GreenIndustry rolls out Internet-based management software

BY ANDREW OVERBECK

WOODBINE, Md. — Steve Cissel, owner of Tree Center Inc., is gearing up to roll out an Internet-based contact management software program and procurement service aimed at improving efficiency in the green industry.

While the venture, GreenIndustry Inc., enters an already packed e-commerce arena, Cissel believes that the software component of the service will set it apart from the competition.

“We are a subscription-based company, not a transaction-based company,” said Cissel. “The Call Book software is an individually customized Internet application that helps manage a contact database. In addition, the project management system keeps each member of the management staff has increased, the number of sales and marketing managers has been trimmed. "In gaining synergies for the merger of the turf and ornamental groups, we reduced middle-management by 50 percent," said Pulliam. "We are trying to get efficiencies, but part of the responsibilities that those folks may have resided somewhere else in the organization."
GreenIndustry

Continued from page 50

team up to date on the status of projects and jobs. Since it is an Internet application, it can constantly updated and can be shared in real time by all users.

Cissel built the software program for use in his own nursery and turf farm business four years ago. "We used it in-house to communicate with one another," he said. "The software handled our invoicing and inventory and it updated our web site so customers were kept up to date on what we had in stock. I let a few friends try the software out and now they can't live without it."

Sensing an opportunity, Cissel has spent the last 18 months developing an Internet-based version of the software to sell to others in the green industry. He has been working with Columbia-based Applied Information Technology to build the back-end of the system that he has spent more than $600,000 developing.

ON THE COURSE

According to Cissel, the application possibilities for golf course superintendents and management companies are numerous.

"Courses can build a contact management database so that all the members of the staff from the owner to the head of the greens committee to the superintendent can communicate," he said. "All of the people involved can log in to check on the status of projects and communicate with each member of the management staff."

"Let's say that there is a question about hole number three," he continued. "The superintendent can track what the concerns were, the things that were done and who was involved.

"The program will also be attractive to management companies," he added. "The owner or manager of a multi-course firm could log in from a remote location to see what was going on and to make sure that the management team is staying on top of tasks."

COST AND SUPPORT

The Call Book software, which can be viewed at greenindustryonline.net, will cost $75 per month ($900 a year) for one to 10 users. More users can be added at an additional cost.

"Setting up a database such as this would be cost prohibitive for most companies," said Cissel. "For $900 a year, they can have a $500,000 contact management database and we will take care of the servers, software upgrades and back up. They have no information technology worries."

The company's servers are protected with multiple firewalls and three levels of security, and old users can easily be deleted from the system. According to Cissel, the database can handle an infinite amount of records. "I have been using mine for three and a half years and I have more than 21,000 records," he said. "Since we are not transaction based, however, we allow vendors to continue to follow their existing business models - greenindustryonline is primarily a forum for communication."

Subscribers will have access to a vendor directory as well as a request-for-proposal system. "Users can put together a list of what they are looking for and then choose which vendors they want to send it to," said Cissel.

"Since we are not involved, this maintains the private and personalized nature of the deal."

Suppliers can either use the Call Book system at the same $900-a-year rate or pay $200 a year to be listed in the vendor directory.

COMPETITION

Cissel estimates that greenindustryonline.net could eventually have 25,000 to 50,000 users within the green industry.

As far as the other dot-com ventures, he doesn't see them as direct competition to the company's service-oriented site.

"What is your motivation for logging on to the other sites? Why should you stop what you are doing to get onto the Internet?" he asked. "We have something that you will use every day as an Internet utility. Once you are using it you are just a click away from these dot-coms."

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