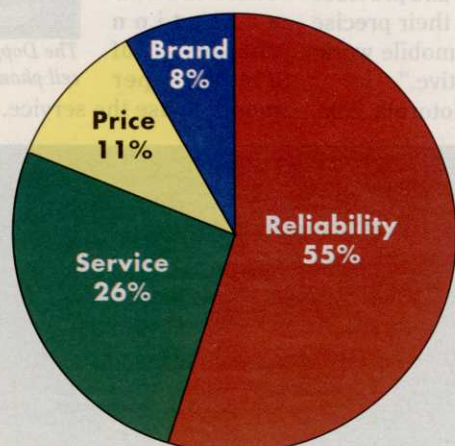


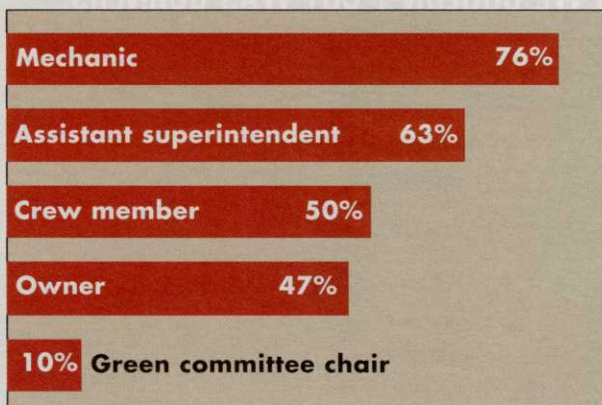
GOLF COURSE NEWS

NEWS POLL

WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR WHEN PURCHASING MOWERS?



WHO DO YOU INVOLVE IN THE PURCHASING DECISION?



♦ Many people will impact my decision on buying equipment. The owner needs to feel confident about the equipment I am buying, I need to know if the mechanic can work on it and I need to know from crew members if it is useable in the field.

— Pat Shay, superintendent, Thousand Hills Golf Resort

♦ The single most important factor when purchasing mowers is the service. If you can't receive adequate service from the distributor, no amount of savings will make up for this shortfall.

— Kevin Goolsby, superintendent, The Sportsman Golf Resort

Manufacturers tweak products

Continued from page 1

the same reliability, quality and value for price as models currently on the market.

"I don't think you could say we are moving away from new technology," Wright said. "It is just a matter of reading when the industry is ready for a big jump. There are a lot of things that can be done, but you have to have an economic model in place to make new technology viable."

Larry Jones, product manager for fairway and rotary mowers for Textron Golf Turf and Specialty Products, agreed.

"We are challenged with creating the latest in technology but also focusing on the customers' needs and wants," said Jones. "But at the end of the day it has to present value to the customer."

With that value proposition in mind, manufacturers are making incremental improvements to existing product lines.

"There is a significant risk from the manufacturing standpoint in moving too quickly with breakthrough technology," said Gregg Breningmeyer, director of sales and marketing for John Deere golf and turf. "So it is not surprising this year to see new products being different iterations of current technology."

GOLF COURSE NEWS

Editorial Focus: Mowers

Equipment selection process critical to effective operation

By KEVIN ROSS

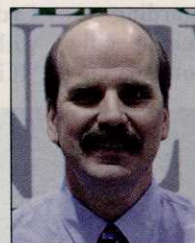
One of the most important decisions a superintendent has to make in managing a golf course operation is proper equipment selection. Justification for purchasing expensive equipment, like mowers, must be matched to needs and budget.

How does one go about selecting the equipment needed? There are many different factors which go into this process. While superintendents will differ in their criteria of selection, some of the important factors include:

- **Price** – For many, price is the bottom line. Unfortunately, comparing equipment only by price can be very misleading. Two machines with different prices might look the same on the surface, but a complete look at the units will reveal differences, especially when it comes to components. For example, a less expensive machine might not have as good hydraulic motors as the more expensive machine.

- **Service/Support** – The ability of the company to back their equipment with service and support, whether it is parts, training, or updates is of extreme importance.

- **Warranty** – Most equipment warranties are very similar, however reading the fine print can reveal important differences. It is critical to investigate warranties



Kevin Ross

because components such as hydraulic motors, drive engines and even tires can carry different warranties.

- **Reliability/Track Record** – There is no doubt that word of mouth in this industry can make or break a piece of equipment. A machine that has been rock-solid in the field has a major advantage because superintendents cannot afford down time.

- **Serviceability** – Having the equipment technician crawl all over a potential equipment can reveal many important issues that can make a difference. For example, by taking a closer look, mechanics can evaluate everything from how easy it is to get at the oil drain plug to how difficult it will be to change a fan or drive belt.

THE DEMO GAME

Another important factor in the decision-making process is the equipment demo. A one-week demo should be enough for a superintendent to see how it performs under their course conditions.

During the demo process, it is critical to get input from assistants, mechanics and seasonal staff. First have the technician do a total inspection and set-up. Make notes on advantages and disadvantages so when the next brand rolls in, comparison will be easier. Next, select the staff members that will be using this machine the most, and have the equipment technician perform the proper training. The unit should then be put to the test in all conditions (wet, dry, etc.) over different terrain (flat, hills, etc.).

When each demo is finished, have a brief meeting with the operators to discuss the machine's performance and make notes for future reference. After all machines have been evaluated, have a final meeting for staff input, and review the notes for each. Using the demo information with the aforementioned selection process factors, a superintendent can then evaluate their equipment selection with confidence in making the proper decision.

Editorial Focus: Mowers

Electric, autonomous mowers still hold promise

While manufacturers are currently focusing on improving existing products, they are still evaluating the market for new technology.

All three companies are considering electric mowers. Textron's E-Plex greensmower is already on the market and Toro and John Deere are evaluating the potential of electric models.

John Deere's director of sales and marketing Gregg Breningmeyer said the company is testing an electric model, but the main challenge remains coming up with a system that can give the superintendent all-day power.

"Replacing hydraulics and diesel-powered engines is something everyone would like to do," he

said. "The problem is that current battery and fuel cell technology is insufficient to give a full day of power. In golf course applications electric motors are close to the ground and get splashed by fertilizer, so durability is an issue."

Toro's director of marketing John Wright is skeptical about the size of the electric market. "The market is not there yet," he said. "This is not a big industry to begin with and if you can only sell 50 of something, the investment is not worth it."

Textron remains bullish on the future of electric products and has answered the power challenge with snap-out battery packs that it said could keep an

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products into the market, then your customers are not starting over with a new machine," said Wright. "The idea here is to have innovation with limited newness."

The company also improved ergonomics and operator comforts on its Greensmaster 3150 greens mower.

JOHN DEERE EXPANDS B-SERIES LINE

John Deere's new B-Series walk-behind greens mowers have also been improved for this year.

"We have made a good product better," said Breningmeyer. "We have made it easier to adjust the reels and to take them on and off. We also added a true 18-inch machine and a new 26-inch machine to the line. They are the lightest walk-behind greens mowers out there."

Breningmeyer also said that a major new product is in the works for release next year, but gave no other details other than it would be "riding mower."

FOCUSING ON FOCUS GROUPS

According to manufacturers, these product tweaks and developments are largely a result of feedback sessions and focus groups.

Jones said the LF 1800 was tested on golf courses for two years before its release this season. "Superintendents put the unit to the test and the final design is a result of their input," he said. "This allows us to ensure the reliability and value of the machine when it goes on the market."

In a market where innovation can equate risk, this strategy will be key to the introduction of any new products or changes.

"Toro has the largest install base out there to pull from," added Wright. "We will continue to tweak our products as we learn from our customers about the changes and modifications they would like to see. We will also gauge their response on new products and prototypes." ■

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12-16	12th Annual ING Spring Conference in Pinehurst, N.C. Contact: 407-328-0500.
22	Ohio Sports Turf Managers Association Chapter workshop Contact: 740-452-4541.

Mower technology

Continued from page 11

operator on course all day. According to Larry Jones, product manager for fairway and rotary mowers for Textron Golf Turf and Specialty Products, the electric market is unexploited and the company plans to add more on the electric end. He declined to specify what models are being considered for electric conversion.

AUTONOMOUS MOWERS

John Deere is also considering adapting its autonomous technology from its agricultural division to the golf and turf division.

"Autonomous mowing is interesting with the labor issues and rising costs for golf courses," Breningmeyer said. "We are investing in it and see the need, but we have to decide if it is feasible. We are using it in the agricultural business right now, but golf courses have more obstacles like trees and golfers."

Wright said Toro is evaluating autonomous mowers and hybrid and alternative fuel options, but that any new products are at least five to 10 years off.

"It will take time for the price of technology to come down," he said. "It is not like computers where more technology is cheaper. In our business, more technology means higher costs, and I am not sure superintendents are willing to pay for it yet."

— Andrew Overbeck

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