

This series will tell you what the distributor will do for you and how you can get all he has to offer

## The role of the distributor in turf maintenance



**Andy Lawyer**, Turf Specialist, and **Joe Cravens**, President, run Cory Orchard Supply Company, a major chemical distributorship in Indianapolis.

**A nice showroom** is necessary and is a small part of the overhead a distributor must carry.

**A** golf course cannot be maintained without equipment. Equipment purchase is one of the major investments of a course and maintenance protects that investment. The distributor's role is that of a source, both for the initial investment and the resources with which to protect it. A superintendent must depend upon his distributor for the parts and service he needs. The distributor de-



pends upon the superintendent to buy from him and keep his business alive.

Very large sums of money are involved when major pieces of equipment are purchased. The distributor recognizes the need to keep the buyer happy with that piece of equipment. He knows the superintendent won't be happy if it is sitting in the shop waiting on parts and the course needs to be mowed, fertilizer spread, and/or pesticides applied. Distributors have, and are working on new, methods to facilitate the customer and at the same time keep overhead low so that they can be competitive in the marketplace.

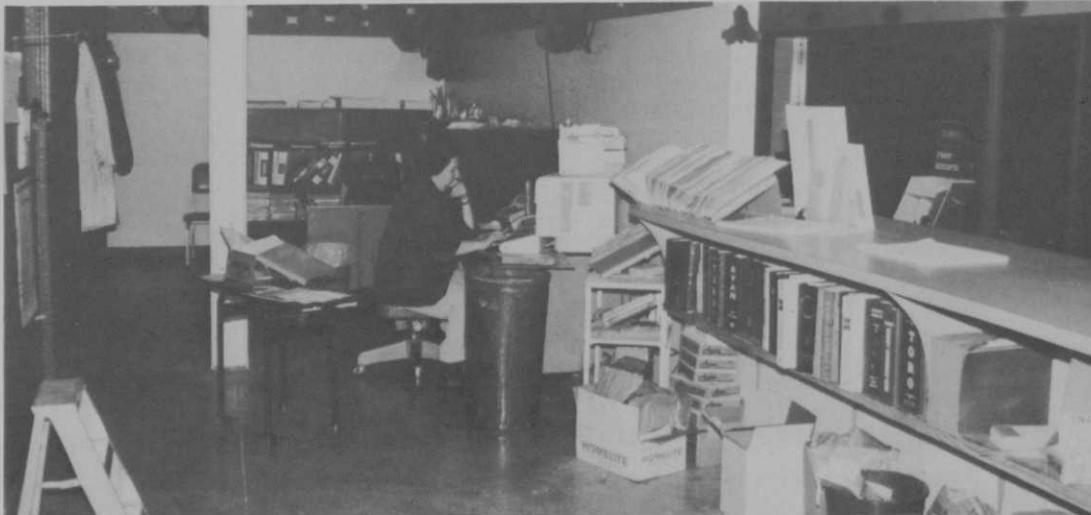
### What is a distributor?

If you ask a golf course superintendent what a distributor sells, he would reply: "Turf equipment and chemicals." If you ask a distributor what he sells, he would most likely reply: "We sell our distributorship to the customer by selling high-quality merchandise and backing it up with service."

Selling is a term that falls easily  
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**Jim Kenney** owns Kenney Machinery Corporation in Indianapolis. It has been operating since 1938.



**A quick** and smooth system for filling parts orders plays a role in the success of a distributor.



**Stan Bockoski** is the Turf Sales Manager for Kenney Machinery Corporation.



**Having a parts manager** that has been around and knows the business is essential. William Tardy fills that position at Indiana Equipment Company in Indianapolis.



**Specific training** sessions on various pieces of equipment is viewed as a necessary service.



**Robert A. Zwart** is President of Indiana Equipment Company.

into the baliwick of a distributor. He has made it his career and his success rides on how well he, and his salesmen, sell. Quality merchandise plays an important role in the continued success of a distributor. People generally will not get themselves 'took' more than once. A manufacturer who makes shoddy equipment, or equipment that does not do what he says it will, will not last long among people who demand equipment that will do the job right and keep on doing it with a minimum of downtime.

**"You have to know when to . . ."**

That the distributor must be a gambler has never been more true, considering the extreme fluctuation in interest rates that we have recently seen. The ideal situation for a distributor would be for everyone who is going to purchase equipment to come in with their orders all at once. The distributor could then go to the manufacturers with his order and run everything through the system at once. But, as one distributor put it, "If it were that easy, everyone would be in the business."

Most distributors are tied in with the prime interest rate. If it goes up, they must pay more; therefore their prices must go up. How does it spiral? If prime is at 20 percent, those who intend to stay in business must charge at least 15 to 20 percent more to pay overhead and make a profit. And as Earl Butz, former Secretary of Agriculture said, "Profit is not a four-letter word." It is necessary for a business to stay in business. Right away, we're looking at a 40, or more, percent mark-up on an already expensive piece of equipment.

Just because the prime is 20 percent doesn't mean that the distributor is going to get even that good of a rate. Prime is what banks offer their preferred customers. Most distributors must borrow money at two or three points over that. Manufacturers are looking at tight money also. Inflation has escalated to the point that it feels like a mean dog taking a chunk out of the side that your wallet is on.

**Salesmanship**

A professional turf salesman differs in almost every respect from an over-the-counter salesman. First of  
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all, the number of customers the turf distributor will have remains almost static. Only in the Sunbelt are we seeing significant growth in the number of golf courses. A salesman must depend on the same customer to come back.

A salesman must know the ins and outs of his equipment and be able to assure the buyer that it is the best piece of equipment for the job that it will perform. He must know how to, in the face of tight money, offer the buyer a financing plan he can afford. And after he has sold the equipment, he must back it up with quick parts availability and service.

One of the big differences in service between a turf distributor and for example, automobile sales, is that the distributor teaches the customer how to work on his equipment himself. The manufacturer hold schools to teach the distributor the latest technology and the distributor holds schools passing the knowledge on to the customer. And

they are glad to do so. It is not viewed as a money-losing operation. It is viewed as "That distributor supported my piece of equipment." It may put a sale off because the equipment will last longer, but when the sale comes, it will come back to that distributor.

#### Parts

The parts departments of most distributors has shown a surge as customers hang on to equipment and try to make it last longer. Distributors are implementing programs to make parts purchases flow through the system more efficiently. To get as fast service as is possible, it is important for the buyer to be as precise as possible when ordering parts. He will get much quicker service if he has looked in his parts book, and orders by part number. If he says, "Well, I need some parts for my mower, oh some points and maybe a hydrostatic muffler belt, I

bought it last year, no I don't remember the model—threw the book away . . ." Well, that order is going to get shelved until the parts man has time to go to his books or the computer, look up the piece of equipment that the customer bought, look up the part number and then see if it's in stock.

Meanwhile, if there is another superintendent who ordered by part number, maybe even after the first one, and there is only one part, he will get it. His order will be filled first.

Volume of business is very important. It is impossible to run a profitable organization if you have to spend a lot of time searching for information that should be readily available. Because of this, distributors are educating their customers and trying to get them to work within their systems, as much for their own gain as for the customers.

More and more distributors are go-  
*Continues on page 39*

# DON'T FOOL WITH MOTHER NATURE

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ing to computers for ease in maintaining inventories and also to facilitate finding needed parts among distributors. In some areas, distributors are tied together by computers to make locating a hard to find or out of stock part faster.

#### Options

When a distributor orders a piece of equipment, it doesn't roll off the truck ready to go. The distributor orders the piece of equipment in parts and must spend as much as 30 hours putting it together. Different wheels are available, different frames, reels, operator ease options ... a long list.

Freight bills can be astronomical. The distributor must weigh the fact that freight for a truckload is maybe \$1200, while freight for a single piece might be \$700. (Figures are for illustration only.) Does he think he can sell a truckload? Can he sell a single piece if the freight bill raises

the price so high?

#### Service department

Most distributors' service departments perform major repair operations that the mechanic at the course is not equipped to do. They maintain highly skilled mechanics. Between training and wages for a skilled mechanic and overhead for specialized equipment, labor rates are high. However, when a piece of equipment needs major repair, superintendents want it done right. In the eyes of the distributor, it is another highly necessary service to keep the customer coming back.

#### Chemicals

Chemical distributors depend to a great extent on early season buying. Often, preventative pesticides are one of the first cutbacks in a budget. Most of the time, however, chemicals are ordered through late

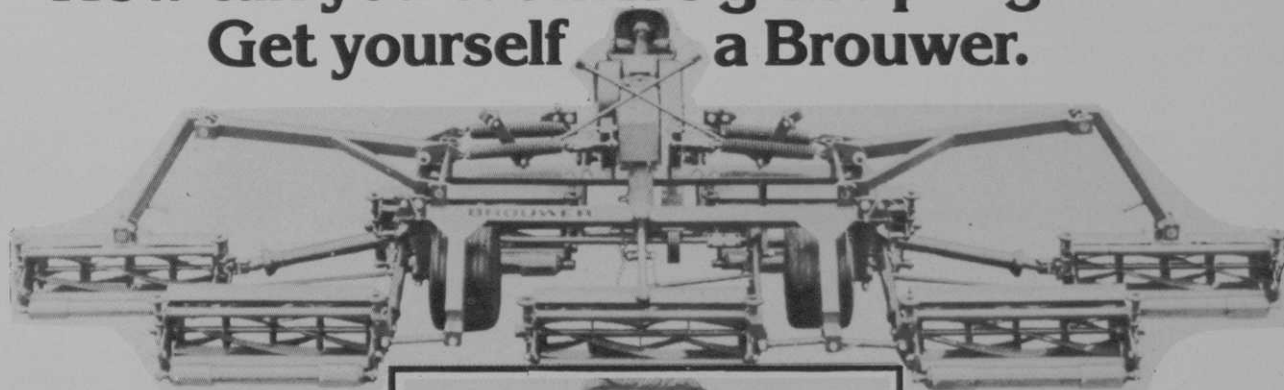
winter, or early spring, as budgets are settled.

Expenditures for chemicals are high, perhaps not so much as the initial expense for a piece of equipment, but considering that chemicals are ordered year after year, while equipment might last several, it adds up. At \$135 a case, 35 cases to treat a course for fusarium and maybe a couple of other diseases, you're looking at nearly \$5000 as only a part of the pesticide budget.

#### Objective

Our objective, as we pursue this subject with thorough interviews with distributors, is to pass along information that will help the superintendent do his job better. With this article, we have laid the groundwork behind why a distributor speaks as he does. In next month's issue, we will hear from them directly, and they will tell you how to get the most value for your money, and how to maintain that value.

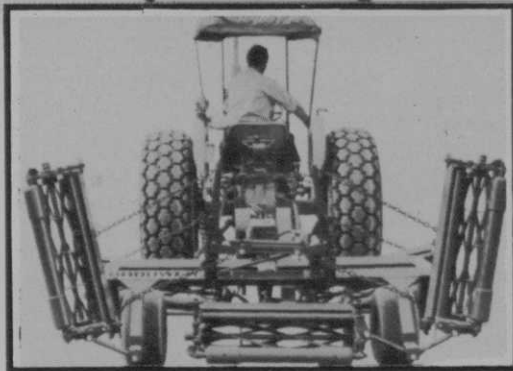
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Golf Business/February 39