Remembering turfgrass fundamentals is crucial to success

As I sit in my office on this cold October morning, preparing to write this commentary, I am surrounded by technology. As I tap the computer keyboard, I see my fax machine, Palmpilot, and answering machines – and this is just in my office. During my 25 years in this business, the turfgrass industry – from maintenance equipment to irrigation controls and turf varieties – has gone high tech. While these high-tech developments are all great for our industry, superintendents need to remember the fundamentals and cultural practices of turfgrass management.

BACK IN THE DAY

When I first started working on a golf course we used to topdress greens by hand. Our topdressing machine consisted of three guys; a trailer full of a 1:1 sand/soil mix, and three large shovels. When I saw the first self-propelled topdresser, I thought I had seen it all. Now we have topdressers big and small, and for greens and fairways. I am happy that no one decided to topdress fairways when we were using the shovel technique.

For us older guys, “computer” was hardly a household word when we started in the business. Now we sit at a computer and tell it what we want to irrigate with the click of a mouse. The only mouse we knew years back were the ones in our maintenance barn, eating our low-tech grass seed. When our first central control system it took a while to build my confidence that a mouse click could program the system. It just didn’t seem right to inspect the course and visit each satellite for programming.

The largest technology leap, however, has occurred with turfgrass varieties. Whoever thought we would have a “gene gun” that would be capable of transforming a selected species of turfgrass varieties. Whoever thought we would have a “gene gun” that would be capable of transforming a selected species of turfgrass varieties. According to superintendents I spoke with, many have already been impacted by the effects of consolidation.

“What we are seeing initially is that there are definitely some service issues,” said superintendent Neil Thrailkill at Silverhorn Club. “But I am constantly searching for some obscure product or machine.”

Larson agreed. “I have never been a fan of buying one brand,” he said. “I have a hodge podge of equipment and I have a hard time believing that someone who offers a one-stop shop could have the best products of each category. I don’t see it happening.”

While industry consolidation is inevitable in a free market economy, companies need to bear in mind that serving customers is just as important as pleasing shareholders. When companies come together to broaden the scope of products and services there is an opportunity to increase both market share and customer satisfaction. As the consolidation trend continues to march through the golf course industry, let’s hope that the version of Big Golf Inc. depicted in our editorial cartoon never comes to fruition.