Sometimes, the story changes in midstream

Reporters will tell you that, sometimes, a new story begins and ends exactly as you might expect. Other times the research and conversations lead you to more interesting subjects, changing the story and the reporter’s original line of inquiry.

Such was the case with this month’s front-page story on factory direct sales, which started as an analysis of direct marketing in the golf course industry and wound up detailing the slow-but-sure consolidation of distribution channels.

The two phenomena are related, of course. As smaller independent firms are going out of business and larger firms searching for ever more efficiencies, access to the marketplace narrows — especially for smaller manufacturers whose lines might not be lucrative enough to command space on the shelves.

This last point I discovered while researching the subject of direct marketing. The epiphany? All these smaller companies were going factory-direct because they had to go factory-direct. They were losing access to distributors, and thus losing access to superintendents.

Of course, many of the floor in the San Francisco will be golf course distributors. I look forward to hearing their strong opinions on the subject.

One name that kept cropping up during my research was Terra International, Inc. This Sioux City, Iowa-based firm has been on a spending spree lately, adding staff (the firm has gone from 27 to 62 sales representatives since 1992) and buying up distributors:

Turf World of Houston, Bi-State Turf of Danville, Ill., Androscoggin Products Medford, Minn., and Aegrow Florida with 15 in-state locations.

Two things to keep in mind as we gather in San Francisco:

• First, firms like Terra will become increasingly common as the millennium approaches. Larger firms have growth on the brain and many will go public to fund strategic, market-segmented expansions like Terra’s.

• Second, Chuck Champion of Kalo, Inc. was right: Some day superintendents will have the option of buying everything via the Internet. The increasing sophistication of mower and irrigation technology will always bind superintendents to their distributors.

But that relationship will become less important over time, as superintendents make more and more purchases over the phone.

Hey, that’s a great idea! The Course Shopping Network.

Letters

GREENS ROLLING SYSTEMS ARE NOT THE SAME

To the editor:

Golf Course News, over the past couple of years, published several stories on greens rolling techniques [GCG August & October ’94]. However, we at Turfline know all superintendents need help educating consumers on the differences comparing our True Surface Vibratory Greens Rolling System apart from other rollers, Quickly, here’s the difference.

True-Surface units are installed on triplex mowers in place of the cutting units and they produce high frequency, minimal vibrations. The following are a few advantages of vibration:

• Low roller weight: We use a 55-sand roller that will not strain the frame or lift cylinders on the greensmower. Vibration will firm and true the surface better than physical weight.

• Speed: You can roll a green with units faster than it can be mowed with a triplex mower. No new greens to be in playing condition by the next tee time, walk mowers were not used and greens were firm and smooth enough to use triplex mowers.

• Topdressing: Vibration following dragging or brushing virtually eliminates sand from the turf. The sand falls through just before the roller gets to it, thus reducing sand on the putting surface.

• Greens rolling, a practice reintroduced in recent years primarily for a speed enhancing device, has now become an integral tool for overall greens management.

The development of the True-Surface Greens Rolling System is the next step. It is the direct result of the imagination, innovation and effort typical of golf course superintendents.

Steve Wilson, sales manager Turfline, Inc.

The McLoughlin Group

Golf Course News

Commercial Pump Sets Record Straight

To the editor:

I am writing to you in regards to your article in the October issue titled, “Irrigation design, pump house technology continue to meet, or exceed, industry standards.” In the article, the author provided of pump station manufacturers, Commercial Pump was not included. We feel this was a major oversight and would like to be included in any upcoming articles relating to our industry.

Commercial Pump has been manufacturing prefabricated pumping stations, automated control packages and control components for turf irrigation systems for over 13 years and has over 1,000 customers.

Thank you for allowing us to introduce our product. We look forward to the prospect of contributing to you next golf course irrigation article.

Whittnaej Schultz Market Planner/Instructor Commercial Pump Services, Inc.

Swanton, Ohio

Ed. We regret the error. The staff here at Golf Course News was under the impression that Commercial Pump Services, Inc. had continuously developed its strategic marketing alliance with Hartford, Wis.-based Watertronics, Inc., and so listed only the latter. According to Schultz, this agreement has since expired.
Phillips commentary

A word of caution, reiterating a point from Peter Blais' front-page story on the GOP-controlled Congress. Agencies like Environmental Protection and Land Management will play key roles for the Clinton Administration, as it tries to make political hay-making end runs around Gingrich & Co. Agencies are not subject to Congressional oversight, as anyone in the Reagan and Bush administrations will tell you...

San Francisco is one of my all-time favorite cities. Three quick suggestions on where to enjoy some atmosphere and perhaps a libation: Vesuvio's on Columbus, right next to City Lights book store, provides a bar experience you won't soon forget. Emphasis on the funky here. Great beer selection, throwback decor, and just about anybody is liable to walk in. Bring your own Whole Earth Catalog.

For the more traditional tavern experience, try Tosca, located just down the street from Vesuvio's, also on Columbus. A real '40s-style long bar. Edward G. Robinson would be right at home here.

If you have a car and feel like getting out of the city, sample the Pelican Inn in Muir Beach. Located across the Golden Gate Bridge in Marin County. The Pelican is a beautiful country inn with a genuine British-style pub attached, complete with darts and short stools. Further, the food served in the dining room is first-rate and reasonable.

Vesuvio's, also on Columbus. A real '40s-style here. Great beer selection, throwback decor, long bar. Edward G. Robinson would be right here. Great beer selection, throwback decor, and just about anybody is liable to walk in. Bring your own Whole Earth Catalog.

Douglas: Golf and the Calif. Coast

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Act public-access policies. When a new golf course is proposed for a coastal location, the threshold question is the appropriateness of the land use and its compatibility with surrounding uses. Once these questions has been answered; other, more project-specific concerns must be addressed. Based on our experience, golf courses designed in an environmentally sensitive manner are much less likely to raise significant Coastal Act problems. Early consultation with local government and Commission staff, before a design is fixed, most often yields timely identification and resolution of potential problems. The Commission, to the extent its limited staffing resources allow, is committed to and encourages such consultation. Although each project is unique and raises different concerns, some basic principles of design can facilitate coastal development permit approval:

- Select a suitable location that minimizes potential conflicts with surrounding uses and underlying existing uses such as agriculture. Respect urban-rural limit lines and avoid use of prime agricultural lands.
- Maximize opportunities for public access across, around and along the project. A recently approved golf course in Santa Barbara County (the ARCO project) and the Links at Spanish Bay in Del Monte Forest — both Commission-approved projects — are good examples of this principle.
- To the maximum extent feasible, let nature guide the design. Natural features such as tree cover, streams and ponds, and sand dunes, should be preserved to the extent possible and land-form alteration should be minimized. Environmentally sensitive habitat areas should not be disturbed.
- Habitat values should be preserved, mitigated and/or enhanced. Project design should take into account wildlife corridors, feeding, breeding, nesting and roosting areas and the benefits of using native plants. The Links at Spanish Bay again provide a good example.
- Issues relating to water supply and quality must be addressed. The use of reclaimed water is desirable and project design should minimize dependence on potentially polluting chemicals.
- Provisions to protect the land in perpetuity from subdivision or conversion to other types of development in the future are also important. The ARCO project was approved by the Commission in large part because such a provision was incorporated into the project.
- Careful, creatively designed and managed golf course projects can be both environmentally beneficial and economically rewarding. The Commission staff stands ready to help project developers meet those goals in a way that has enduring value for all those who cherish the California Coast.