Mike Thurow likes pain. Not physical pain, but pain in business. When a group is having a pain with their business, he says he sees that as a business opportunity. So it could be said that Thurow, president and CEO of Spectrum Technologies Inc., enjoys it when superintendents have a pain in the grass. “If a superintendent has a pain, then we will look for the solution,” Thurow says.
For example, the FieldScout TDR 300. Available for about 15 years now, the technology has caught the industry by storm in the last five. The portable tool gives instantaneous readings of root zone soil moisture, allowing turf pros to spot-water only the areas that really need it.

Today the TDR 300 can be seen at golf courses across the country. “It’s the single best tool I’ve bought in the last five years,” says Dan Dinelli, CGCS at North Shore CC in Chicago. That seems to be a common sentiment around the industry, so much so that here at Golfdom we even featured the product on our cover last year.

So it’s no surprise that Thurow has a big grin on his face when he makes his next statement. “In my 40 years in the industry, I’ve never seen adoption of a product such as I have with the TDR,” he says. “It’s because the guys at the USGA and the PGA believed in it. Word travels efficiently in this industry. It’s a network, more so than any other crop segment.”

Thurow says sales of the TDR increased 80 percent from 2010 to 2011, then doubled from 2011 to 2012. He anticipates more success for the product this year. Behind the TDR, turf now accounts for 30 percent of his total business. Previously it accounted for 5 percent of his business.

Golfdom recently visited Spectrum Technologies in the Chicago suburb of Aurora, Ill. We asked one main question: What is the company’s next big idea?

GreenIndex+
Available beginning next month is the FieldScout GreenIndex+ for turf applications. The premise is simple: it’s a tool to give an exact reading on how green the grass is.

The value, according to Adam Rusciolelli, vice president of product development for Spectrum Technologies, is it takes the guesswork out of applying nitrogen.

“We’re trying to make color measurements more consistent and objective. The app can assist in making decisions associated with declining greenness. It’s a tool to help keep turf in the optimal range, not over- or under-fertilized,” Rusciolelli says. “Once it’s calibrated any person can go out and take the measurements.”

The equipment includes a small board with three colors, and a smartphone app. The user takes a photo of the board and surrounding turf with the smartphone. The app locks in on the board, and uses those colors as a control. So shadows, sunlight or hazy weather won’t impact the reading of the grass.

The photo then gives the user an objective numeric value as well as an equivalent visual rating for how green the grass is.

“We’re in the measurement business. We want to help superintendents figure out how to do their jobs better.”

MIKE THUROW

Bluetooth-enabled TDR
The TDR 300 — the first product mentioned in this article — has been so good for Spectrum Technologies that it shouldn’t be a surprise that the company is looking for ways to improve it.

By giving it the power of Bluetooth, they believe they have. “Bluetooth is so powerful and affordable. It’s simply a chip,” says Madden. “You can already log the data and download the data, but you can’t automatically shoot that data to a device at this point in time. Bluetooth would simplify this process to save valuable time.”

The target release date for the Bluetooth TDR 300 is the 2014 Golf Industry Show in Orlando.

Would you like to see articles similar to this in the future? If so, what companies would you like to see profiled? Write to us at sjones@northcoastmedia.net or tweet at us @Golfdom.