hardwood instead of a stone slab.

"More people want stuff that's natural because there's no production process with it. It's just the materials pulled out of the earth, and a crew of stone masons can build something if they've got the right skill set," DelGandio says.

Unlike concrete block kits which may limit installers to



More clients are asking for their firepits to match their homes, requesting designs that are congruent with existing architecture.

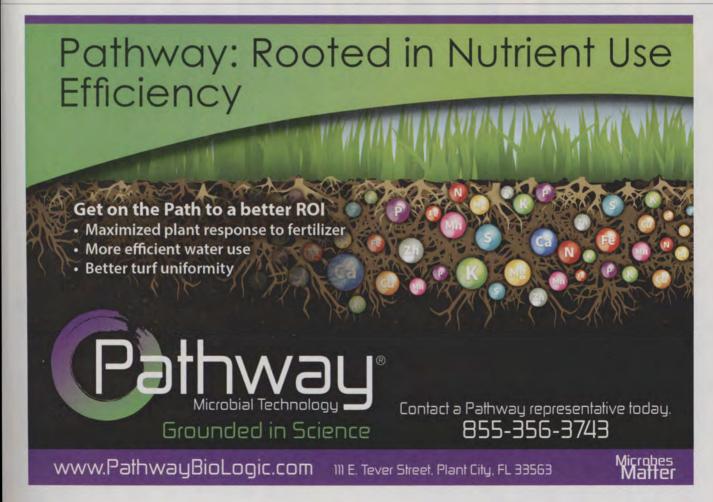
uniformity, natural stone allows more creativity.

FUNCTION FOR FOOD. While firepits are often enjoyed for their aesthetic appeal, clients still want to be able to use them like they would a real campfire, Sanders says.

When designing these firepits, he will make sure it's

scaled to size and safe so children can easily place a stick over a flame to roast food. Then, in snowy climates, where firepits are not being used year-round, custom enclosures or caps can be offered as an upsell to also protect the structure during the off-season, he adds. L&L

The author is a freelancer based in Ohio.





SHOULD ROBOTS YOUR

OVE IT OR HATE IT, lawn maintenance is a significant segment of the market. But it's never easy money: Margins are tight, competition is stiff and employees are hard to keep. "When I owned a sod installation company, I never wanted to do maintenance," says Nick Sagnella, co-founder of HomeVP in Charlotte, North Carolina. "It's typically resource-intensive, and you don't make money unless you're operating on a large scale."

After Sagnella sold his company, he and a business partner began to look at other service industry options. "We wanted to harness technology to service homeowners better," Sagnella says. "We narrowed it to the landscaping sector, and automated mowing seemed to be ripe." Their company began installing robotic mowers for residential properties in the Charlotte area in June 2017 with several dozen in service to date.

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By Arricca Elin SanSone



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ROBOMOWING

With just a handful of robotic mowing companies currently in operation across the country, the industry is poised for growth. Interestingly, these mowers have been popular in Europe for decades. But growing interest in the environment, and the techno-geeky coolness factor of a little robot driving across the lawn are spurring interest in the U.S. now, says Sagnella.

REASON FOR ROBOTICS. Robotic mowers can perform when humans can't. "Many of our customers were not happy with their current providers," Sagnella says. "It doesn't matter how great your operation is. You can't put a

1,300-pound mower on the grass in the rain." Robotics can mow multiple times a week even when the weather isn't cooperating.

Justin Crandall and his business partner ran a Dallas lawn maintenance company. "We had 5,000 customers and did maintenance only," Crandall says. "We were 100 percent residential and went after the part of the market no other landscaper likes." But with the volume and the rainiest two summers on record after a 10-year drought in Texas, they soon became disillusioned. "Reliability, costs and weather became big issues," he says.

They researched Europe's robotics market and launched

Robin, their robotic mowing program, in May 2017, selling off their traditional lawn business. Less than 10 percent of their customers opted to transition with the company. "We decided to find a new customer base, which has turned out to be primarily the tech-savvy and environmental people," Crandall says.

Andrew Walsh, owner of the design/build firm Terra Dura Landscapes in Austin, Texas, jumped into the market because he was listening to an interview that got him thinking about job loss due to automation.

"To me, it makes sense to automate anywhere there's a

simple task," Walsh says. In late spring 2017, he opened a sister company, Blackland Supply Company, to become a robotic mower dealer.

HOW ROBOTICS WORK. Robotic mowers are slightly smaller than traditional push mowers. They weigh between 20 to 50 pounds and run using a low-voltage wire, laid out along the perimeter of the lawn, similar to what's installed for electronic dog fencing. The charging station is placed within 50 feet of an outdoor electrical outlet.

Wires can be run through expansion joints of concrete drives or walkways. Asphalt may require





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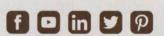


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using an angle grinder to cut a channel, then caulking over the wire. If there's a fence, two robots may be required. The robots are scheduled to run depending on the customer's grass type and preference. The machine returns to the charging station when power is low. They are also quiet so they can run at night without disturbing clients, Walsh says.

Units also are scheduled around irrigation times because there's a risk they'd bump into operating sprinkler heads and damage them. Mowers can run in rain, but it's not ideal in certain types of soil. Some have rain sensors so they'll head back to their charging station if it's too wet.



Robotic mowers may be a better solution to mowing in wet conditions.

ROBOTIC ROAD BUMPS. Although there's obviously a nifty-gee-whiz factor to robotic mowing, it's not without challenges. "There's a lot more involved than meets the eye," Sagnella says. One of the issues is cut wires. "We didn't anticipate the number that get damaged during edging, trimming or aeration," Crandall says. And although

every major manufacturer assured him it wasn't going to be a problem, Crandall says theft is a concern. "In the early days, we had three units stolen," he says. "Now we custom install GPS trackers."

Awareness about robotic mowers is another issue, as it only appeals to a small share of the market. The companies say leads have come from social media, Google ads or local news coverage.

So, is this new world worth exploring? In the big picture, time will tell how quick Americans are to embrace the technology. But it could be good for everyone.

"Hopefully, one of the effects is that it's going to save time and money so we can offer better employment," Walsh says. "I think it's going to be a solution to the constant labor problems.

My crews joke about it, but they know I'm trying to save their jobs. I want to offer real employment with room to grow." L&L

The author is a freelance writer based in the Northeast.

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ADOPTION OF GPS TRACKING TECHNOLOGY

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GPS Insight sponsors a report that uncovers industry challenges and solutions to fleet management.

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Fleet Management Guide produced by Lawn & Landscape Magazine. The purpose of this report is to enlighten landscape contractors about where the GPS fleet tracking industry is today and how it is impacting businesses throughout North America.

The findings of the report indicate that the landscaping industry's adoption of GPS tracking technology to manage fleets of vehicles, trailers and other mobile assets mirrors the adoption rate of the overall fleet industry. This shows that landscaping businesses are also understanding the value of the technology and realizing that it is no longer a nice-to-have tool, but a necessity to manage daily operations, reduce costs, reduce risk and increase revenue. It is expected that within a few years, the majority of fleets will use GPS tracking as a core piece of their fleet management puzzle.

Although landscape businesses are continuing to grow, there are still many challenges they face. The top three challenges related to vehicles and technology are labor costs, fuel costs and consumption and vehicle maintenance. Any one of these can take a big chunk out of a business's bottom line. It is recommended that contractors fully evaluate these expenses and risks and look for solutions to stop the bleeding.

The results of the report also identify the top ways GPS tracking helps improve fleet management. It is great to see that about 90 percent of respondents using GPS tracking today find that it helps most with increasing accountability, which addresses, directly or indirectly, all three of the top challenges faced by the landscaping industry.

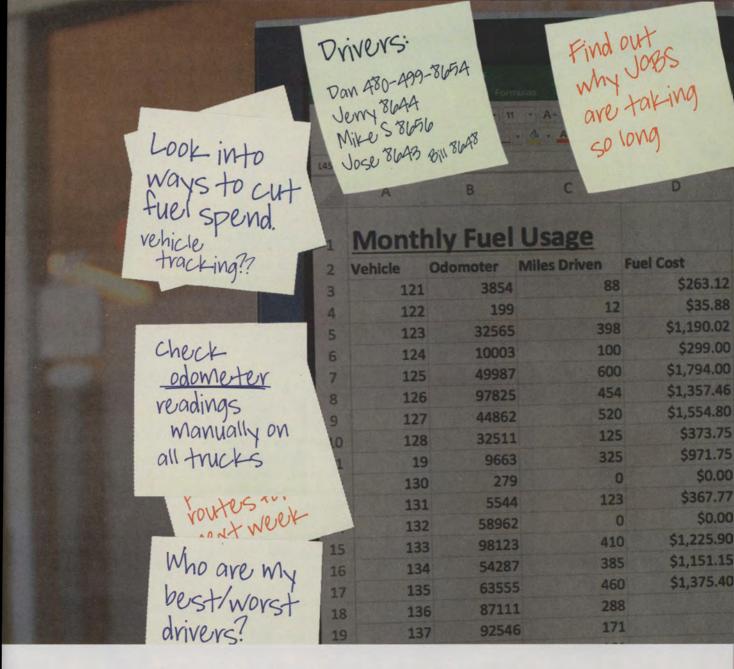
Landscaping businesses rely on the performance of their trucks and crews to drive revenue and stay competitive. This is why so many business owners and managers are looking for a tool that will answer the unknowns about their workforce and provide insight on where to make improvements. GPS tracking helps solve the most problematic fleet challenges so that landscaping businesses can get back to what they do best, serving customers.

We hope you find the information in this report helpful in understanding the fleet management landscape and how using GPS tracking technology will reduce costs, reduce risk and increase revenue.



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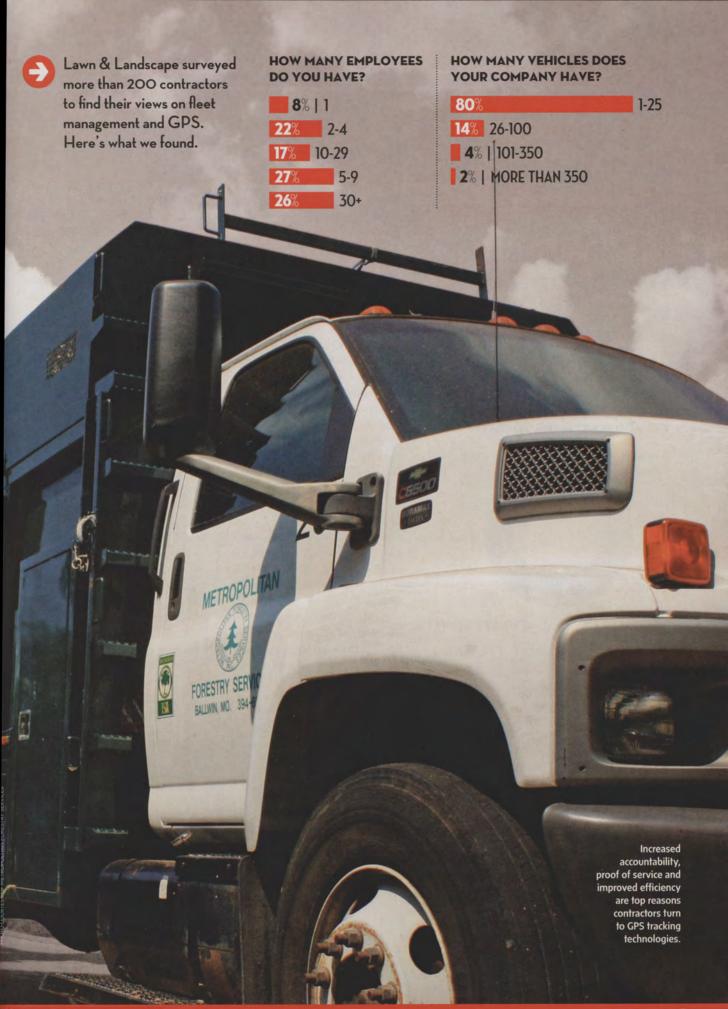
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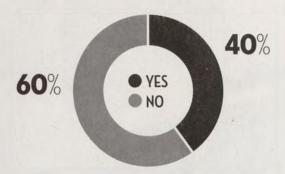


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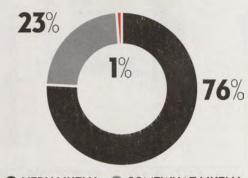




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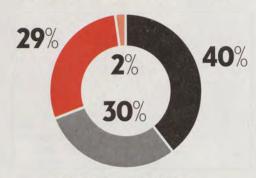


HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO RECOMMEND USING GPS TRACKING TECHNOLOGY FOR FLEET MANAGEMENT?



VERY LIKELYSOMEWHAT LIKELYNOT LIKELY

WHAT IS THE PRIMARY REASON YOU ARE NOT USING GPS TRACKING?



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uses GPS or routing technology. While the majority of respondents have yet to implement this technology, those who do use it report it increases accountability, provides proof of service and improves efficiency.

St. Louis-based Metropolitan Forestry Services installed GPS routing technology in its 25-vehicle fleet between 2012 and 2014. Meggan Hargrave, operations manager, says efficiency is the biggest perk with the technology. Even some of her customers have noticed the fleet's improved response times since implementing GPS technology.

"Customers who know about it think it's a nice thing that we can look up where people are and get someone to them quicker," she says. "They may not know that was GPS at work, but we can tell it increases customer satisfaction."

LEARNING CURVE. With new technology comes a learning curve. It took Pacific Lawn Maintenance three to four months to fully understand both its GPS routing system and additional software system after installation.

To minimize challenges, Demers implemented the technology during a slower period. "My biggest recommendation is to take time in the off-season to really learn everything a system has to offer," he says.

Adding GPS systems also requires teaching drivers and other laborers about the new system, and that may lead to some questions. When Scott Denker, owner of Ohio-based Grounds Guys of Toledo, installed GPS routing technology in his trucks a few months ago, his drivers seemed apprehensive.

"They were standoffish," he says. "But eventually they realized, while it is a tool to know where your vehicles are, it helps with scheduling and also lowers insurance costs. Drivers have actually been driving better and idling has improved among them."

Demers received mixed reactions when he first told his drivers about the technology. "Younger employees really grabbed onto it quite quickly, while some of our older crew leaders aren't as tech-savvy."

He gave his employees a crash course on the technology as soon as he introduced the system. While he received questions from older crew leaders on how to log into the new system, these workers managed to pick up on the system in a matter of days.

Pacific Lawn Maintenance has also experienced a few hiccups with its GPS system the past few years, such



FLEET PAINS

GPS ROUTING AND SOFTWARE SYSTEMS ASIDE,

a few other issues stand out when contractors consider fleet management. Lawn & Landscape surveyed readers and the numbers at right serve as the top three headaches when it comes to vehicles and technology.

Labor came out as the biggest fleet management concern. Amy Tincher of Rocky Fork Company in Ohio notes this is likely of top concern because it's traditionally a company's biggest expense. "We sell service, so maximizing productive hours we get in a day is crucial. If our drivers aren't efficient in how they drive to a jobsite or if they're stopping places they shouldn't be, those are hours we aren't getting to bill out."

Meggan Hargrave of Missouri-based Metropolitan Forestry Services says labor costs are also expected to rise. "The younger generation of people wants to get paid more so now it is more important than ever to maximize the time that employees are working productively."

Both Tincher and Hargrave suggest GPS and fleet management technology can help to relieve any of these top concerns, though. "You need to measure and manage fleets," Tincher says. "GPS is a great tool for this, measuring your numbers all the time. Some may think it's cost prohibitive, or a smaller organization may see it as costly. But if you do your research, it's not that much."

58%
LABOR COST

51% FUEL COST

50% VEHICLE MAINTENANCE

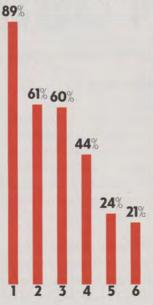
as glitches with the tablets. Although these scenarios can prove to be challenging in the moment, he says his team always manages to improvise. "If (the GPS or tablet) is down, often we can troubleshoot from the office."

REALIZED RELIEF. For some companies, like Rocky Fork Company in Columbus, Ohio, integrating GPS technology into their fleet has alleviated unnecessary stress. The central Ohio company features a 40-truck fleet, with about 30 of its vehicles on the road every day.

"(GPS routing) has reduced our downtime, lost hours we strive to minimize," says Amy Tincher, vice president of operations at Rocky Fork. The technology also aids with liability issues, and it particularly helps with slip-and-fall cases.

"Two years ago, we had an incident in a really large shopping center," Tincher says. "Someone said they were there early in the

WHAT ARE THE TOP 3 WAYS GPS TRACKING HELPS YOU MANAGE YOUR FLEET?



- 1. Increase Accountability
- 2. Provide Proof of Service
- 3. More Efficient Routing
- 4. Reduce Fuel/Labor Costs
- 5. Enforcing safety policies
- 6. Improve Vehicle Maintenance

morning, and slipped and fell. Yet we hadn't even been to the site yet because the client hadn't granted us permission. So, between an email from our client and GPS verification of when we were on site and where vehicles had been prior, it released us from any liability. That liability fell back on the property owner and not us."

In this situation, the GPS routing technology came through for Tincher and her team by providing tracking history, thus saving the company from a liability claim.

"Liability-wise with snow removal, (the technology) is a lifesaver," she says.

Metropolitan Forestry Services experienced similar benefits to this type of technology after installing it in its trucks. "When (a client) is not sure that their technician was there, I'll say, 'His truck was there at 9 a.m. He rang the bell," Hargrave says. So, instead of making multiple

phone calls, the GPS and routing technology provides Hargrave with instant answers to most fleet-related questions.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS.

GPS and routing technologies offer benefits for fleet management, but the technology may not be necessary for smaller fleets. Denker recommends only companies with at least five vehicles consider adding the technology. "You don't want to spend a lot of money on something and be locked into it and then not use it," he says.

However, Hargrave says some smaller companies may benefit from adding GPS in their vehicles, especially after a profitable year.

"If you have extra income that would allow you to purchase (a system), then it could definitely be a good thing. If you're a manager or owner who needs to manage five trucks, it could be a helpful addition." L&L



KEEP THEM GOING

Use these tips to choose, maintain and train crews on sprayers and spreaders.

By Arricca Elin SanSone

ou MAY NOT GIVE your sprayers and spreaders a second thought, but this equipment can make your work easier – or give you a lot of headaches if you neglect them. "They're like any other piece of equipment in your shop. Take care of them, and they'll take care of you," says Marcus Belote, owner of Turf Experts in Raleigh, North Carolina. "I do a lot of preventive maintenance because I can't afford to have them not working or to be waiting on a part."

Here are some considerations for when you're shopping for sprayers and spreaders, as well as how to make these units last and how to train crews to use them properly.

GET A DEMO. Do your homework: Read reviews, watch manufacturer videos and talk to others who have purchased a similar unit. "Get the salesperson to show your model in action," says Fred Kapp, educational director

for the Green Industry Web Portal (www.giwportal.org), a training website affiliated with Auburn University. "Have them fill it with water. Check out the agitation system. It should look like the water is 'boiling,' not barely vibrating, when you look in the tank. If you use wettable powders, you want to make sure they will be getting thoroughly mixed."

TEST DRIVE THEM. About four years ago, Beau Hartman, owner of Hartman Landscaping, in Zanesville, Ohio, purchased a used sprayer-spreader. "It did not feel stable unless I was on flat ground," Hartman says. "I didn't feel comfortable on it, so there was no way I was putting an employee on it." He has since purchased a new unit which operates safely on the hills of southeastern Ohio. "It seems to have a lower center of gravity. Although it doesn't carry as much product, it's more appropriate for the types of properties we do, which are primarily on slopes."





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PERFORM A REALITY CHECK. "You don't want to have to grow into the machine," Kapp says. "If it's only working a half-day a week, stick with a tank and hose rather than

a ride-on. A machine that's sitting around destroys profit." And before you buy the biggest, baddest machine available, figure out if it's going to fit where you need it to go. You may have tight or fenced areas where you won't be able to maneuver.

LOOK FOR THE LITTLE THINGS. Slight quirks can become big annoyances down the road. "Look at how the hose winds," Hartman says. "After a year or two, I found that the coil hoses start to droop. If the muffler is on that side, it melts the hose. I prefer a hose reel rather than a coil type." An electric windup is a timesaver, too.

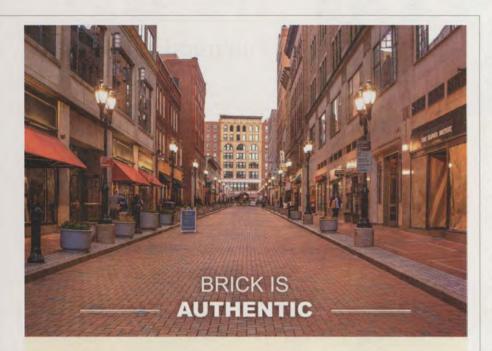
CLEAN EVERYTHING REGULARLY. Equipment will last longer if corrosive products, such as fertilizers, aren't left to sit in the hoppers. Some products can build up on the impeller so that you'll get uneven distribution of material, Belote says. Rinse out spreaders on a daily or weekly basis, depending on how frequently you use them.

sprayers should be cleaned daily. Ideally, don't leave product in the tank overnight, as it can degrade. It also may cause issues with fittings and gaskets over time, Kapp says. Check the manufacturer's recommendations for how much water to use to flush the system, and follow local codes for proper capture and disposal of waste water.

DO A REGULAR INSPECTION. Examine the spray nozzles, which can get damaged if dropped or dragged. You may need to take them apart and clean them every few days to prevent clogs, Hartman says. "We don't use granular product, but even with liquid a film remains behind," he says. "You can't wait a week in between cleanings."

LOOK FOR LEAKS AT CONNECTIONS. Examine the diaphragm. Some companies replace them proactively, rather than waiting for them to fail. Lube grease fittings as needed, typically every few days. Examine impellers, as well. The fins should not be worn, which can cause a distorted distribution pattern, Kapp says.

It's also important to maintain proper tire pressure. "If you run on under-inflated tires, that can change the operating speed of the



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machine," Kapp says. Even on push units, 80 pounds of fertilizer on flat tires will not yield a smooth application.

STOCK EXTRA PARTS. Keep parts such as belts, cables, pins and extra hoses on the truck so you won't be stuck going back to the shop in the middle of a job, says Belote. At the shop, have agitators, regulators and diaphragms on hand for unexpected repairs. "You're going to need to replace these eventually, so keep them on the shelf," he says.

KEEP ENGINES HUMMING. For ride-on units, follow the manufacturer's recommendations for

"I do a lot of preventive maintenance because I can't afford to have them not working or to be waiting on a part."

Marcus Belote, owner, Turf Experts tasks such as changing the oil and air filters, inspecting spark plugs and checking the battery. At the very least, do all these maintenance tasks at the end of the season. Have a system in place to keep track of hours and what was done for each unit. Spreadsheets are fine, but an old-school binder is OK, too.

PROVIDE SUPERVISION. No matter how experienced a new employee may be with chemical applications, make them go through the paces with you before clearing them to work independently. "We do all our own training," Hartman says. "We have 4 acres at our shop

we use for instruction. Then crew members start out doing properties under me or my ops manager. We train them how to calibrate and monitor how much coverage they're getting."

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT. Set up a spray course so crew members can demonstrate that they are able to replicate the right amount of chemical. Observe them to ensure they are not making the most common mistakes: not overlapping correctly, making uneven passes, changing operating speed or making passes too wide. "If you're off by even a foot, that's a lot," Hartman says. L&L



LOCK AND LOAD

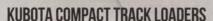
These compact wheel and track loaders are small enough to go wherever your job takes them, but they pack enough power to get the job done.

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The pitch: M2-Series compact track loaders offer performance, comfort and visibility enhancements.

- Cab comfort is enhanced with an automatic ride control option and new front and rear cab isolators.
- A redesigned top window improves visibility with a 34 percent increase in open area.
- A reversing fan option allows loader operators to temporarily reverse the cooling fan direction for several seconds.

For more information: Bobcat.com



The pitch: Compact Track Loaders are now equipped with powerful high hydraulics and added versatility.

- Kubota added the new SVL75-2 with High Flow, which includes the SVL75-2 and SVL95-2s.
- The SVL75-2 with has a bucket breakout force of 6,204 pounds and lift arm breakout at 4,766 pounds.
- The main frame and undercarriage are one piece, welded together for better structural strength.

For more information: Kubota.com

JCB TELESKID

The pitch: JCB Teleskid is a compact track loader with a telescoping boom.

- Telescoping boom allows it to lift over 13 feet, reach 8 feet forward and dig 3 feet below grade.
- Combines vertical lift capability for greater lift capacity and radial lift capability for improved grading.
- · 3,695 pound lift capacity
- The teleskid features a single-arm boom, and cab features like a side entry door and 270-degree visibility.

For more information: JCB.com









TAKEUCHI TW80 SERIES 2 Compact wheel loader

The pitch: The TW80 SERIES 2 compact wheel loader delivers increased performance, improved serviceability and an enhanced deluxe operator's cabin.

- Compact design allows these loaders to maneuver in tight spaces with minimal damage to surface areas.
- The TW80 features air conditioning and heat, adjustable armrest and controller position, as well as storage compartments for the operator.
- For improved performance, the automotive-styled interior design also features a frameless door, easy-to-operate function switches, inching pedal for precise machine control and precision pilot controls.

For more information: Takeuchi-us.com



CAT 906M COMPACT WHEEL LOADER

The pitch: The 906M Compact Wheel Loader delivers high performance and versatility with on-the-go operator-tuned hydraulics and drivetrain to adjust the machine's response to the task at hand.

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- The cab features all-around visibility, quiet sound levels and low-effort joystick controls with fully adjustable seat suspension.
- Caterpillar offers a complete range of options and attachments to configure an M-Series Wheel Loader.

For more information: Cat.com

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KEEP THE **FLOW**

Try these basic maintenance tips and tricks for irrigation systems.

By Holly Hammersmith

RRIGATION SYSTEM MAINTENANCE can keep the phones ringing, especially as older installs age.

Johnny's Turf Management has been in business for 35 years and has offered irrigation system installation since the early 1990s. The company, based in Jacksonville, Florida, provides lawn maintenance, landscaping and irrigation services to both residential and commercial customers. Today, 11 people work at Johnny's Turf Management, which has an annual revenue

"Most of the stuff we do is repair work for big outfits," says John Day, owner. "We have a customer with over 2,000 rental homes that we do all their service work. They call us when they know something's broken."

between \$750,000 and \$900,000.

Lawn & Landscape spoke to Day about best practices for offering irrigation maintenance service, common questions from customers and tips on pricing. Here are some of his suggestions:

How often should you be servicing heads and nozzles?

"At least twice a year, we recommend them being flipped on and gone through," Day says.

This recommendation is for customers with a clean water supply – typically city water. If the customer has well water, this may need to be done more often. "If you get into a drought situation, wells start picking sand up and the water table drops," Day says.

How does the age of a system impact maintenance needs?

Irrigation heads can begin sticking out higher than the turf over time.

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"It depends, again, on the water (source). That's got a lot to do with it, but five years probably (when) heads begin to pop up," Day says. "That head is popping up and down, and up and down, over time they wear, just like anything else."

Other frequent reasons for maintenance calls include failed valves, stuck valves, broken heads and problems with rain sensor functioning.

When do you know if you have enough demand to start offering irrigation services?

"You just kind of have to feel your way around it," Day says. "At that stage when you're troubleshooting

systems and someone calls and whatever is wrong – that takes a trained technician to do it."

This typically requires a new hire. "A good one gets paid a good wage. To bring somebody on full-time, then you have that overhead. You've got to have somewhere to plug them in when you start. You're not just going to have a full-time service truck running all the time when you're starting."

Once irrigation installations are completed by the company, maintenance can be offered going forward. Just recently, Day received a call for maintenance on a system he installed in 1999.

"We put stickers on the controllers when we were doing new construction with our company contact information on the stickers," he says, adding that new homeowners may move in, see the sticker and call his company when maintenance is needed.

Do you have any tips for winterizing a system?

While irrigation systems in northern climates experiencing a hard frost should be winterized using an air compressor, this type of maintenance is not typically needed in warmer climates.

"The only (winterizing) thing that really needs to happen (in a warm climate like Florida) is the backflows. They are above ground. Sometimes we've had freezes to the point where they've frozen," he says. "That's on rare occurrences, but it has happened."

Placing insulation on them and

around the above-ground pipes can mitigate the risk of freezing and damage.

How do you price irrigation maintenance?

"We're \$75 for a service call. That gets us there and includes a halfhour of labor," Day says. "And then we're \$75 an hour after."

Customers at Johnny's Turf Management are charged the same fee regardless of their distance from his place of business.

"You see people advertising maintenance all the time for \$69, and they're basically going through and they're turning everything on and inspecting," Day says. "The heads have gotten knocked over and they're spraying up in the air or spraying down to the ground. That





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IRRIGATION

(fee) usually includes a half an hour or 45 minutes labor and then you charge from there for repairs and whatnot. When you go through, you can tell if the nozzles are clogged or the heads are sticking up or that type (of) stuff just by turning it on."

What do you need to tell customers about their irrigation systems?

"The biggest thing is that you can't set it and forget it," Day says. "It's automatic, but that doesn't mean you're getting enough water down, or too much."

Many customers in Florida run their systems before the sun rises.

"They never turn them on and look at them. They just assume it's doing what it's supposed to do," Day says.

Customers should turn the system on and view it in operation at least once a month.

"Down here we have water restrictions that are in place all the time. That's two days a week. Because they're watering for the restrictions, they think that's supposed to be enough," Day says. "We get a lot of rain in the afternoons so it usually works, but again, in a

"You can't set it and forget it. It's automatic, but that doesn't mean you're getting enough water or too much."

John Day, owner, Johnny's Turf Management drought situation, two days a week just doesn't work."

Customers need to be involved in the programming, whether it's a drought or a season with above-average rainfall.

"Rain sensors can be set up to an inch and a half of rainfall before they kick in. And if that's the case, we're getting a ton of water and the system is still running. Or it could be set at an eighth of an inch and it sprinkles and it shuts it down," Day says.

Do you have any other tips for communicating with the customer?

"Be careful not to make the customer too knowledgeable, or curious, about the system," Day says. "You can have them too informed to where they start messing with it. They start asking for tools to adjust rotors and then I can't tell you how many times people do that and then they strip them and they're doing full circles and watering the road or the house."

Keep customer knowledge to the basics, he says.

"If you notice something is not right, then give us a call," Day tells customers. L&L

The author is a freelance writer based in Ohio.

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STRATEGY IN THE STRATEGY IN TH

Having the right in-cab controls can make or break your performance in a snow event. 188















MORE THOUGHTS FROM D.C.

BY KEVIN GILBRIDE

hen the Accredited Snow Contractors Association members descended on Washington, D.C., Sept. 12, our mission was to educate elected officials on the business issues snow and ice management companies face. Specifically, the number of slip-and-fall claims this industry faces each season. I wrote about some of this last month, but wanted to expand on our time there.

The legal system allows anyone to file a claim against another person or entity for any reason (or no reason at all) and then the court system is left to let the claim run its course. Rarely does the court system get a chance to see the cases. In most cases, the attorneys for the insurance carrier broker a settlement that makes these claims go away. This settlement then raises insurance premiums and encourages others to

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file similar claims for a quick payday.

Senate Bill 237, the Lawsuit Abuse Reduction Act, would rein in these lawsuits. This bill would make it mandatory for judges at the federal level (and subsequently the state level) to impose sanctions on plaintiffs and attorneys who are found to have filed frivolous lawsuits. Those sanctions would include the plaintiff and their attorneys being responsible for defense fees if it is deemed a frivolous case. It also would remove the 21-day "safe harbor" clause. This clause allows a plaintiff's attorney to file a lawsuit against anyone and then pull it back in 21 days. It discourages them from doing any research on the case and encourages quick settlements.

We only met with Senate offices because this bill, which has partisan support, has already passed the House SPONSORED BY



of Representatives. It only needs to pass the Senate and then be signed by the president. The Bill (HB 720) passed in the House 230-188.

In the end, your peers took 48 hours out of their busy schedules to educate our elected officials on issues facing your businesses.

In our first conversation, Paul Taylor, the chair of the subcommittee on the constitution, didn't even realize there was this kind of problem in this industry. He couldn't believe there were people suing companies for slipping and falling on ice.

He didn't know. Your government doesn't know because we didn't tell them. That was our fault. Thank the nearly 40 individuals who took care of that for you.

Our success on Capitol Hill, like always, garnered mixed results. The Republican side was very sympathetic to our situation, while staunch Democrats have their heels dug in. Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin is no friend to small business or the snow industry. New Jersey Sen. Corey Booker's office, while perhaps a little more cordial, also is not a friend of the snow industry.

Some more moderate Democrats were very open to learning more about the issues we are facing, asking for additional information. We are in the process of gathering that information. We're also looking for more stories of frivolous lawsuits, and they do not have to be snow-related.

If you have a story to tell, please call me at 216-393-0246 or email me at kgilbride@gie.net. L&L

The author is the executive director of the ASCA.

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READY FOR WINTER

Ariens Co. launched its 2018 snow products and Lawn & Landscape got a close look at the new lineup.

BY LAUREN RATHMELL

GREEN BAY, Wis. – Ariens recently unveiled its Professional 21 series – a line of single-stage blowers running at 1,200 rpm.

The Professional 21 blowers have an adjusted handle and grip on the housing in order to be able to be lifted onto, and pulled into a pickup truck easier. The equipment also underwent tumble testing to be able to withstand the use.

The Professional series will be available for purchase in October with EFI engines for easy startup and efficiency.

"For this line, we went to our customers," said Matt Medden, vice president of marketing. "At a visit in Chicago, we realized our customers were really having to lift this equipment into their trucks."

The series was shown to Lawn & Landscape at Ariens' headquarters followed by a media event at Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wisconsin. The company also launched two more contractor-grade items:

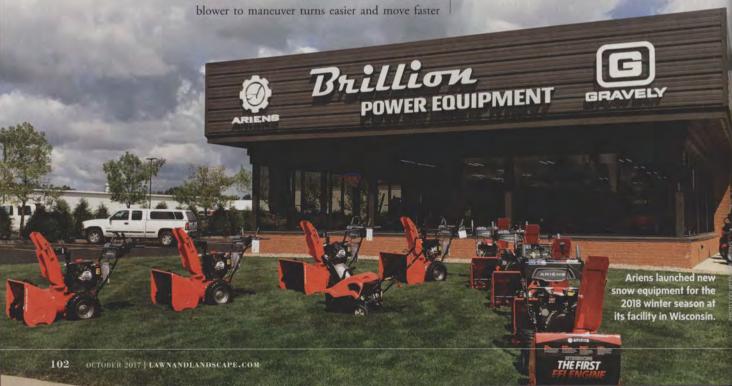
• The RapidTrak is a track system with back wheels that can be adjusted independently from the front wheel in the track. This allows the track blower to maneuver turns easier and move faster.

than traditional track equipment. RapidTrak will only be offered to dealers this season, but Medden said he expects the technology to be available on more track products in the future. Josh Wilson, senior director of engineering, said the products underwent rigorous testing in areas with up to 300 inches of snowfall annually. Each piece of equipment was tested beyond its expected lifespan.

• The compact Sno-Thro has been upgraded with a 223 cc engine allowing for faster use. The compact equipment is designed for use on up to 12 inches of snow and comes in both wheeled and track models.

Adam Stanton, production manager, said preparation for this year's new products began in March. All fabrication and quality checks for Ariens products are performed in-house in their manufacturing plant.

The plant has been optimized for production, utilizing an assembly line similar to one used in automobile production. The company also manufactured custom machines to build parts for their equipment, 181



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SNOWPLOW

CONTRACT STRUCTURE. Today, Wright strives for all clients to be on a 12-month contract, receiving landscape maintenance during the green season and snow removal in the winter season. The contracts are multiyear, typically for a three-year term.

New clients are found by going door to door in neighborhoods or commercial areas of town, from leads via the company's website and word-of-mouth referrals.

Contracts start Nov. 1 and end March 31, matching the lifespan of the typical winter season in Ontario, Wright says. A few contracts extend until April, allowing the client peace of mind in case late-season snow comes.

"We start prepping our equipment in October. We have one of our guys start prepping equipment and bringing it from our storage area and getting it ready," he says.

FLEET SIZE AND STRUCTURE.

Trucks are readied for winter, but then the equipment is removed and set aside until summer work is finished.

TO AVOID STAFFING ISSUES, WRIGHT SAYS IT'S IMPORTANT TO INVEST TIME IN HIRING THE RIGHT PEOPLE.

"We have about six plow units, three agricultural tractors with 16-foot blades, two walkway crews, and each walkway crew has push mowers and a rideon machine for doing the city walkways," Wright says. "We do bring in the odd subcontractor to help out when we need it. We have two smaller salt units on three-ton trucks, and then we have the large 6-ton salter as well."

Most of the salting is done with the large salt truck. Smaller units can help out if more coverage is needed during a storm, Wright says. Walkway crews operate separate from plow drivers, and ideally, hit a property before the plow comes.

"It's a bit of a balance between that, and having to do cleanup afterward," he says. "It doesn't always work. They're all communicating with each other as well."

The company runs 12 snow removal routes and employee roles are interchangeable depending on needs, Wright says.

FINDING AND KEEPING EMPLOYEES.

Manpower is always a challenge, but even more so during a mild winter like this past one, Wright says. This past season, the region experienced only about 70 percent of the average snowfall for the area.

"Because of the winter we had, we didn't have consistent snow so it was a challenge keeping our hourly employees on, because they just weren't making enough hours," he says. However, those who stayed on did learn to work more efficiently, he adds.

"I think I need to go find more all-inclusive contract work in order to manage cash flow," Wright says. "Fewer per trip stuff because we're just not making the money per trip."

During peak season, the company, which has an annual revenue of about \$2.5 million, employs 20 individuals. About \$500,000 of that revenue comes from snow removal work, Wright says.

When it comes to staffing, Wright says it's important to invest the time into hiring the right people. He has found that hiring in the fall works well, and 80 to 90 percent of employees typically stay on for more than one season.

"You find some of your best employees that way. Once they stay through the entire season, they turn into great green season staff. We hire for 12 months; we don't hire just for a season," he says.

Wright also offers a program where employees can bank hours so that summer pay goes toward slow times in the winter, allowing



SMART ABOUT SALT-CERTIFIED COMPAN'

them to receive a steady paycheck Hiring should be at the top of your mind all year long though, "You may not have a position,

mer storage of material, how you

their happiness," Wright says, adding that he does much of this type of headhunting through networking.

Subcontractors are used occasionally, usually on client sites that are on the furthest outskirts of the company's service area.

EMPLOYEE TRAINING. Employees undergo training programs provided by industry organizations such as the Smart About Salt Council.

All employees visit the client sites they will be servicing prior to the first snowfall for a walkthrough and in-the-field training. Ride-alongs are also performed with an experienced operator leading a new employee. "The experienced ones it's more of just you tell them where the hazards are, and leave them to figure out their best way of doing it," Wright says.

Also, about one-third of the company's employees are trained to use a salt truck. While roles are interchangeable, there are some limits, he says.

"We don't just drop somebody into one of the bigger machines or a truck. They have to kind of work their way up there," Wright says. "Certainly, when it comes to walkways, everybody's doing it." L&L

The author is a freelance writer based in Ohio.

Rewriting the Rules

of sidewalk snow removal



Rule #2

vear-round.

he adds.

he says.

but someone good comes along

where you've got to hire them

because it's a challenge. It's a

challenge finding people that

The good employees have

jobs, but they may be unhappy

with their employer and are

simply staying because it's easy,

"It's a matter of searching for

those employees who are not

happy and convincing them

that maybe it's time to go find

want to work," Wright says.

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STRATEGY IN THE STRATEGY IN TH

Having the right in-cab controls can make or break your performance in a snow event.

BY KATE SPIRGEN

hen a snowstorm hits, there's no time to waste getting yourself and your crews out on the job. In-cab controls can make all the difference, especially for companies that are servicing smaller properties with lots of twists and turns, and lots of stops on their routes.

Jim Stewart's five-man crew at Stewart Landscaping operates in suburban Maine. So while his crews service a lot of residential accounts and small strip malls, they need to be able to move around quickly and efficiently so that they can get back on the road to their next service stop.

GETTING AROUND. Stewart uses UTVs with plows for smaller sidewalk areas and says his guys prefer to use the joystick controls rather than the power grip option, which he tried out at the dealership when he was shopping around.

"When you're wearing big, heavy gloves, the controls on the power grip work better," he says. "I tried it with my usual gloves on and it does take some getting used to, but it's easier for me and my guys."

For the same reason, he uses the joystick controls on his straight plows as well. He uses those on larger areas, like gated community streets and parking lots, as well as tailgate spreaders. He can adjust the application rate right inside the cab without having to brave the cold.

"It seems like something small, but it's not just an issue of staying warm," he says. "It really saves us a lot of time in the long run."

Stewart says he asks his snow removal employees at Stewart Landscaping, three of whom also work on his landscaping crews, to weigh in on what works best for them. He also plows during the winter, so he knows firsthand what to look for.

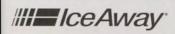
"The simpler the better," he says. "The more ins and outs you need to learn, the harder it is to get people on board. We want the smallest margin for error possible while still having what we need to do the job right."

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SNOW EQUIPMENT

QUICK AND EASY ADJUSTMENTS.

And working in residential areas, he says he needs quick reactions from his controls to deal with the ins and outs of driveways and smaller parking lots. But since he's working in a pickup truck, he doesn't want anything that will impede his ability to drive safely.

"I'm not a small guy and I need to make sure I'm not hitting controls I don't want to when I'm getting in or out," he says.

He says he looks for equipment with the fewest parts since he doesn't have an in-house mechanic. "We have a great guy that we trust, but we aren't his only customer," Stewart says. "There



While Jim Stewart, owner of Stewart Landscaping, used to shop for used equipment and vehicles, he only buys new today to avoid problems.

are times where we'll have to wait a day or two to get service and that kind of downtime makes it really difficult to stay on track."

Plus, he likes being able to install and remove the spreaders quickly. He says he also likes having LED lights and digital diagnostics to help him reduce waste. Plus, he doesn't have to get out of the truck to check and

see if he's putting down the right amount of salt.

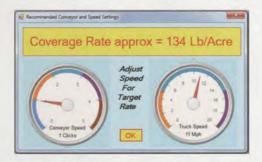
And if he needs to haul material around, he can swing the spreader around to give him access to his truck bed. This comes in handy when he's delivering firewood or hauling fallen tree branches.

The simple chain drive makes it easy for him to apply salt where it's needed and control the amount he's broadcasting.

"The way we sell, some people want no snow at all, and others, like the residential customers, aren't as picky," he says.

Stewart says he used to buy used equipment when he found a good deal, but three years ago, he bought a used truck that caused him nothing but problems from the start.





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"It was constantly down and out in the shop," he says. "It seemed like a great deal at the time, but now I know better. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is."

Now he says he'll stick to all new equipment and vehicles, which gives him better peace of mind.

He's planning to expand in the next few years and says he's looking for some larger properties so that he can spend less time travelling back and forth between properties. He's looking to sign on larger housing developments and commercial properties.

TALKING TRAINING. Stewart does

WE WANT THE
SMALLEST MARGIN
FOR ERROR
POSSIBLE WHILE
STILL HAVING
WHAT WE NEED TO
DO THE JOB RIGHT."

Jim Stewart, owner, Stewart Landscaping all of his training in house when he hires new snow removal employees, which is about two a season.

If all goes well, he can have his new hires shadow a more seasoned veteran, but sometimes people have to "learn on the fly," he says.

"Ideally, we can have someone go out in a truck or in a UTV before the snow hits and take their time learning the ropes," he says. "But sometimes we have them shadow someone on the job and then take the reins during the real deal."

That happened to him last year when one of his workers was out with a spinal injury. To get someone on board fast, he hired a referral from the injured worker and hoped for the best.

Since the new employee had experience with vehicles of different sizes, he caught on quickly and learned how to operate efficiently with the help of the veteran.

"We didn't have a ton of stuff he needed to learn. It was mostly getting used to the crazy hours," Stewart says. That employee is signed on again for the 2017-2018 winter.

"Turnover is just part of the way things work," Stewart says, adding that while he used to get upset by it, he's learned that it's "just part of the business." L&L

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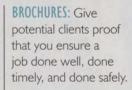
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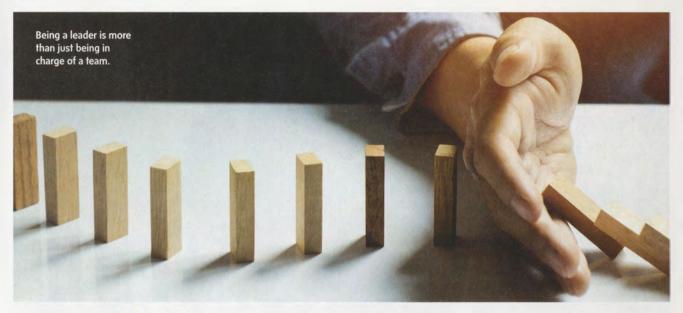




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PROBLEMS ARE LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS

BY MIKE CALLLAHAN

verything that happens in any company comes down to the leader's ability to do the work, delegate the work or find someone who can do the work the leader may not be capable of doing. The turning point for most businesses, including my own snow removal business, is when the owner of the company has the courage to engage in an internal audit of his abilities to lead not only the company but the people in his charge.

Taking care of those in our charge begins with a laser-like focus on three key areas:

Systematize and standardize operations. This particular responsibility requires leaders to take a 40,000-foot view of the company's operations, including marketing, sales and employee recruitment and retention. This means having the vision to create a standard process to fulfill each of these operations as well as the daily snow and ice removal activities. Leaders are responsible for mastering the core marketing and sales processes to grow their businesses, and need to possess the ability to recruit, train and retain the highest quality employees. In most cases, once leaders have mastered the sales and marketing functions, they fail to realize they can use these same skills to market and sell their businesses to attract the highest quality employees. Leaders must be able to attract the right people now, predict who will be needed in the future and also ensure they are doing the right work for the company.

Lead the financial stability of the company. This charge means focusing on budget creation

and accountability for that budget. The leader is first responsible for creating a yearly budget that accounts for labor, equipment and general and administrative costs. Once these costs are calculated with the leadership team, time should be spent updating the company's pricing and budgeted man-hours for all current work along with work to be priced out in the future. The leader must hold the entire company accountable to the new budget. As leaders, we should be creating a culture of accountability and transparency by publicly sharing the daily or weekly budgeted times on jobs along with the company's wins and losses.

Create the vision, mission and core values. Not only must leaders pave the way for the creation of these foundational aspects of the business, they must also embody these values in their day-to-day work. The most successful companies have a leader that facilitates a formal process to establish what their company stands for. Once these foundational aspects of a business are established, it becomes the leader's responsibility to create a culture that hires, fires and trains to these core values and beliefs.

Before the flakes of the next winter start falling, I suggest taking some time away from the day-to-day grind to take an honest look inward and identify where you are winning and losing leadership battles in your company. Don't ignore the problems. Address them head on and find solutions by capitalizing on the strengths of those that complement you and your work. L&L







Coming to a close

As fall approaches, the Turnaround Tour winners continue to find new ways to improve. By Brian Horn

S THE SEASON WINDS DOWN, so does the 2017 Turnaround Tour. As the three winners approach fall, they have experienced a number of wins, but also still have challenges. Freedom Lawn & Landscapes has a good feeling about a large job they bid on, but will need to make sure it's profitable. Vineland has had no trouble getting work, but still has problems getting paid. The Wades have what they think is a solution on examining revenue streams, but it's too early to tell if it will work long-term.

Latest update: The Dirksens replaced the spray truck, which was a 2000 Ford with more than 200,000 miles on it. It would have cost \$4,500 to fix the transmission, so the couple found a 2011 truck in decent shape with 140,000 miles for \$11,500.

with profitable ones. They were

debating whether to repair or

replace an old spray truck that

broke down.

The Dirksens recently moved homes, and one of their neighbors was unhappy with their current landscaper. After speaking with the new neighbor, the Dirksens found out the homeowner owns a large commercial real estate company in Oklahoma City.

more on profitable

accounts.



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MEET THE TURNAROUND TOUR WINNERS



You can hear firsthand all about the Turnaround Tour from the major players. Our three winners and Bill Arman and Ed Laflamme will take part in the Turnaround Tour panel at Landscapes 2017. The panel will take place on Thursday, Oct. 19 from 3-4:15 p.m.

They put a bid in for all of their commercial properties, and they hope to sign a deal by December.

"We have a lot of customers in that area, so we have a great reputation that we've built," Heather says.

The Dirksens' daughter is friends with the homeowner's daughter, but that wasn't only the connection that helped. "Something that Bill and Ed had talked about is place yourself as No. 2," Heather says. "So not necessarily going there to get the job, but just let them know who you are and what you offer."

Bill and Ed's take: While the company has dropped in

sales, they've doubled in profit. The company was surrounded by potentially profitable clients, and didn't know it until they started scouting them out. Arman says owners should take a 30-minute drive around their dispatch yard looking at properties, especially new construction.

"I start pinpointing the jobs that are in there and the types of jobs. What do I have that's in a half-anhour drive point of my dispatch yard?" Arman says.

Vineland Landscaping

Last time we checked in: Will Gruccio and his partner Michael D'Orazio were subbing some maintenance work to another company for the first time, and debating whether to drop construction work. They also discussed pre-billing maintenance work and visiting a similar company with higher revenue.

Latest update: The biggest hurdle facing Vineland is having cash on hand because the big checks from construction jobs haven't come in yet - those jobs are slated for the fall. Vineland hired a part-time employee to help with collections, and the company will start to pre-bill mowing jobs each month despite a few long-time customers saying they didn't like the idea.

"It's at the point where I'd rather lose an account and have our business run smoothly than every week us being worried about cash on hand," he says.

Gruccio says he hopes to start billing in October of this year as a trial run. He plans on sending a letter with an invoice to customers explaining the change.

If customers who pay on time complain, they will return to the old process for those customers.

Vineland has also been getting burned by general contractors not paying on time. Gruccio is putting language in contracts saying some money should be paid up front.



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MEET THE TURNAROUND TOUR WINNERS



You can also get a behind-the-scenes account of the tour during three free webinars with each company, Bill, Ed and Lawn & Landscape. All webinars start at noon eastern. Visit bit.ly/TurnaroundTour to register. Freedom: Nov. 6, Vineland: Dec. 4 and Wade's: Jan. 8

The company is also reducing overtime. They will allow experienced workers to get overtime, but as less experienced workers hit 40 hours, Vineland will have a part-time worker jump on a job.

Bill and Ed's take: Vineland is getting killed on their subcontractor work and would like to see the company move away from working as a subcontractor. The Harvesters also encouraged the company to look for new maintenance work to replace the commercial construction revenue.

"Throughout the winter they can be making calls on commercial work to grow that side of the

business," Ed says. "They've got six months or so to replace the construction work and I believe he can do it without any problems."

Wade's Lawn Service

Last time we checked in:

Deborah and Ira Wade were trying to find out how much revenue was coming in from enhancement work and maintenance. They planned on having a whiteboard in their office with a worker's name and next to it the hours they spent performing maintenance or enhancement work.

Latest update: The Wades scrapped the whiteboard idea, opting for a division of crews. Previously, maintenance and enhancement work was performed by the same crews. Now it has specialized landscaping/enhancement and maintenance crews.

"We can just look at the time cards and see how many hours the landscapers came in and how many (hours) the maintenance crew came in," Deborah says.

The Wades hope the change will solve the revenue problem, and also result in better work.

"We need to specialize so we can keep customers and repeat customers, especially for landscaping," she says. "The mowing crew, they're out and they're mowing. That's all they're doing."

Deborah says they asked employees to note things that could use work at properties, so they can suggest the service to the owners.

Bill and Ed's take: The Wades have two large jobs pending that are close to their office, which is good for profit. The Harvesters encouraged Ira to spend more time managing jobs, but he recently had to go back in the field to do work due to staffing issues.

"Now he's being more of a manager and leader and oversight of jobs rather than doing the job," Bill says. "He's actually inspecting jobs and making sure they're performing to the quality level that we expect." L&L



BETTER TURF

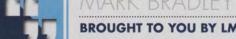
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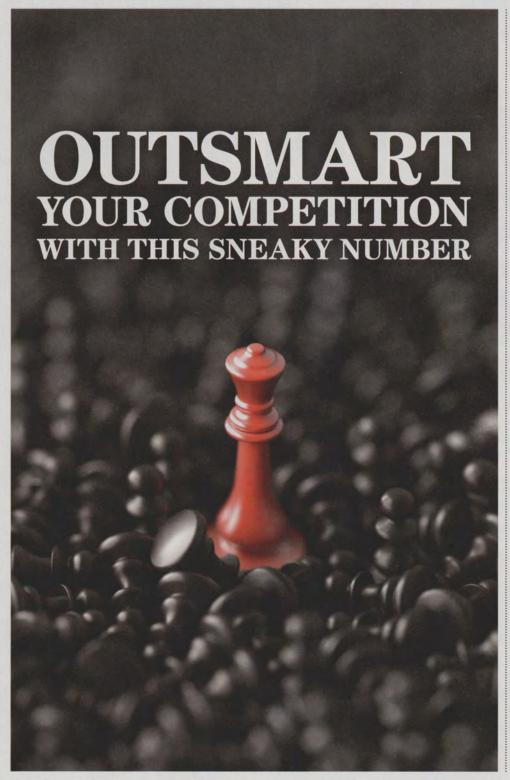
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or at least a century, two numbers have always defined 'success' as a business: gross profit and net profit.

After all - they are a perfect indicator of success - it's how much money is left over in the business after all the expenses have been paid. And so, for years, businesses have struggled to calculate, and identify, the jobs, or products, that will help them earn the highest profits. You start with your known expenses, add markups for your assumed overhead expenses, and anything left over is profit. The higher the anticipated profit, the better the job. It's simple, right?

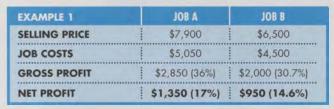
Or is it that simple? Let's take a look with a real example (Ex. 1) on the opposite page.

Take a look at the two jobs above? Which one would you rather have? And think about for a second before you read on.

If your answer to the previous question was "I need more information." - you're right! Gross and Net Profit can help us identify profitable jobs, but they don't tell the whole story because they don't deal with reality. Net profit - the guiding light for every business - doesn't know a damn thing about your business.

Net profit, after all, is just a number. Sales minus expenses, minus overhead. That's it. Net profit doesn't know how hard it is to find good staff. Or how much harder it is to keep and fulfill them. Net profit doesn't know that whole crews sometimes don't show up, or that the guy you just hired is just about to pour 5 GAL of gas into a diesel engine.

When you're a landscape con-



EXAMPLE 2	JOB A	JOB B
SELLING PRICE	\$7,900	\$6,500
VENDOR COSTS	\$3,050	\$3,060
THROUGHPUT	\$4,850	\$3,440

EXAMPLE 3	JOB A	JOB B
THROUGHPUT	\$4,850	\$3,440
MAN HOURS	\$5,050	\$40
THROUGHPUT PER MAN HOUR	\$67.35	\$86

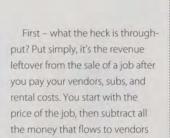
tractor, your spend most of your time managing labor. You need every ounce of profit you can get out of that labor because there are 1,000 mistakes around the next turn just waiting to eat that profit for breakfast.

Wouldn't you like to know a number that will help you grow your business without having to grow your labor? Or wouldn't you like to know what jobs carry the least risk, for the most reward? Then read on...

The problem with the scenario above is that we don't know how much labor we need to invest in either job to make the profit. The truth is, I quickly estimated 2 jobs above. **Job A** was an interlock patio we installed by hand – 3 guys in 3 days. **Job B**, on the other hand, was the very same size patio, but by adding a skid steer to do the excavation and material placement, we reduced the job to 2 guys for 1 day and 3 guys for another. Material hauling and deliveries were done by subs.

Net profit doesn't know that whole crews sometimes don't show up, or that the guy you just hired is just about of pour 5 GAL of gas into a diesel engine.

An experienced contract might start to look at those two jobs and realize that 3 days is more than two days and maybe Job B, even though its got less profit, is actually more profit per day... but could one of your salespersons or estimators know that? Could they know it without having to rely on instinct, intuition or just a good hunch? They can, and it's really simple with just one simple number: **Throughput Per Man Hour.**



In the example above, we would calculate throughput by starting with the selling price of the job, then subtracting all material, rentals, and subcontractor expenses (Ex. 2).

outside the business.

Once you've found the throughput (the money left **inside the company**), you simply divide that number by the man hours for each job to arrive at each job's **Throughput Per Man Hour (Ex. 3).**

For each man hour invested in the job – Job B leaves your company \$86 to pay wages, overhead and equipment costs and net profit. Job A only leaves your company with \$67.35 per hour to pay those same costs.

By going after jobs that maximize your throughput per man hour, your company will be taking on work that maximizes revenue earned per man hour. And the more revenue each person generates for the company, the easier it is to grow your top line sales without hiring/training/managing/retaining and occasionally psycho-analyzing your staff.

If you picture your business like a funnel, its likely that your access to good labor is the smallest part of that funnel. Customers are there, and you can buy all the equipment and materials that your creditors will let you... but you just can't snap your fingers and find 5 more good people. It's just not that simple.

Maximizing throughput also helps surface the least-risky jobs. Jobs with lots of materials, for



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.

example, are a lot less risky than jobs with lots of labor. Even jobs with lots of equipment are less risky. Think about the risks involved in cutting a large turf area with 1 person and a tractors vs. 10 people with push mowers. There's no way the push mower company is going to be able to compete on price, on efficiency, and even if they could, they'd have to manage 10 people showing up to work on time and doing all the right things. I'd much rather try to manage 1 person.

Revenue earned from markups on materials and equipment goes straight to the Throughput number, where revenue earned from labor also goes to throughput, but it increases your man hours, thereby reducing your throughput per hour. By focusing on throughput per hour, your revenue and profits increase, while your risks decrease.

So the next time you hear one of your competitors grumble about their staff, the truck they backed into, and how hard it is to find good people these days....
Just smile and nod. And keep this little secret number between you, me and anyone else who bothered to read this far.

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



By Tory Hanna and Dan Staley

IN THE WORLD OF LANDSCAPING AND LAWN CARE

few things can save time like a view from above. With the advent of Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (sUAS) technology, or drones, the ability to visualize and analyze large tracts of land is invaluable.

There are trends and technologies today that are changing the playing field for landscapers, turf managers and lawn professionals across the country. There are applications for mapping from the sky, as well as services that will help individuals save time and improve the bottom line.

bids, measurements, surveys and irrigation monitoring. "We believe that (our) drone survey is going to provide valuable information that would not be available through boots-onthe-ground surveying, and at a substantially lower price," says Wendy Booth, president of Ivy Street Design in Denver.

Booth says "this drone technology is going to change landscape architecture as much as anything since (computer aided drawing or CAD)."

Booth discovered the same thing other professionals such



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as the United States Golf Association (USGA) found: flexible, rapidly deployable drones can capture useful and detailed images for a fraction of the cost of other options. (The USGA not only used drones to map the entire 2016 U.S. Open course for management and broadcasting purposes, but it is using drones to study turfgrass drought, as well.) Some drones equipped with specialized cameras can also analyze nitrogen management and soil compaction in turf, as well as assess plant health and drought stress.

Today, any typical drone has a quality camera capable of collecting high-definition still photographs and video and is guided by highly accurate satellite-based Geopositioning systems (GPS). Imagery can be saved and shipped to a data provider, or uploaded to one of several cloud-based analysis services to craft images, maps, 2-D and 3-D models of properties, perform highly

accurate measurements and plant counts and analyze for turf health. Drone imagery, because it is saved on a memory card on the drone as well as broadcast live to a controller, is available immediately in the field to share.

A typical image taken by a drone flying at 400 feet covers about 200 x 200 feet and has a resolution of 3 to 5 pixels per inch. Multiple images can be stitched together to make one large image with a GPS accuracy as good as 4 to 8 inches, allowing you to calculate area or distance very accurately using computer software such as CAD or ArcGIS. 2-D models can be made for drainage with the same accuracy, and 3-D models

"Drone
technology is
going to change
landscape
architecture
as much as
anything since
(computer
aided drawing
or CAD)."

Wendy Booth, president, Ivy Street Design for buildings and landforms often have accuracies of 8 to 12 inches.

The typical four-rotor drone – or quadcopter – is currently the aircraft of choice for landscapes. It is capable of flying for 15 to 25 minutes per battery (depending on weather conditions). This flight time translates to coverage of anywhere from 25 to 75 acres flying at 400-feet elevation. Landing and switching out batteries for more coverage takes only a couple of minutes.

Quadcopters can also return to areas of concern and hover for more images, make a closer inspection of something of interest or orbit a point to explain a situation to a client. Fixed-wing drones are used for larger areas. These drones can either look like a typical aircraft (but smaller), or so-called "flying wings." Fixed-wing aircraft can stay in the air longer than rotor-wing aircraft, but they cannot hover. Most smaller fixed-wing drones are made

of foam and many pilots consider small fixed-wing drones safer to use in crowded environments.

Another feature of modern drones is the ability to use routeplanning software. Any route can be pre-planned for all types of professional drones for any height. Route-planning software is highly accurate, fully customizable and will return you to the point of departure if you need to break off the route to change batteries. However, piloting skills are still needed if something goes wrong, thus drone flight is not yet fully automated.

ANALYZING DRONE DATA. There are two main ways to analyze





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drone data - either by apps created by a service provider and existing in the cloud or by a private company using their computers and software.

From a technology standpoint, there are a few key points that may be helpful. All apps that provide benefits to the landscaping industry are "cloud-based," meaning during drone flights, the data is captured and accessible to your desktop, smartphone or tablet. These cloud-based apps offer a new way of rapidly processing tremendous volumes of data (high-definition photography uses a lot of memory) and quickly providing the user with this data so it can be used for the task at hand.

There are several cloud-based service providers who serve as top industry players with toolkits worth investigating. These service providers have developed software that is not only userfriendly, but also highly effective in capturing and analyzing the data that meets specific needs, and reports upon it in an effective way for both your company and for your client's benefit.

These companies also provide automated flight planning software that allows the user to create a flight path for the drone, select "GO," and the drone will autonomously take off, fly and land on its own. The data collected will be sent to the cloud and processed within a few hours. It generates reports per the user's needs.

One cloud-based app is Drone Deploy, a platform that analyzes the data captured from several drone models, creating outputs ranging from Orthomosaics (aerial photographs with georeference points), terrain features, a popular vegetation index and even 3-D models which can be a benefit for visualization. This software ranges from \$99/month to \$299/month depending on the resolution requirements you have for your business or client.

Another platform is called the Precision Hawk Precision

Mapper, a service from Precision Hawk. The platform currently has a large analysis menu for users to select, manipulate and overlay data gathered from above, including many vegetation indices to analyze plant health. Precision Hawk recently made its mapping and analytics platform available for free to encourage use and consistency for professionals.

Another solution offering mapping usability is Pix4D which offers similar terrain modeling and textured models for myriad landscape applications, ranging from Digital Surface Models, Digital Terrain Models and volume measurements for large stockpiles of



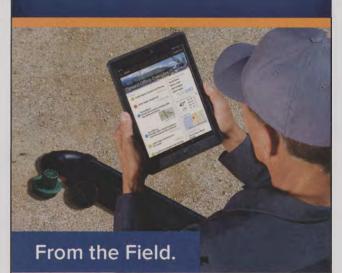


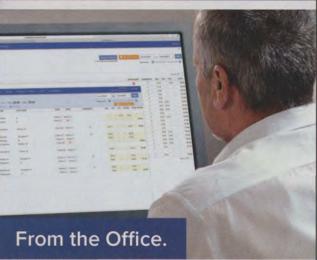


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DRONES



With new advances appearing nearly every day, the drone industry is a rapidly changing ecosystem.

landscape materials such as sand, rock or soil. Pricing ranges from \$49/month upwards.

Other platforms exist that are worth exploring. For example, Sentera and Agribotix offer apps and usability. Additionally, Parrot recently expanded to enter the commercial mapping space, and others are sure to follow suit both with affordable (or potentially free) and user experience-focused platforms.

While these app platforms are designed with the user in mind, there may be several local data companies in your area that specialize in drone flight and data capture and that are certified under the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Part 107 (Unmanned Pilot certification) regulations. This customizable analysis option is another way for companies in the landscape industry to benefit from drone data. Local data providers

are in most markets across the U.S., so there is likely a company nearby to serve your company's needs.

The most important takeaway is that local companies are clientdriven and are flexible to meet your needs. Cloud-based apps are product-driven and provide only a certain range of products, so shop carefully for the solution that meets your specific needs.

Whether you are looking at the health of grass for a golf course, or perhaps investigating tree canopies and counting trees for a municipality's parks department, there are many ways to utilize these tools. Additionally, these platforms are all geared toward user experience and are therefore very user friendly and accessible from smart phones, tablets, desktops or the cloud. With new advances appearing nearly every day, the drone industry is a rapidly changing ecosystem, where corpo-





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rate innovation and competition continues to push the limits of drone uses and user experiences.

LAWS AND PRIVACY. Drones and their analysis tools will change your business, but some wonder whether they can fly anywhere desired. Any drone flight in the United States for commercial purposes must be performed by a licensed remote pilot. Licensure requires testing of airspace knowledge, weather and maps.

Privacy law regarding drone flight is a somewhat separate matter from property rights law in the U.S., as the FAA has decided to remain silent on privacy at this time. This means some of the burden for respecting the privacy of property owners falls on drone pilots. Compounding matters is the fact that the airspace over private property was defined by the Supreme Court in 1947, thus many analysts expect drones to refine the definition of "private property" in the coming years.

As the law stands now, drones have the right to fly over a client's property with permission. Drones can transit to that property over another private property if the drone remains at least 83 feet above ground level (many recommend transiting above 300-feet above ground level to avoid conflict). Most people do not know that their property rights do not extend infinitely to the sky above their property, so it is best to land your aircraft immediately if someone is concerned about their privacy. Always respect a property owner's privacy when flying, and err on the side of caution on the off-chance you are confronted. Often explaining what you are doing and showing images and process is enough to alleviate property owner concerns.

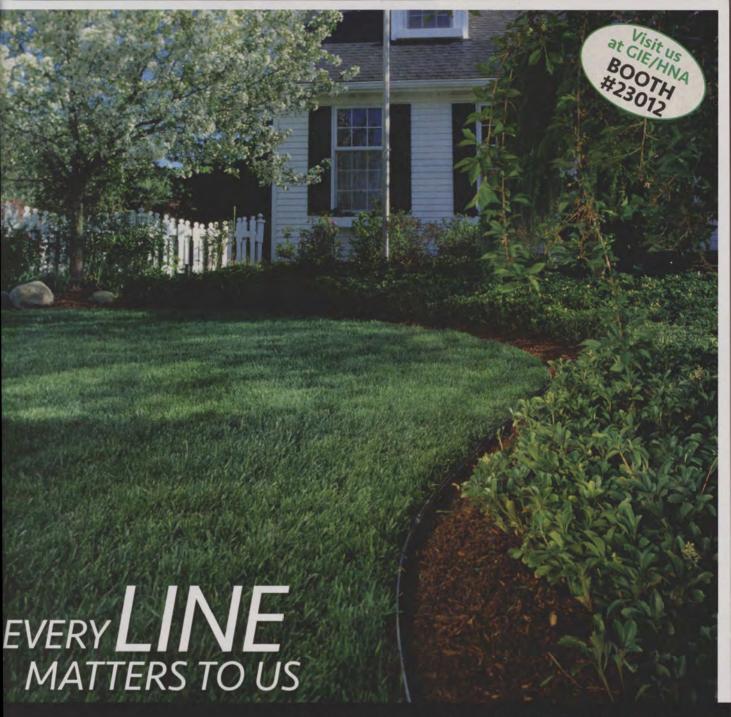
CONSIDERING THE PERKS. The landscape industry will soon benefit by using drones in their operations. Better mapping, bids, plant health monitoring, sales and other things are

possible with drones and their software. Should you train staff to fly and use a cloud-based service provider, or should you hire a firm to fly and analyze your data? The answer will differ for every firm and depends on staffing levels, acceptance of risk, capital costs and available training time.

Whether you choose to learn to fly for yourself or hire a company to fly for you, your business will change the minute you start to use drones. L&L

Tory Hanna is the director of business development at Origin Solar Energy in Brooklyn, New York. Dan Staley is a certified remote pilot and principal of Arbor Drone LLC in Aurora, Colorado.





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OB ATEMA, owner and CEO of Rivertop Contracting in Swannanoa, North Carolina, was blindsided when his office manager stole roughly \$250,000 from the company over three years. She wasn't a new employee either.

"She had worked for me for I think about six years," Atema says. "Basically, what was happening was the company was growing. Me and (COO Brian Wierman) were concentrating on operations and sales, and our office manager seemed to have everything under control."

The situation started in 2014 and ended in August 2016. During that time, Atema thought business was doing well. So well the company was the September 2015 cover story for Lawn & Landscape, where Atema discussed how he changed his company's focus and rebounded from The Great Recession.

While that story of triumph was being told, Rivertop was being robbed. The office manager started off small, simply adding \$200 to each of her paychecks. Since she was in charge of payroll, no one noticed. As time went on, Atema says she became more brazen.

"She was bonusing herself regularly," he says. "Every time she would get paid, she was paying herself two or three times a pay cycle and washing it out."

Even though others in the company were looking at P&Ls, the office manager would hide it by reporting payments to vendors, then stiffing the vendor money on the check.

"Say she stole \$500, she would mark she paid 100 percent, but would leave off \$500 and keep it for herself, which would then leave a balance at one of our vendors," Atema says.

She also opened a company credit card in her name, racking up \$35,000 in charges before it was discovered.



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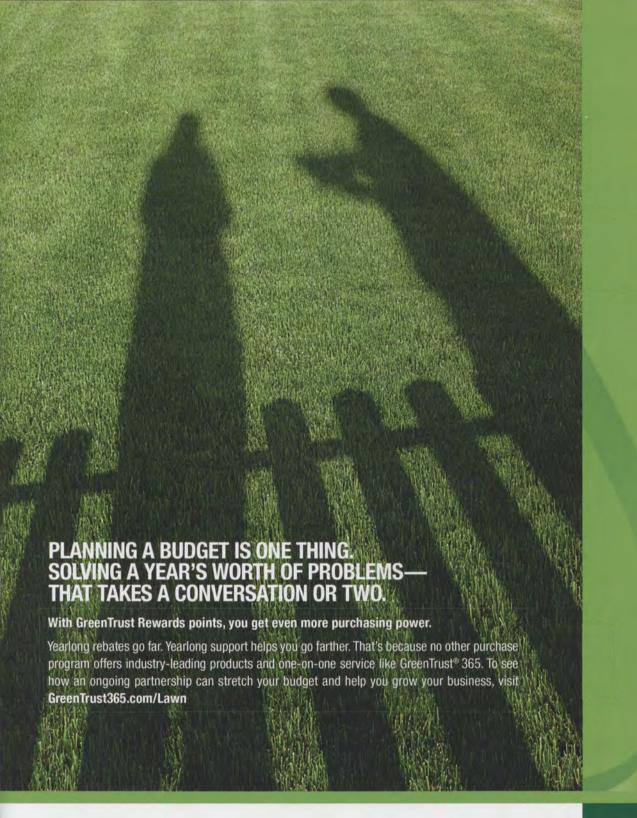
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FAYIT

Rick Doesburg was part of and ran a successful landscaping business for decades, but it's his contribution to younger generations that meant the most to him. By Kristen Hampshire

ICK DOESBURG RECALLS the first time he handed a \$1,000 scholarship to a student preparing for a career in the green industry. Only one year prior, he had purchased Thornton Landscape in Maineville, Ohio, from its founders, who were also his fraternity brothers at The Ohio State University. Doesburg had worked for the business since he finished college, joining in 1969.

Doesburg was an original charter member of the Educational Foundation for the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA), now National Association of Landscape Professionals. "It was wonderful when I became an ambassador, and we had fun raising millions of dollars for the foundation," he says. "I had tears in my eyes when I handed the first scholarship to a student, and every year I could give \$1,000 to a deserving student based on the criteria I had put forth for the Thornton Landscape Doesburg Family Scholarship."

Doesburg has granted more than \$17,000 in scholarship money to students since the foundation started. Debra Holder was executive director of ALCA for 25 years and played a mentorship role as an original Trailblazer, along with being a founding member of the Educational Foundation. "He is passionate about young people coming into the industry," Holder says. "And as a mentor, he just loved to help people grow in success."

Meaningful associations. Association involvement opened Doesburg's eyes to many industry possibilities so that he could someday do the same for younger members. Over the years, Thornton Landscape went on to win many national, state and local design/build awards for its work.

"The key word is 'networking,' and it's true that what makes

conferences, meetings and board meetings so valuable is the networking, and with that comes the friendships," Doesburg says.

Jim McCutcheon is one of those friends. The CEO of HighGrove Partners met Doesburg in the late 1990s at an ALCA conference before either of them owned their businesses.

Doesburg gave McCutcheon some advice – get involved. "For me personally and for my business, that has made a tremendous impact and I feel like I owe him thanks," McCutcheon says. "He is truly one of my mentors in the industry."

McCutcheon recalls a meeting in Columbus, Ohio, when Doesburg stood up at an awards ceremony and made a pitch for the Educational Foundation.

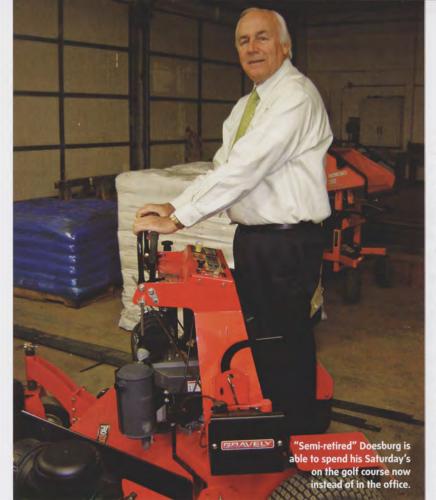
"I had no business endowing a scholarship at that point in time, but I was convinced with the way he put it," Mc-Cutcheon says. "He has done more to help students and programs in this industry than anyone I can think of."

That meeting ultimately set the stage for the Trailblazers program, where industry leaders serve as mentors. Doesburg was one of the first.

"We visited each other's operations and donated our time, but the beauty of it was, I always learned more than I think I ever taught anyone by being with them and having them explain their problems and issues to me," Doesburg says.

Alternatively, others learned from Doesburg by simply watching.

"What I learned from him was how he really built some great relationships with clients and they became friends and counterparts," says Jud Griggs of Scapes Group in Roswell, Georgia. "It was more than a business relationship, and I tried to follow some of those same techniques."





Doing what's right. Doesburg became president of ALCA in 2002, and he calls it "the most honored thing I have done in my career."

Doesburg had served as president of the Ohio Nurserymen's Association in 1984, at the same time he was president of the Cincinnati Homebuilders Association (for two terms).

"He was never afraid to be the contrarian and to say, 'I hear you, but you might want to consider this,'" McCutcheon says. When Doesburg gets involved, he's all in.

"He typically has strong opinions – and I think some association people want to be politically correct and not make waves," Griggs says. "Rick never worried about that."

His honesty was always refreshing, Holder says.

"You always knew where he stood," she says. "There was never any hesitation with wondering, 'What is he really thinking?' and we always appreciated that." **Continuing a legacy.** The actual transaction to make Doesburg the owner went smoothly, and so did the transition. "It was an easy fit because I had been there for 30 years," Doesburg says. "Nothing changed when I bought the company except on Fridays, I had to make payroll."

Once Doesburg bought the business, his son, Andy, joined. In fact, it was his son's interest in running a business with his dad that really pushed Doesburg to take ownership, he says.

Andy came on board and worked his way up the ranks in the company. "He has evolved into a good manager and president and he knows how to run the business," Doesburg says. "It's fun working with him – he's kind of my best friend, so that makes it special."

Doesburg is currently "semi-retired," though in his terms, that means spending Saturdays on the golf course rather than in the office – with an eye to spend one more day on the course, too. "I try to stay out of the way as much as possible and let Andy make the decisions," Doesburg says.

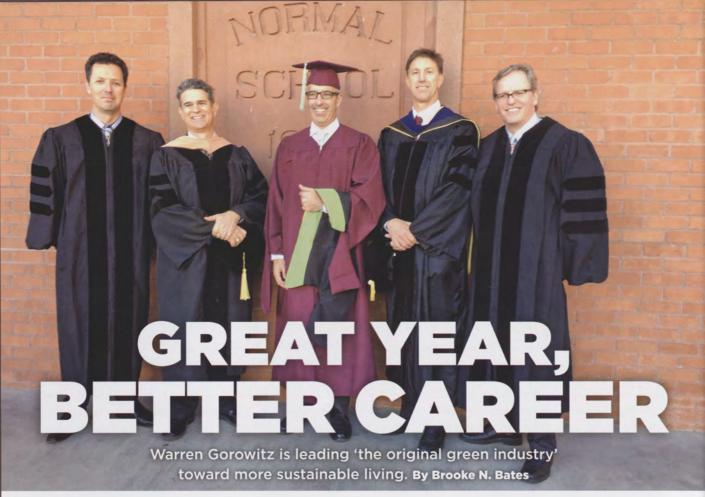
Meanwhile. Thornton Landscape continues a legacy of serving industry associations. Founders Gary and Bill Thornton served as ALCA president, as did Doesburg, who also gave time to the Ohio Nutserymen's Association and Cincinnati's Home Builders Association like Andy is now doing.

"I love that tradition," Holder says. "And Andy may make a fourth president at some point."

The business, indeed, has been a family affair. It's where Doesburg met his wife of 43 years, Peggy. She was a secretary at Thornton Landscape. A year later, they got married.

"We have date night every Friday night, and have for years. We travel a little bit and would like to travel more," Doesburg says.

Andy and their daughter, Stephanie, live close by. "We get together as often as we can," he says of them and three grandchildren. "I may never retire completely, but I'm slowing down a little."



Warren Gorowitz doesn't just lead water conservation efforts at Ewing Irrigation & Landscape Supply. Throughout his 23-year career, he has proven to be a proactive leader on the cutting-edge of promoting sustainability to the entire green industry and beyond.

And his interest in the industry really got started where a lot of people enjoy retirement.

Across the street from his childhood home was Rancho Park Golf Course in Los Angeles, where Gorowitz started working at age 14 – and even worked several PGA and LPGA tournaments. This experience, combined with green influences he grew up around, like neighbors who had gardens, sparked his interest in the horticulture industry.

"Some of my first memories during childhood were being outdoors," Gorowitz says. "I knew I wanted to do something that was connected to the outdoors."

Rising in the ranks. Thinking he might want to become a golf course superintendent, Gorowitz decided to study ornamental horticulture at California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly San Luis Obispo). He also worked in the college bookstore selling computers, which honed his other interest in technology. By combining these two passions, Gorowitz narrowed his focus to the technical side of the green industry – irrigation.

At a student career fair in January 1994, a friend introduced Gorowitz to a wholesale irrigation distribution company called Ewing, where Cliff Woodbury was recruiting Cal Poly grads.

"I was extremely impressed with Warren," says Woodbury, now Ewing's executive vice president of culture and engagement, who had just started working at Ewing about a year before he met Gorowitz. "He was a well-prepared, professional kid whose passion and sincerity stood out."

Gorowitz was hired by Ewing right after graduating in 1994, initially to do outside sales for irrigation control systems like the ones he used at Rancho Park.

He started on a Friday, helping move Ewing's Anaheim store to a new location. Then the following week, the branch manager there turned in his two weeks' notice and Gorowitz ended up in that position. With no prior experience managing people, he lived out Cal Poly's motto, to "learn by doing." He went on to manage and open several different branches for Ewing, often with a simultaneous role of salesman, selling the company's specialty products.

"It's not normal for somebody to come into our company and start taking on increased responsibility, but he was of that ilk," Woodbury says. "I've watched him grow quickly because he genuinely loves the business that we're in – every aspect of it, from the horticulture to the distribution to the customers."

Gorowitz says that when he started working at Ewing, people thought of him as Mikey from the Life cereal commercials, because he'd try anything. "I don't tend to say no to things because I'm always wanting to learn and take advantage of opportunities to grow," he says. "I have this continuous hunger for knowledge, and how to take that and apply it to help people."



Forging a role in sustainability. The product that cemented his (and Ewing's) focus on water conservation was the MP Rotator. Seeing how this technology could reduce water use, Gorowitz started spending his spare time learning everything he could about water management and efficiency.

"That's when we realized we have a role to provide solutions that help people conserve water," Gorowitz says. "From there, we created a water management sales team that I managed. As soon as people started talking about 'sustainability,' I knew it was going to be an important part of our industry."

Three years ago, Gorowitz moved into his current role as VP of sustainability. Gorowitz oversees all of Ewing's sustainability products and initiatives, both internally and externally throughout the landscape industry.

"He was always an early adopter and a champion of new and different ways to use water more efficiently and effectively," Woodbury says.

Woodbury says the drive and passion that Gorowitz demonstrates has helped Ewing and its customers stay relevant through changing environmental concerns over time.

"Warren keeps Ewing a step ahead when it comes to conservation and sustainability," says John Farner, government and public affairs director at the Irrigation Association. "Because Warren has that foresight into industry trends and what the customers want, they're able to be proactive in the marketplace."

Being green. As the demand for more eco-friendly practices and products has increased, so have the opportunities for Gorowitz to promote sustainability – not just inside of Ewing, but throughout the industry.

"There's environmental value, financial value, and the whole health and wellbeing value that come from outdoor green spaces," Gorowitz says.

"So, as an industry, we're realizing that all these

systems work together and understanding the positive and negative effects that we can have, depending on how we use our resources."

With the goal of improving the perception and the OPPOSITE PAGE: Gorowitz is most proud of his executive master of sustainability of leadership from Arizona State. impact of the "original green industry," as he calls it, Gorowitz speaks regularly at industry events to promote responsible resource management and sustainability.

"My biggest passion is trying to figure out how we all can work together to develop a cohesive, collaborative message about the benefits of what we do every day as stewards of the environment," says Gorowitz, who's active in numerous trade associations.

Farner calls this "The Year of Warren," as Gorowitz was inducted into the Green Industry Hall of Fame in May, and he will become president of the Irrigation Association in November. An IA Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor and Texas Licensed Irrigator, Gorowitz is also co-chair of the USGBC Water Efficiency Technical Advisory Group. He has been involved with the National Association of Landscape Professionals – particularly its National Collegiate Landscape Competition – for many years.

"He's always held an interest in how regulations affect the industry and promoting the benefits of (sustainable) irrigation and green infrastructure," Farner says. "He's always willing to help out, from menial tasks to high-profile speaking on behalf of the association. He's well-spoken and he cares about the work he does."

Lynda Wightman, who has known Gorowitz since his days at Cal Poly, agrees. "Warren walks the talk," says Wightman, industry relations manager at one of Ewing's partner irrigation equipment manufacturers, Hunter Industries. "He truly believes in making our world a better place to live, and works relentlessly to develop an awareness of how our industry can do that."

Though he has a long list of honors and accomplishments, Gorowitz says his proudest accomplishment came last year, when he earned an executive master of sustainability of leadership from Arizona State University.

"It reignited my passion for our industry, and helped me understand my purpose of really wanting to make a difference," he says. "It gave me an opportunity to learn from others in the sustainability field outside of our sector and most importantly, it gave me a strong appreciation for what an amazing industry I get the honor to work in every day."





have received calls and letters from Matt Jesson, president and owner of Green Lawn Fertilizing and Green Pest Solutions, asking if he can come visit them. Those initial visits often develop into meaningful mentorships and close friendships – with plenty more calls, visits and golf games along the way – as Jesson soaks up advice from the most successful lawn care leaders.

On a map in his office, pins mark the 40-plus companies Jesson and his team have visited over the past 14 years, spanning 20 states and into Canada. "Every business is doing something better than you are," Jesson says. "You can always improve and learn from others."

By integrating these best practices into his own company, Jesson and his team have grown Green Lawn Fertilizing to over \$13 million through 14 years of consistent growth – while giving back to the industry even more than they're gleaning from it.

Building a strong foundation. Jesson's landscaping career began in fifth grade, when he and his older brother, Keith, started Jesson Landscaping.

By his senior year of high school, the business had 75 customers. When his brother went off to college, Jesson bought him out and continued growing the company. While Jesson earned his marketing degree at West Chester University and played defensive tackle for the football team, he hired a full-time employee to manage the busi-

ness and several college friends helped out. In 2002, after a couple of years working in the business development department of half.com, he decided to follow his dream and focus solely on the landscaping company.

In 2004, Jesson Landscaping officially became Green Lawn Fertilizing. He dropped his name because he wanted a brand that easily explained his services. But, at the time, no one on his leadership team knew much about the business of lawn care, so he used a treat made in Philadelphia to get on the good side of industry veterans.

"I wrote letters to several business owners who were on Lawn & Landscape's Top 100 list and included some Tastykakes," he says. "I asked if I could bring my team to visit, and several businesses welcomed the opportunity."

That first year, Jesson reached out to Jim Campanella, who was president of Lawn Dawg. After visiting each other's companies, Campanella agreed to consult Jesson on weekly phone calls, where he reviewed his numbers and answered his questions. Early on, Jesson sent Campanella a blank score card from Pebble Beach golf resort with both of their names on it; by the date, Jesson wrote, "When we hit 5,000 customers."

"He listened more than he spoke, and asked a lot of great questions," Campanella says.

In the spring of 2007, Jesson booked a tee time at California-based Pebble Beach and accommodations at a nearby resort. He flew Campanella there to help him celebrate 5,000 customers and over \$2 million in revenue, with the game of golf he'd promised.



Planning for growth. Joe Kucik, owner of Real Green Systems, remembers the first call he got from Jesson 15 years ago. It was about a study Jesson was doing to evaluate Real Green's software and would

share with Kucik.

"I'm thinking, here's this little company doing a big software evaluation? I was expecting it to be a couple of pages, maybe a checklist," Kucik says. "It turned out to be a 150-page document. When I saw it, I was blown away, like holy cow, this guy is doing things the right way."

Jesson's penchant for planning is one of the first things people notice about him.

When he brings his team to visit other companies, they bring "about 400 spreadsheets," says Chris Senske, president of Senske Lawn & Tree Care, based in Kennewick, Washington. "Any number that could be produced from operating a business, Matt has a spreadsheet for it."

Jesson's team tracks more than 50 daily reports and 100 weekly reports, constantly analyzing data to fine-tune operations. When he launched Green Pest Solutions as a separately branded division in 2012, for example, it was after two years of writing business plans and meeting with leaders like Ian Robinson at Massey Services about combining pest and lawn care services.

"Matt's an impressive guy
– engaging, approachable and
personable," Robinson says.
"How could you not instantly
like him and sense 'here's a
guy on a mission.' He knows a



ABOVE: About 15 years ago, Jesson teamed with Real Green for a study and to evaluate the company's software. OPPOSITE PAGE: In his spare time, Jesson, left, enjoys regularly hitting the greens with a goal of one day playing Augusta National. Here, he's pictured with Jim Campanella at Pebble Beach.

tremendous amount, but never presumes to know it all."

Giving back. About six years ago, Jesson invited nine other LCOs to meet twice a year as a peer group and openly share financials, sales and marketing strategies and results. When Senske received the invitation, his lawn care business was stagnant — as were many around the country. He asked his VP of operations to "humor" him and attend the first meeting.

"He came back so energized and excited about how, with the right marketing mix, we could grow lawn care again," Senske says. "It has more than doubled, almost tripled, with double-digit growth since Matt, with his youthful exuberance, enthusiasm and energy, inspired us to reach for the stars and grow the lawn care business."

Beyond the peer group, Jesson willingly shares advice and data with anyone who asks,

welcoming at least half a dozen companies to visit his operations each year.

"I've always tried to have an open door to any companies that want to improve," Jesson says. "That was one thing Jim Campanella told me. He said, 'Matt, I'm going to help you; just make sure you give back when you're able to and help other young leaders grow."

Drive to be the best.

In March 2018, Jesson will graduate from a three-year executive education program at Harvard Business School.

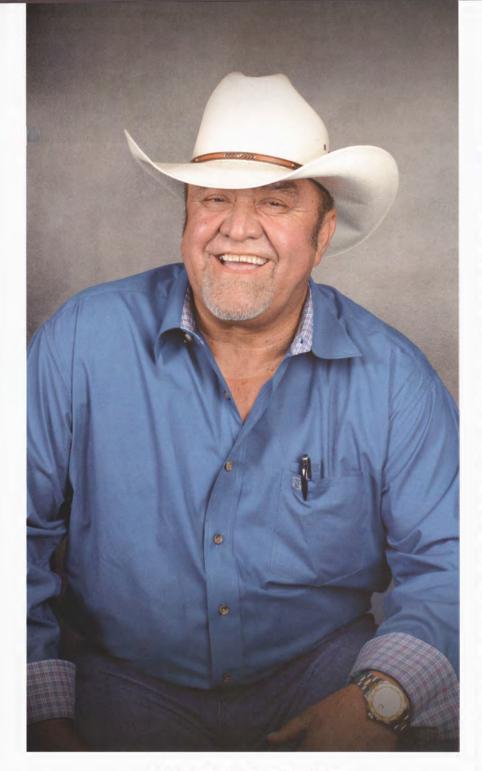
Two years ago, Jesson announced a 20-year plan targeting consistent 13 percent annual growth with a goal of hitting \$100 million. "My goal has always been to have great leaders and operate the business today like a \$50 or \$100 million business, because we're going to get there," Jesson says.

Between growing his business exponentially, building a national network of like-minded leaders, enjoying season tickets to the Philadelphia Eagles and regularly hitting the greens (with a goal of one day playing Augusta National), Jesson still makes family time a priority. Kristy, his wife of six years, is his "rock and strongest supporter," and they enjoy summer vacations to Ocean City, New Jersey, with their 2-year-old daughter Juliet and newborn baby, Joslyn, who arrived in late August 2017.

In fact, Campanella says Jesson turned down a golf trip invitation in September so he could stay home with his wife and daughters.

"Any business owner in this industry should aspire to be like Matt," Campanella says. "He demonstrates pride and professionalism in everything he does and says. He never stops trying to learn, because he has a drive to be the very best at everything he does – in both his personal and professional life."





DREAM

Jesus "Chuy" Medrano proves that growing your own destiny is possible. By Kristen Hampshire

and working the land are simply part of Jesus "Chuy" Medrano's DNA. The owner of CoCal Landscape in Denver was raised on a farm in Chihuahua, Mexico, where his family grew corn, had apple orchards and tended to cattle and horses. "We used to do everything that farmers do to make ends meet," he says.

When Medrano came to the United States in the early 1970s to find work, he ended up taking a job in a factory that made electric motors, but couldn't stand being cooped up for 10 hours a day.

Medrano, with his characteristic wide-brimmed ranch hat, cowboy boots and 44 years of experience has helped grow CoCal to one of the largest Hispanic-owned landscape companies in the nation at \$18 million in revenue. He is also the founding president of the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance. Medrano is closely involved with the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado and National Association of Landscape Professionals.

It hasn't always been easy. Medrano brought his company back from the brink of bankruptcy during the Great Recession – it was doing \$45 million in sales and the construction market fell out. His former partner Tom Fochtman describes Medrano as "a leader of people."

"He's the kind of guy who can light up the room because he's warm and has a great sense of humor – he's highly respected," Fochtman says.

Growing his own. Fochtman remembers meeting Medrano for the first time. He had flown from



Chicago to interview at ValleyCrest in Denver, where Medrano was already working. Fochtman had a land-scape architect degree and Medrano was an expert in the field. Fochtman was on a jobsite during an interview with some higher-ups and saw Medrano lying in a parking lot with his arm 3 feet deep fiddling with an irrigation break. "The manager, as we pulled up, said, 'This is a really good guy. He has a lot of potential,'" Fochtman says.

Medrano recalls when Fochtman was relocating to Denver to take the job. He ended up having to pick him up after Fochtman has some car trouble. "We kind of hit it off. I liked him and he liked me, and we began working together as co-workers, and it went from there," Medrano says.

Eventually, both were seeking greater opportunity. That's when the conversations started about going into business together. "I wasn't going to do it if he wasn't my partner," Fochtman says. They nicknamed each other "maestro," which means teacher in Spanish.

"He taught me everything to do with the field," Fochtman says. "And I taught him how to walk jobs and sell services, and I helped him with his English."

They brought English classes to the workplace along with financial classes. The training went beyond the job; it was about creating a better life. Today, Medrano says training is an enormous focus at CoCal. The company dedicates every Friday in the off-season to four-hour training sessions. It's a partnership and the team is equally invested, Medrano points out. "Everyone who has a job here has an opportunity to make it a career," he says.

Many members of Medrano's own family have chosen that path. CoCal is working on its fourth generation in the business; and Medrano's son, Jody, now serves as president. His daughter, Marisol, works at the company, as does son Carlos. Medrano's brother, Manuel, has worked at CoCal since day one. There were 560 people working at CoCal during the height of the company, before the Great Recession. "Every one of them was out there making money for us, and we felt like we really needed to take care of them," Fochtman says.

That meant providing company loans to workers from time to time, and even going to court with a team member if there was an unjust claim, Fochtman says. "A lot of this was Chuy – and I learned it from him."

Medrano says he has guys who have been working with him since the 1980s. "I remember back, seeing them buy their first home, become Americans, have their first child, graduate from college," he says. "These are proud moments for me."

Reinvention post-Recession. "Anything that is growing can get sick, and then you have to restart or grab energy from somewhere and get going on it," Medrano says.

In 2011, the construction industry fell flat and the company lost half of its revenue. "We closed the door on the construction division and we let the maintenance division carry us through," Medrano says. At the same time, Fochtman was ready to part ways. "We needed to get divorced," Fochtman says. "I wanted to do things differently in the company than he did."

It was a tough time for Medrano. "Not only did my revenue go to hell, I had to come up with money for a down payment to buy out my partner and then deal with the Recession," he says.

But Medrano's loyal people and longtime customers stuck by him. He moved to a four-day workweek, but employees wanted to show up Friday anyway. "The loyal ones didn't care, they still worked even though they were not going to be paid," he says.

Medrano paid back every hour they had worked without compensation during the Great Recession and then some once the company stabilized. And CoCal did recover with a renewed focus on maintenance. Now, CoCal is about 300 employees strong with revenues of \$18 million. In 2011, Medrano helped found the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance. He noticed at all the industry conferences he attended, none of the seminars were offered in Spanish, so he organized with some others to change that.

"Now we have about 500 members from all over the country," he says. Medrano's advice to anyone in the industry, and particularly those starting out: Get involved in associations. And, surround yourself with advisers. "Don't risk what you worked so hard to build," he says.

In spite of all the building, Medrano takes time out to enjoy hobbies and his family. He has been married to his wife since 1975.

Medrano is "living the dream," Fochtman says, proud of his former partner's success. "He is one of the great leaders in the industry."



CoCal focuses on educating its employees to provide them not only industry knowledge, but support for a better life overall.







ALWAYS LEARNING

We asked a few past Leadership Award winners about their thoughts on being a leader.

MARIA CANDLER, James River Grounds Management:

Class of 2004

Being the leader was never a career goal for me. In the early days, when James River was small, I just looked around and saw so much that needed to be organized, streamlined, improved. I rolled up my sleeves and went to the task. In those days, I thought leadership was something that you do – giving directions, organizing teams, making big decisions. Now nearly 24 years later, I realize that good leadership is so much more. It's about being open-minded, listening to your team, knowing what makes your team tick and more importantly, helping them understand themselves in a more meaningful way.

One of the harder lessons I've had to learn is to let go and get out of the way. I'm a recovering perfectionist and as such, many years were spent working super hard on just about everything and, admittedly in the process, step-

ping on a lot of toes. Now I find joy in allowing others to take things on and grow and learn. When I see one of our team members take on a big challenge or something new and do well, it's one of the absolute best feelings. It's a sense of accomplishment that is far greater and more impactful than if I had just done it myself. It's the best lesson learned.

CHRIS SENSKE, Senske Services: Class of 1999

One comes into a leadership position with a debt. You owe your tearn the tools and time necessary to grow the business and grow themselves personally. I am here to serve the people I am leading. I am paying off the debt I owe every day by serving them. I serve them by giving each individual a clear message of the company values, a clear vision of what we are trying to accomplish in terms of goals, objectives and progress, and I encourage each team member

to improve themselves personally as individuals, as feam contributors and as an integral member of their family.

I always used to say my leadership/management philosophy was "to give people enough rope to hang

themselves." I've recently adopted a more positive and realistic approach based on Steve Jobs' off-repeated saying on his management style: "We hire people to tell us what to do. That's what we pay them for." My job at Senske is to give the company direction and let others who are much more capable run the company.

RICHARD RESTUCCIA, Jain Irrigation: Class of 2014

To be a great leader means putting the success of the industry and your organization ahead of your own ambitions and expectations. It takes a willingness to serve without asking if people appreciate the work you do. It takes understanding that change is gradual, incremental and constant. It takes humility to understand you are not the center of attention, but serve a larger order. Keeping these concepts in the front of their mind each day, leaders move forward making a difference in the industry and for their organizations.



ELLY DOWELL IS A PIONEER. At 29 years old, she's created Dowco's first sales and account management systems, and has helped develop the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Young Professionals group. And she is Lawn & Landscape's first Emerging Leader Award recipient.

"I see a niche and I fill it," Dowell says. "That's the kind of stuff that I get excited about."

She's been immersed in the lawn care industry since she was a little girl, watching her parents run their St. Louis-based landscape company, Dowco.

Jim Paluch, president of consulting group JP Horizons, has watched Dowell grow into a successful leader in the industry.

"I can remember her as a little girl, coming along with her parents to seminars and workshops," he says.

LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Her passion started early on as she worked alongside industry veterans during her childhood. "She was giving a presentation alongside my son (three years ago), and this was in front of about 70 industry veterans, and there's these two young kids," Paluch says. "And (Dowell) had them with her the entire time. She is so passionate about what she does."

Dowell attended Lindenwood University in Saint Charles, Missouri, to study business administration. She was able to make the 30-minute commute to the family business on days she didn't have class. After serving as an administrative assistant for Dowco, she was given a challenge she couldn't pass up.

"One of our consultants challenged me to be the best account manager that Dowco has ever seen," she says. "I didn't take that lightly. And, I didn't want people to think I got this job just because my dad is the boss. I really had to do something to make a dent in things."

She says Dowco was very production-driven, getting a lot of work done, but lacking a sales process to upsell to current clients or find new ones. "So that was somewhere that I was able to jump in and make an impact," Dowell says.

Once Dowell realized she had a place in the company, she continued working there.

"It's hard to say where a child will go, but I knew she was going to be successful in whatever it was," Paluch says.

For Paluch, seeing someone



"She's just a great person to know. She always goes beyond and does more."

Clay Martin, CEO, Martin Recruiting and Consulting so driven at a young age gives him hope that the future of the industry is in good hands.

A valued leader. Dowell has three employees who report directly to her, along with her own accounts, online marketing, employee training and even her own freelance marketing on the side, which keeps her skills sharp.

"I freelance all over the country, so I'm always learning about other people's challenges," she says.

She also makes it a priority to travel at least nine times a year, even if that means shutting off her laptop and heading to a nearby lake for the weekend.

"I guess one of my goals is to grow a business enough that I can travel for like four weeks in January," she says.

She does have an extensive travel log with trips to Hawaii, Mexico and the Caribbean to name a few.

"I always thought I was a beach girl, but I really love the mountains," she says. "There's just something amazing about them. Colorado is my favorite state."

Dowell has done a lot for herself in terms of career advancement, but it's also what she's done for others that makes her a valuable leader in the green industry.

Clay Martin, CEO of Martin Recruiting and Consulting, met Dowell at his first visit to GIE+EXPO last year. He was the new guy, and he says Dowell could sense that





ABOVE: While she enjoys taking multiple trips each year, Dowell says the mountains are her favorite place to visit. **LEFT:** Dowell works closely with NALP's Young Professionals group, which started out as a Facebook group.

he wasn't too familiar with things yet.

"At the expo, she kind of took me under her wing," he says. "She knew I needed some guidance and she didn't hesitate to step up and help me out."

Martin credits Dowell for helping him get his business on its feet, including help with his website.

Emails from Dowell urging him to make sure he is following a certain business technique, or even some helpful advice pop up from time to time.

"She's just a great person to know," Martin says. "She always goes beyond and does more."

While Dowell excels in the professional world, Martin says

she also has an admirable set of morals and values. "Aside from her business skills, her core values and morals are similar to mine," he says.

Outside the workplace.

Dowell has been a "big sister" through the Big Brother, Big Sister program for two years. Her "little sister" is 14, which Dowell says can be a challenge, but the experience has been very rewarding.

"I find out she's doing well in sports and in school," she says. "So that makes me happy."

Dowell also led the creation of the NALP's Young Professionals group, creating a way for young people to network.

She saw a hole in the industry for young people, and knew she wanted to help fill it. The group started on Facebook in 2016 and now it's up to nearly 200 members.

"She is very involved, and she always, always follows through, which is something that is great for these young people to have," says Brett Lemcke, vice president of RM Landscape in Hilton, New York, and NALP board member.

Lemcke worked with Dowell to create the Young Professionals group and the two are continuing to work together to expand the program.

"I really want to get it moving for the first two years and then shift my involvement more with the NALP group itself," she says. "They really want to get me on that membership committee, but I haven't committed to that just yet." While Dowell seems to have a lot going on, Lemcke notes that she is very smart with the time she has.

"She knows when to take something new on, and is aware of that. She knows how her time can be best served," he says.

Dowell spends a lot of that time with the employees of Dowco. She's the person the new employees (and pretty much anyone else that comes to Dowco) start with.

"I like to make that good first impression," she says. "And I like to relate the people that work for us with the clients that we do business with."

Like many in the industry, Dowell has experienced the challenges that come with finding good employees. She set up several events through Dowco Academy, a program that offers workshops and online training for Dowco employees, to educate the employees in areas outside of work.

"It's not showing them how to cut grass with a 52-inch mower," she says. "But it's something like, 'Here's how to save enough money so that you can afford the house you want, or buy a new car, or go on a trip with your family."

It's been a challenge to get everyone on board with the training. There were times when Dowell wasn't sure if the programs were even worth it.

Yet even the smallest payoff motivates her to keep planning.

"All you need is one smile, one person to buy that car," she says. "And that's all that matters. You've made an impact." •

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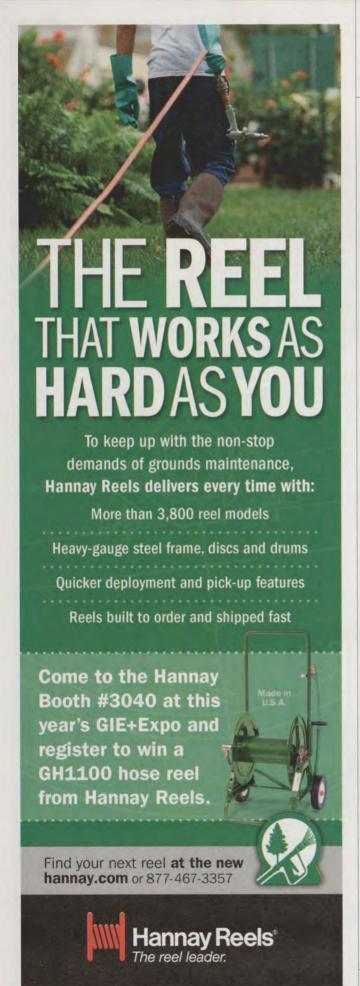
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THEFT



Atema says having a relationship with his vendors as well as being honest and transparent with them helped to improve Rivertop Contracting's recovery process.

FRIENDLY, BUT NOT TOO FRIENDLY.

Atema says the office manager was pretty savvy with how she picked the vendors to target. She would choose ones the company had high volume with or that Atema had a personal relationship with.

When the vendors would call him, the conversation would start with chitchat before they mentioned an old invoice. He would then bring it up to his office manager, who always insisted it was paid. "She would call and fix it," he says. "I don't know if she went back and paid them and then started again."

The friendships he had with vendors came in handy because they would give him the benefit of the doubt. Atema says those relationships helped because they understood that he wouldn't be able to pay right away after discovering the theft.

He adds that if the vendors had sent the due invoices to collections or had told them they had to pay upfront, the company wouldn't have been able to.

"We were eight months overdue

on some invoices," he says. Some of the invoices reached \$100,000.

"Having a relationship with your vendors and being honest and transparent for us in a real-life situation changed the recovery for us. We may not have recovered had our vendors not stood beside us and said, 'OK that's a bad deal, what can we do to help you?""

DATA DISCOVERIES. Ultimately, Rivertop's office manager was caught when the size of theft got so large the company started experiencing a noticeable cash flow problem.

"That was startling to me because the company was doing well. All the P&L sheets said we were doing great, but we had no cash," Atema says. "Our accounts payable weren't jiving with receivables."

Rivertop had a CPA, but when Atema approached her to make sure everything was balanced, she admitted she was 15 months behind in rectifying the company's books. Luckily, she was able to quickly discover the fraud, pull-





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ing enough evidence together that they were able to confront the office manager and fire her.

What happened next is what Atema calls a fire sale. He called in his father's CFO and had her change all the Rivertop accounts, passwords and anything with sensitive logins that the office manager could still access. They relieved the previous CPA and with the help of his dad's CFO, Atema hired a whole new office team: a book keeper, office manager and receptionist.

Rivertop ended up posting a loss in 2016 and has had to do a lot of debt consolidation and refinancing to pay back vendors. As of July, Atema says the company has finally started turning the corner and stabilized from the incident.

THE AFTERMATH. The employee pleaded guilty to the crime and received one day in jail, 40 hours of community service, 48 months of probation and had to pay some restitution.

Atema advises other business owners to carefully review their insurance policies. His insurance included employee dishonesty coverage, which he didn't know existed. The insurance plan Rivertop had didn't cover enough for the size of the company, but the insurance company did pay Rivertop back a small amount.

In preparing for a similar situation to not occur again, Atema says the company now has a segregation of duties in the office. For example, the person who collects the mail isn't the person who makes the deposit.

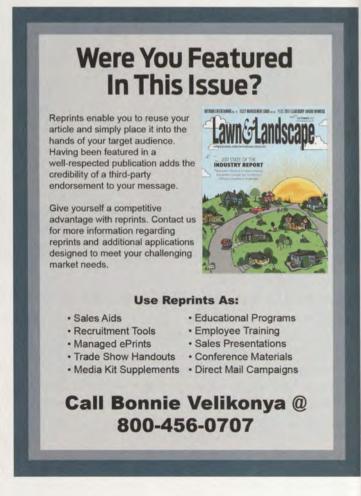
The company also requires checks to be seen by three people before being deposited. The checks require dual signatures, and the CFO is now a signer on the account.

They also implemented more banking restrictions. Now, if there's a check going through for more than \$5,000, someone has to physically make that happen, instead of leaving it up to banking technology. The new CPA meets with Rivertop's executive team once a month to go through everything that's on the books for that month. The company has also updated its purchase order system in order to stay on track of orders, purchases and job data.

At the end of the day, Atema sees the situation as a learning moment. In fact, he's somewhat glad it happened, as funny as it sounds.

"I learned a tremendous lesson that now I feel I'm ready to take our company to the next level," he says. "I now know what I should have learned a different way, but it's good to know it now. I feel way more confident now than I've ever been." L&L





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Know the

Maintaining sports fields takes a different approach from residential and commercial properties.

By Debbie Swanson

ROM PEE-WEE LEAGUES to Division 1 athletics and beyond, America has a passion for sports. That passion means a need for lush, healthy playing fields. And if you've been successful with residential or commercial clients, moving into sports turf maintenance can be a natural progression.

From tending to the city's ballparks to grooming the athletic fields for the local university, sports turf maintenance can be a profitable add-on revenue stream.

If you've been successfully caring for commercial and residential clients, you already have a solid start to caring for sports fields.

Brian Dossett, certified sports field manager at Oxner Landscape & Maintenance in Greenville, South Carolina, suggests making a gradual entry. "Some fields still have their coaches do the mowing. Getting them to contract that out to you is a good way to start - take over the mowing, then you'll start to figure out other things, like irrigation," he says.

Talking with coaches about their fields' uses will help to build your knowledge. Making regular field assessments is also important, either alone or with a coach. Walk the fields to study areas such as grass cover, drainage, weeds and wear patterns.

Formal instruction can further fine-tune your skills. Many universities offer programs in turf and field maintenance, and membership with an organization, such as the Sports Turf Managers Association, can be a valuable connection. Also, keep watch for local or online clinics and seminars throughout the year.



"In addition to getting the field's schedule up front, let the grounds manager know what you'll need. For example, no-traffic times to let the grass recuperate."

Rob Spoor, partner, SiteWorks

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SPORTS TURF

One challenge with athletic field care lies in the scheduling. Non-sports clients are usually amenable to changing the time or day of their usual service. But in the height of the season, field time is at a premium. Coupled with the additional upkeep needed, alterations to the schedule can create a problem for field managers.

ADVANCE PLANNING IS KEY. Preseason, connect with a grounds manager or coach who will be your contact that season.

"In addition to getting the field's schedule up front, let the grounds manager know what you'll need. For example, no-traffic times to let the grass recuperate," says Rob Spoor, partner at SiteWorks in Chandler, Arizona.

Map out dates and times you'll perform routine and specialized care. With periodic applications, such as pesticides, fertilizer or overseeding, plan for traffic-free time, as recommended by your product and state regulations.

Once the season gets underway, your mowing staff should keep you abreast of changing field conditions. Don't hesitate to relay issues back to your contact person. "For example, if a team is running the same drills over and over in the same area, causing wear, you can suggest they spread it out," Spoor says.

Unless you're working for a high-profile venue, it's unlikely you'll be asked to be present at every game or practice, but making the occasional visit during high usage times can be educational.

Whether it's the beating from a scheduled game or the wrath of Mother Nature, quickly rebounding from damage is an essential part of the job.

"For us, lacrosse is one of the most wearing sports," says Dossett, who adds that he expects to do repair after a game. "I need to add a sand and clay mixture to pack the front of the goal, and bring in thick cut sod to lay back in." Football's field goal kicker presents a similar need, he adds.

Knowing that thick-cut sod is a crucial element to these repairs, Dossett orders his supply up to a year in advance. "It's thick enough that you can lay down a plug and it won't move. It's very hard to find once the season begins. You might find some leftover somewhere, but you really need to anticipate what you're going to need and order ahead."

SAFETY. Player and spectator safety is another concern. Monitoring the weather and knowing how your field will react enables you to relay recommendations to your field contact.

"If the field is a soupy mess, you don't want the kids to blow out their knees," Dossett says. "You need to do something, whether you suggest they cancel the game, or you get out there and dry it out so it's firm enough for the cleats to stick. It falls on you for the field to look good and be in safe condition."

To avoid problems, you'll need to slice into the surface with an aerator, and top dress with manure, soil or fertilizer.

Don't overlook the importance of these steps, Spoor says. "Developing and keeping to an aeration and top dressing schedule is a key step. Depending on the area and its use, this may be necessary multiple times per year." L&L

The author is a freelance writer based in Massachusetts.



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From World First to World Leader



While some companies offer edible landscaping as an add-on to their lineup of services, others specialize in edible design. Basic garden installations typically range from \$3,000 to \$10,000. Larger landscape projects that include other design elements such as hardscaping, native plants and ornamentals run \$30,000 to \$50,000. Some companies boost cash flow by growing their own plants, teaching gardening workshops or offering maintenance programs to tend crops.

Before digging in, here's what you should know about this market.

LEARN WHAT WORKS. When Colin McCrate. cofounder of Seattle Urban Farm Company, started his business in 2007, it was a leap of faith. With experience working in agricultural and landscaping businesses, he wondered if homeowners would pay to have someone build vegetable gardens for them. "Conventional landscaping companies said, 'No, people always do that themselves,' but I wasn't convinced," he says.

McCrate and his partner have been busy from the outset, designing, building and

maintaining edible gardens in the Seattle area. "The interest in food over the last decade has increased so much, and we're essentially a tangential market to that," he says.

The majority of his clients are residential, but he also works with commercial accounts.

Pete Kanaris, president of GreenDreams Sustainable Solutions in the greater Tampa Bay area of Florida, grew up in his dad's landscaping business. He started mowing lawns as a young man, then built his own landscaping company until the financial crisis and his son's illness made him rethink his business model in 2012. "I turned toward the use of more sustainable practices and edibles," he says.

Kanaris' company specializes in the concept of working with nature, not against it. He plants fruit trees and perennial plants that produce food for two or more years, have few pests and require little water. "In the Tampa Bay area, they're passing new gardening and backyard chicken ordinances all the time," Kanaris says. "That kind of culture fuels the movement to grow your own food."

On the other side of the country in San

You can't do this overnight. You need to educate vourself... But the most essential element in all of this is to get your hands in the dirt."

Pete Kanaris, president, GreenDreams Sustainable Solutions





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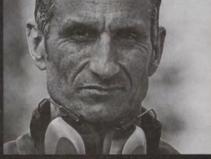






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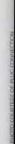


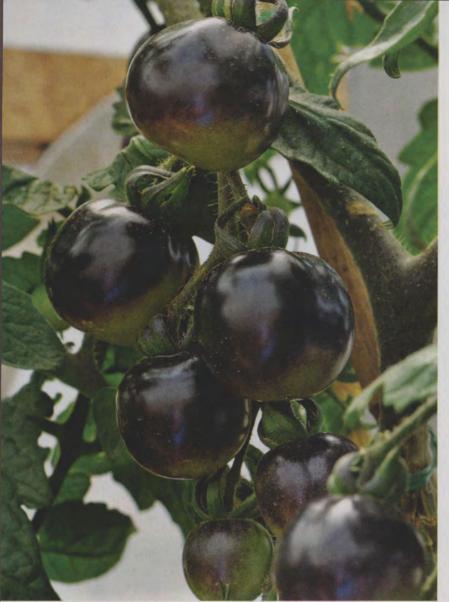
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Diego, Ari Tenenbaum studied plant science but graduated in the midst of the financial crisis. "There were not a lot of job opportunities, so a friend with a business background and I talked about whether people would be willing to pay for help in planting edible gardens," he says. They founded Revolution Landscape in 2008, with a focus on edibles but soon transitioned into comprehensive landscape services.

KNOW THE CHALLENGES. Some aspects of edible landscaping can be logistically complicated. "We're juggling seeds, tiny transplants and crop lists for multiple clients at once," Mc-Crate says. "You've also got to find the right people with the right background, which is sometimes tough."

Company size is another issue. He's chosen to keep staff to about 15 max and limit the number of new builds each year to a manageable level. "We want to stay small," he says. "I'm not that interested in running lots of crews. That detracts from a high level of customer service and quality."

Edible landscaping often appeals to families with kids who want to grow crops but don't know how to start or to

ABOVE: It's important to understand whether or not edible landscaping will work well in your part of the country.

clients with disposable income. But the idea may not necessarily work in certain locations. "There's always been a garden-forward culture in Seattle and we know people running some sort of business model of this type now in most major cities. But you have to understand your market," McCrate says.

Implementation can take time, too, Kanaris says. "You can't do this overnight. You need to educate yourself. Take a course on permaculture. Do some reading. Learn about more eco-savvy irrigation practices," he says. "But the most essential element in all of this is to get your hands in the dirt. Understand the soil and learn how to add organic materials to promote fungal life. The real magic of any garden happens in the dirt."

Dealing with Mother Nature's fickleness is nothing new in the landscaping business, but sometimes the challenges present new opportunities. "Because of the drought, people want low water use in their landscapes," Tenenbaum says. "They get rid of their lawns but want a small area with vegetables. The idea has become, 'If I'm going spend money on water, I might as well get something out of it."

GET THE WORD OUT. Your client base is a good place to market new services. Reach out to existing customers with flyers, emails or social media. McCrate continues to promote his company and educate clients through regular email newsletters and a newly-launched podcast, Encyclopedia Botanica. He says it's also helpful to develop relationships with food and garden writers at local publications such as newspapers to keep your name in circulation.

During the launch of their company, Tenenbaum and his partner set up a booth to sell veggies at local farmers' markets. "We didn't make much off that, but it gave us a venue to meet people and talk to people about our business," Tenenbaum says. From early jobs, their client base grew. "Word of mouth still tends to be one of the biggest ways new clients come to us," he says.

Another approach is to partner with other companies or design firms. "We have always been willing to collaborate," McCrate says. "We take our work very seriously so we have established a reputation as experts in edibles. We work with local landscape architecture firms who get amazing projects and do a lot in-house, but they may not have the expertise in this area, so we get called in. We've become a resource for them, which expands our opportunities." L&L

The author is a freelance writer based in the Northeast.



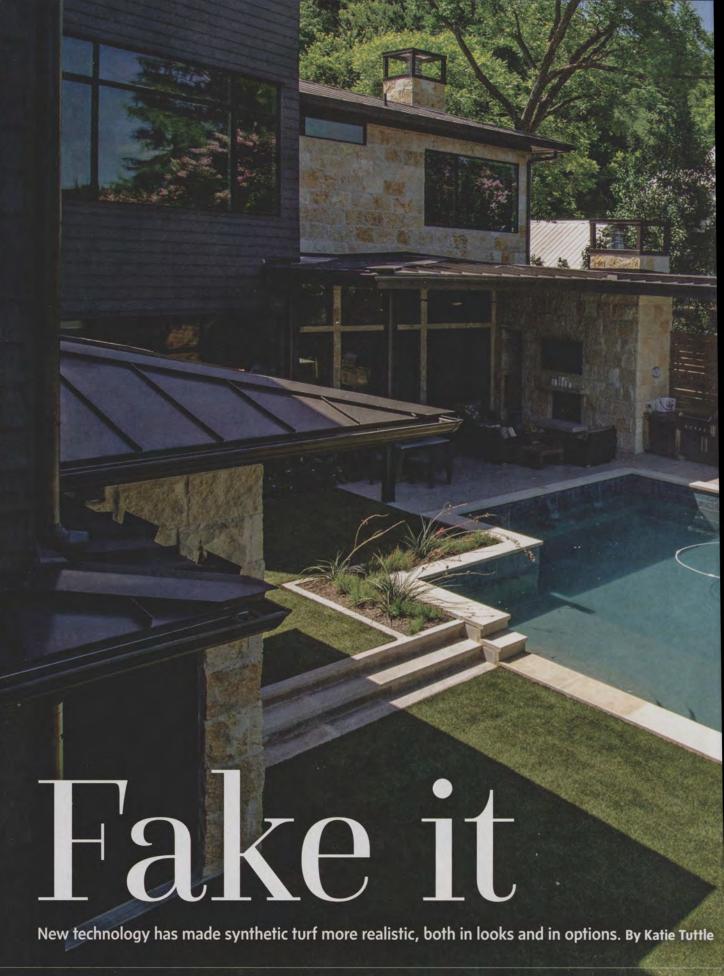
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HEN YOU THINK OF ARTIFICIAL TURF,

it's typically associated with athletic fields at schools or professional stadiums.

But what about yards?

According to Donna Kent, marketing director with ForeverLawn, synthetic turf is becoming more popular as an option for residential and commercial lawns. Kent says it first became popular in the Southwest. "(Synthetic) turf is used in cases where real grass either can't grow or is difficult to grow," Kent says.

Michelle Balicki, marketing manager for SynLawn, adds that different parts of the country view synthetic turf differently, depending on the knowledge in that area.

"Out West we have drought issues and water issues and the level of acceptance is far different than it is in the Northeast," Balicki says.

However, she adds that drought is hitting different parts of the country as well. She says the option of synthetic turf provides people with an alternative to dying turf, while also helping save water. On the opposite side of the spectrum are the clients with lawns in a valley or below sea level. Too much water can hurt a lawn just as much as not enough water.

"Depending on what part of the country you're in, there's a lot of rain," Balicki says. "So muddy areas are just as big a concern as drought."

She says a lot of people like to spend time with their families in yards, but having muddy kids and dogs running around the house isn't enjoyable. Neither of those scenarios are a problem, no matter the weather the day before, if the yard is synthetic.

On the financial side, Balicki says people in heavy rain areas can sometimes see so much damage, the sod has to be replaced a couple of times a year. Installing synthetic turf can eliminate those extra yearly costs.

IN THE CITY. Along with yards, synthetic turf is also seeing an increase in urban areas as more people look for ways to be outside.

"Rooftops are getting a lot of synthetic turf," Kent says. "In an urban area, there's not a lot of green space and you can't get dirt up there or mow. You can install synthetic and have your own green space that's low maintenance."

"We've got commercial properties, hotels actually, creating additional revenue spaces out of their rooftop areas they couldn't use before," Balicki says.

INSTALLATION. Similar to rolling out a carpet, synthetic turf comes in 15-foot rolls, sometimes even installed with parameter board. At ForeverLawn, installation involves removing 15 inches of existing soil and replacing it with an aggregate stone base.

"We chose something that will allow water to percolate through but will provide a firm base to stop weeds and plants from growing through it," Kent says.

The base is leveled out and the turf is rolled over the top and secured with nails into the ground. After installation, maintenance is minimal, Kent says.

"If debris falls on it, like leaves, you have to remove the leaves," she says. "If you've got seasons and seasons of debris on it, that would be bad."

Because of the low-maintenance aspect, Balicki says many homeowners associations and municipalities are installing synthetic turf.

"We see areas in the country where there are serious issues with (workers fixing) median strips because of liabilities issues," she says. Switching the median strips to synthetic turf takes away that liability risk.

Another risk solved by synthetic grass is child safety. Using a 2-inch foam board, SynLawn can install grass in a playground area that meets head injury prevention criteria. "We can bring that to a customer's backyard and can add safety elements to it," Balicki says. "There is now a safety element built in there to provide peace of mind." L&L

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Hiring more employees isn't always the solution when the workload increases.

By Robert Groff

HEN I ATTEND CONFERENCES, I find myself listening to the conversations surrounding me. I'm always amazed how everybody seemingly utters the same exact problem, "We just can't find enough good help."

It's never a waste of time to look for superstar employees. I am constantly trying to "build a bench" of superstars. In the same breath, I gasp as I visit with friends within the green industry who are "killing it" in May and immediately decide they need to hire additional team members. Oftentimes this is not part of a grand strategic plan, but a knee-jerk reaction caused by stress and chasing those crisp green \$100 bills we all love so much.

I preface this by professing that I love every single one of my employees as if they were family. We have a very tight-knit group and I am very lucky. Great people are our greatest asset but I never desire having more of these great assets than we need. My question to you is this: If you step back and look at every single process and system you have built within your company, can you find any areas of wasted labor time? Let me help you out here, the answer is absolutely, positively, yes. I strongly believe this holds true for the smaller revenue companies as well as the big dogs out there.

I attended a two-day seminar in 2012 in which the speaker shared a list of the average areas of wasted labor time and the corresponding hours lost for each listed item.

As the speaker methodically read through each item on his list, I slowly sunk down into my chair. I could take claim to almost every bit of waste on that list. That's probably why up until that point, beyond my personal salary, our company net profit was at one percent. Embarrassing, I know, but I'm betting all of us have been there at some point. Maybe you are there now. That's okay because the good news is waste can always be removed.

COMPANY CLEANSE. On that February day in 2012, our firm embarked on a mission to cut every single bit of labor waste we could find. Our entire team read books together about 'The Toyota Way' and 'Kaizen activities.' Together we worked hard to implement what we learned in both the seminar and these books. For example we removed small waste by disposing of materials and tools that have been





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lying around for months with no use.

We removed large waste by asking our employees to report directly to our installation projects and therefore reduced our windshield time drastically. We switched all of our materials to be delivered directly from our supplier to our jobsites. We purchased smartphones so that our project managers could track their hours rather than asking them to "punch in" every day.

The end result within three years was a 16 percent net profit and revenue increased 150 percent. The last time I looked, that's more than double the industry average. More impressive, we accomplished this with the same exact number of people.

I'm not insinuating that you

shouldn't go hire people and I won't pretend to know your business better than you do. Many of you have been in business much longer than I have and there is no doubt that I could learn from each of you. What I will say is that you likely have waste. The waste you have is probably much larger than you think. It may be a game changer as it relates to your company's bottom line.

I don't know about you, but I would rather run a \$2-million company with an efficient 20 percent net profit than a \$20-million company with only 2 percent net profit.

JUMP IN. When removing waste becomes a focus, how do you get started? Personally, I would hire a consultant







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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

and bring them in to meet your team and create an action plan. If consultants aren't in your budget, get your team together in a room somewhere and lock the door for an hour. Look at every single process you have in place.

After you've made your list, think about which of these profit killers you want to remove and attack it as a team. Make sure the first one is something that your team can approach successfully and will create a positive impact.

Don't overlook the three words, "as a team." If your team doesn't buy into this, you are wasting your time.

CURATING A CULTURE. The end

The most magical part of this process is that it built a brilliant culture within our company.



result of removing waste is not only an increase in profits and a decrease a headaches. The most magical part of this process is that it built a brilliant culture within our company. It inspired teamwork, leadership, ownership and accountability.

When I first introduced the idea to our team I'm sure they all rolled their eyes and thought, "Here he goes again, another seminar resulting in another grand plan."

As we started this process though, everybody noticed the immediate impacts. Floors were cleaner. Shelves were organized and labeled. Miscommunication occurred less. Expectations were set properly. Before you knew it, we were making enough money to raise salaries and bonuses came easier (higher salaries helps you find more help, by the way). Most importantly for me, our team morale improved as did our client experience.

Some of you may be thinking that cutting waste sounds "too easy." Some of you may be intimidated by the amount of work it's going to take.

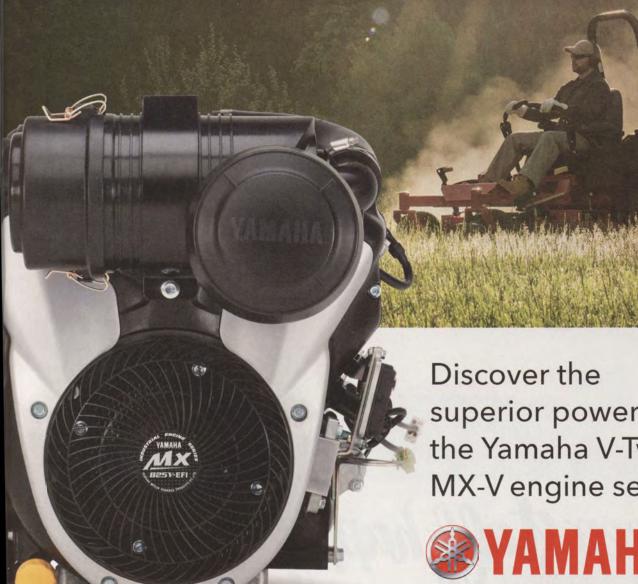
Believe me, cutting waste is worth it and although it can be a daunting task, all you need to commit to is getting just a little better each day. L&L

The author is president of Groff Landscape Design in Fairfax Station, Virginia.



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Keep staff happy

Game rooms and gift cards only go so far. Motivating employees comes down to good management and real opportunities.

By Michelle Simakis

APPINESS AND WORK were once thought of as two opposing ideas. A job was meant to help you care for yourself, your family and put food on the table, and employee satisfaction was considered only when it came to pay and benefits.

Several years ago, that started to change, says Dr. Pat Buhler, professor of management at Goldey-Beacom College.

"Quite frankly, one of the reasons why corporate America sat up and took notice is because they were able to connect the dots between employee engagement and the impact on the bottom line," Buhler says. "We're not really sure if employee satisfaction really does cause higher levels of performance, because we know higher performance levels also can cause employee satisfaction. Let's face it, when we're trying to wring out every last penny of our businesses, when we can engage our employees and deliver higher levels of performance, we are impacting the bottom line positively."

Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh's book "Delivering Happiness" helped bring the issue of employee satisfaction to the forefront, Buhler says.

"It was no longer a subject you kept separate from work and business," she says.

Buhler and her former MBA student and small-business owner Jason Scott coauthored their own book about this topic, "The Employee Satisfaction Revolution: Understanding and Unleashing the Power of a Satisfied Workforce." When the book was published in 2009, there was a lot of information about Google's and Amazon's strategies, but not what smaller businesses with limited resources could do to retain staff.

Discussions of happiness and satisfaction have now shifted to engagement, and the focus is on how companies can engage their employees and retain them longer, Buhler says. Extrinsic

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COMPANY CULTURE

motivators like game rooms and food that larger companies can offer are nice, but smaller companies can be just as competitive by offering essential intrinsic benefits that are more effective at engaging and retaining employees, says Leonard Glick, executive professor of management and organizational development at Northeastern University's D'Amore-McKim School of Business.

"It's when you really engage people in their work, so they have problems to solve and customers to satisfy, and they know what that means. Those are really the keys to motivation," Glick says.

"Most employees are absolutely starved for information, they have no idea what's really going on. Give them the big picture."

Leonard Glick, executive professor, Northeastern University's D'Amore-McKim School of Business

"I don't say that money doesn't matter at all," he adds. "The evidence seems to be, if people think they are being treated fairly from a salary point of view, it's really the intrinsic motivators that take over."

HIRE FOR SOFT SKILLS. "Soft skills" used to be thought of as inferior to a candidate's previous experience and knowledge,

but that is no longer the case, Buhler says. In fact, interviewing for "soft skills" like work ethic and values can help companies hire the right employee who fits with the company culture, she says. "When we understand our culture, what we value, and then we very intentionally conduct a job interview for applicants who share our values, our particular work ethic, our approach to

business, then that alleviates a lot of the barriers to high performance right off the bat," she says. "That's the thing that businesses have to acknowledge: We're not as well equipped to teach the soft skills as the hard skills."

OFFER SHADOWING. Shadowing is often a practice reserved for high school students and interns, but it can be incredibly helpful during the interview process. The interview is just as important for candidates to get a real sense of the job as it is for companies to get to know applicants. "A candidate could be given an opportunity to come and actually shadow before they take the job

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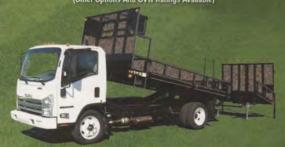
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COMPANY CULTURE

to see what they would be doing and spend the day with someone," Buhler says. Shadowing can also be used as an effective training tool, "(For instance,) someone is working as a cashier, but they would like to know a lot more about being a buyer. Having that individual shadow the buyer once a month or once a quarter, that's a win-win for the organization because they are helping with cross-training as well," Buhler says. Employees are looking for growth opportunities, and shadowing days can help staff feel valued and companies promote from within.

CONDUCT "STAY" INTERVIEWS.

Exit interviews are a common practice at companies to find out why an employee is leaving and how the company could have done better and encouraged them to stay. But what about actively talking to staff about what keeps them working for a business? That's the idea behind "stay" interviews. "What we're recommending now is that (companies conduct) stay interviews ... those interviews can help with recruiting more people and retention," Buhler says.

ENCOURAGE OWNERSHIP. This is easier said than done, but Glick offers a helpful perspective for looking at it. "Ask yourself the question: 'why do owners care?' Owners aren't going to kick out a customer who shows up three minutes after closing. Owners get a lot of feedback. They know if customers are satisfied or not. They stand to benefit directly from good performance and they get hurt directly from bad performance. They know the big

"What we're recommending now is that (companies conduct) stay interviews. Those interviews can help with recruiting more people and retention."

Dr. Pat Buhler, professor, Goldev-Beacom College

picture, they make decisions. They certainly have input in decisions," Glick says. "If you think about what it is that makes an owner motivated, and to the extent you can, enable employees to have some of that."

BE HONEST AND TRANSPARENT.

"Most employees are absolutely starved for information, they have no idea what's really going on," Glick says. "Give them the big picture. I continue to be astounded at how little most employees know what happens to their work and the results of their work."

PROVIDE FEEDBACK OFTEN. Yearly reviews are being replaced with more frequent, informal meetings to give employees regular feedback, Buhler says. "These are more meaningful and much more critical and effective for management. Every direct supervisor should build a relationship with each one of their subordinates and know something about them," Buhler says. "We lose sight of the fact that people don't leave companies, they leave bosses. Those



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WHY HOLIDAY LIGHTING?

Mike is the Vice President of Holiday Bright Lights, a leading holiday lighting supplier for professional decorators. With more than 10 years of experience, Mike has established himself as an industry expert.

Question: If I were a Lawn and Landscape company, why should I add holiday lighting as a service?

Christmas lighting is a niche business, and niche businesses have high earning potential. The holiday lighting industry has grown tremendously over the past five years. If a lawn or landscape company had added holiday lighting as part of their services in 2014, they could have experienced gross sales of more than 400K. That results in an average gross margin of about 50% or higher. As a business owner, it's beneficial to find a niche service to incorporate into your business that has the potential to grow, like holiday lighting.

Question: What are some of the questions you hear every year?

The question I hear most often is "How many lights does this type of tree take?" You can decorate a spruce pine with LED C9 bulbs using 18" or 24" spacing. With a larger maple tree, you can wrap the trunks and branches. As a more cost-effective option, you can hang lighted snowflakes, starbursts, or other lighting products from a maple tree.

Another question I hear is how do I properly estimate a project? There are several ways, but the two I recommend are the purchase option and the leasing option. The purchase option is great as you are selling the lighting products to your client with labor and storage added on. The installation, removal, and storage process is crucial to companies during the following years of business. Always come up with a dollar mark the second year that makes sense for you to do the job. You don't want to lose money, so make sure you estimate correctly and quote accurate pricing to customers.

The leasing option is a popular choice for clients who don't



want to purchase. As a decorator, when you do the leasing option for a customer, you use products that you own and charge your clients to use them. You make better margins over a couple years using the leasing option than the purchase option.

Question: What type of marketing works best for holiday lighting?

As a starting point, I would recommend coming up with a holiday lighting company name that is different from your lawn/landscaping company name. This gives you a separate identity. Create a separate website, Facebook page, Twitter, and Instagram. When you have an online presence and social media established, market to the established client base you have from your lawn/landscaping business. Start working with clients who know you and know your company. Send

customers an introduction letter explaining your new holiday lighting business. Hand out supplier catalogs to existing lawn/landscape clients, which will pique their interest.

If you're an established business, use Google Adwords. It can grow your service by up to 30%. Large postcards and full-color yard signs are also effective.

If you use a lead list, add new home purchases within the last twelve months to it. Design (or hire someone to design) two different looking postcards and mail them at different times to the lead list.

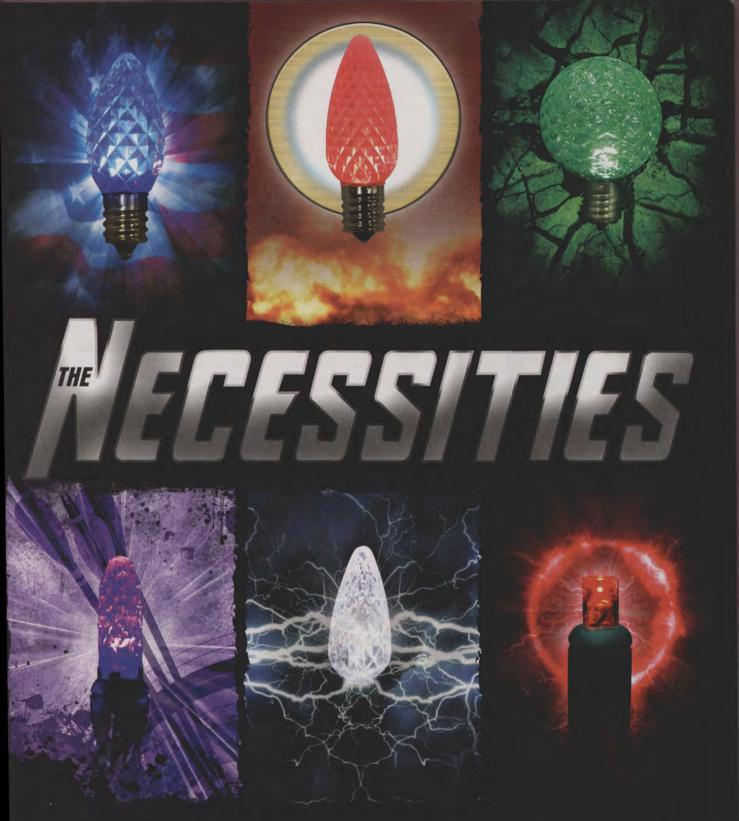
Question: What are some of the popular products decorators use?

Most rooflines are decorated with LED and incandescent C9 bulbs, making them the most popular. Then come light sets for trees and bushes. Wreaths and garlands come in third. Also, LED products become more popular every year.



FOR MORE INFORMATION,

contact Mike Marlow at marlow@holidaybrightlights.com or visit Holiday Bright Lights at www.holidaybrightlights.com.





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COMPANY CULTURE

managers that invest in getting to know their employees find that they can be more effective in supervising them."

RECOGNIZE PEOPLE DIFFERENTLY. You also have to know employees and develop relationships with them to best understand how to recognize them for their best work, Buhler says. "I am a firm believer in asking people. Too often we think we know what people value, and we really don't. Then we get into this one-size-fits-all (approach), and it doesn't appeal to everyone. For one person, having their sign on the parking spot close to the door is a big thing. For another person, they might be embarrassed to have their name on a sign," she says. "You really have to know your employees, and strike a chord with what makes sense to your organization financially.

There are so many things that don't cost anything that we overlook. The primary example of that is a handwritten 'thank-you' note. I can't tell you the number of times people just think it doesn't matter about thanking others. Companies can even make a donation to an employee's favorite charity."

INCREASE LEARNING, NOT TRAINING. Glick says that it's human nature to want to learn new information and understand unknown concepts. "Imagine two concentric circles. The smaller, inside circle represents the skills of the employee, meaning knowledge, competence, whatever he or she can do. The outside circle represents the demands of that person's work.

If you want learning to take place, the outside circle always has to be bigger than the inside circle," Glick says. "Most people will naturally want to master. If they are given a task that they don't know how to do, it's almost human nature to want to figure out how to do it. Most will figure out a way to do it, and now they've learned." But, he adds, it's important for managers to keep track of employee growth and learning, and to make sure their staff is offered challenging - and ultimately rewarding - work at all times.

HAVE A HIGHER PURPOSE. Employees, especially millennials, are attracted to charitable,

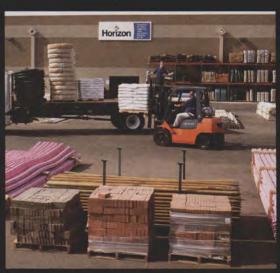
philanthropic businesses that give back to their communities or that have a "higher purpose," Buhler says. "There's a preference for working for organizations that are socially responsible, and that's a great way for a retailer to build that opportunity to be what they refer to as a 'millennial magnet," she says. "It pays off for the organization in terms of hiring more of the talented millennials that have the sense of higher purpose. They don't want to just go in and do that retail job."

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT. Casual. informal interactions with fellow employees can help foster a better culture at work, Buhler says. "You don't have to have a big fancy game room, you can just have something off to the side in your break room where they can connect with one another, whether it be a foosball table or something small. A lot of times companies can pick up things like that through yard sales," she says. "You have to think about your culture and what make sense for your organization, but (something) where you're building relationships (among) people and you're tying (these relationships) in with your culture."

GIVE STAFF AUTONOMY AND FLEXIBILITY. Both Buhler and Glick say that perhaps the most important aspect to employee motivation and retention is giving staff a sense of autonomy and flexibility. "Give (staff members) some flexibility in the way that they do their jobs, so that everything isn't so incredibly structured," Buhler says. "We lose sight in how to effectively and creatively do a job if we think in terms of 'we've always done it this way, this is what worked in the past, and we're just going to train new people to do it exactly that

"Giving new people a little bit of flexibility and giving them broad parameters and letting them create some of the new ways that the job can be done is important. Autonomy and responsibility go a long way toward providing additional motivation and satisfaction on the job." L&L

Michelle Simakis is the editor of sister publication Garden Center magazine.









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BUD, A PRODUCTION MANAGER FOR A LANDSCAPING COMPANY,

arrived at the yard Monday at 5:45 a.m., as normal, to ensure a good 45 minutes of preparation before his crews departed at 6:30 a.m. There was an unfamiliar car parked close to the entrance and when Bud stopped to open the gate, he noticed a young gentleman approach the passenger side of his truck.

"Good morning, can I help you?" Bud greeted the gentleman quickly. "Good morning!" responded George, the gentleman at the gate.

Bud was excited since he was down two crew members and here was a guy who was hopefully looking for work. After finding out that the gentleman was indeed looking for employment, Bud told him he needed a minute to park his truck before doing a quick interview.

"Sweet!" responded George.

The next 30 minutes played out like this: Bud "interviewed" George for about eight minutes and did most of the talking himself. Most of Bud's questions were based on what equipment George had experience running. In fact, Bud walked him over to a 60-inch ExMark Turf Tracer and grilled George on proper operating and maintenance techniques. Even before George



KORY BEIDLER is director of training and development at LandCare

confidently showed his knowledge of the mower, Bud had already decided he was going to give George a chance because he was desperate to fill those openings. He offered George a job on the spot and asked when he could start.

"Today!" George responded with enthusiasm.

"I was hoping you would say that," Bud said. Bud had already asked George if he had good papers (which is illegal by the way), so they went back in the office to quickly fill out the required paperwork. George had forgotten one of his two forms of ID, but Bud explained he had a few days to provide them. Bud then

BUD WAS FRUSTRATED AND CONVINCED HIMSELF THAT YOU JUST CAN'T FIND EMPLOYEES THAT LAST THESE DAYS.

took George over to the safety cabinet for his personal protective equipment. Bud was a bit irritated because the cabinet had not been restocked properly and there was only one safety vest, which was two sizes too big for George. Bud told him, "Oh well, take this and I'll get you the rest of the PPE later this week." Bud had also noticed George did not have boots on, but it was 6:25 a.m. already and the crews were about to mobilize.

Bud went out to the yard and introduced George, his newest

employee, to one of his newer supervisors who was one employee short. "I'll catch up with you later." Bud told George. "Good luck today, and make sure you wear work boots tomorrow!"

That was Monday morning. No one saw or heard from George again after Wednesday, his third and final day at Beido Landscaping. Bud was frustrated and convinced himself that you just can't find employees that last these days. Luckily, his frustration was shortlived because on Thursday, there was another gentleman at the gate looking for work.

The vicious cycle of poor screening, interviewing, hiring and onboarding was about to start again. I would look at this situation and ask myself: does Bud know the definition of insanity?

The point of this story is to highlight what not to do when interviewing a candidate:

- 1. Do not interview a candidate on the spot. Screen the candidate and schedule an interview.
- 2. Do not perform an interview unprepared.
- 3. Do not rely on your gut or random questions to perform an interview.
- 4. Do not focus on equipment skills if you're not looking for a unique operator.
- 5. Do not schedule a new hire without having everything ready for day one.
- 6. Do not rush the hiring and orientation process.
- 7. Do not just throw a new team member on a crew.
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