The key to maintaining a positive public image

June is a month when golf superintendents and landscape managers should strive to be visible—if for no other reason than to earn some well-deserved pats on the back from golfers or customers.

It's a month when the grass is at its greenest and ornamental color is at its brightest. It's a month—unlike the hustle and bustle of April and May—when you can settle down a bit and appreciate being at the "top of your game."

It's the month before the raging heat of summer ignites frazzled tempers among customers and employees, and it's the month before the grass fries and the ornamentals wilt.

As you enjoy the accolades, though, don't forget that they don't last all year. And take note of the common thread running through this issue of Landscape Management: how you, as a professional in this "green" business, can improve your image among golfers, clients and the public at large.

One notion, prompted by Greg Petry, is that you should belong to a professional organization.

But just "belonging" and "playing an active role" are birds of a different feather. It's easy to pay your annual membership dues to organizations like those listed at the left, just so you can say you're a member. It's quite another thing to attend the annual convention and/or volunteer for regional committees.

Every year, the attendance at the GCSAA convention is amazing. There are about 15,000 golf courses in the U.S., and attendance at the annual convention exceeds 15,000—in stark contrast to low attendance at other national trade conventions, which we find incomprehensible.

For instance, there are more than 40,000 landscapers and lawn care companies in the nation and goodness knows how many captive, in-house groundsmen. Yet the Green Industry Expo attracts barely 4,000 each year.

If everyone working in the green industry took a hint from their golf course counterparts, we'd see the development of a much more professional industry very quickly.

Here's the key, people: make sure the organization you work for—including your own or someone else's—provides generous educational travel allowances. Many golf superintendents have a trip to the annual convention built into their contract.

As part of your continuing education and as you strive for ever more professionalism in your career, it's only right to expect your employer to pay for at least one annual educational trip. And in these days when intelligent, productive employees are in high demand, you can justifiably request such extras.

These days, employee education is a cost of doing business. In most industries, generally speaking, it's a "given"—as it should be in this industry.

So if you haven't got a formal agreement with your employer (either verbal or written) to attend at least one national convention every year, you're missing the boat. And if you are the owner yourself, you should have a healthy line item in your budget to send key employees to important national conventions.

Anything less would be an injustice to the green industry and—more importantly—to your own organization.