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# Contents

DECEMBER 2007 / ISSUE #12 / VOLUME 46



## SPECIAL REPORT

*Landscape Management* offers its exclusive comprehensive outlook, analyzing the insights, trends and issues affecting your business in the coming year



# 29

## Business

- 8 On the Record**  
The pace of change in the landscape business can challenge even the most astute owner.  
BY RON HALL
- 10 Best Practices**  
Documenting job conditions is a best practice every maintenance company should do.  
BY BRUCE WILSON
- 12 In the Know**  
Arborists get pest education; Problem Solver; Illinois rain sensor law; Legally Speaking; Landscape Awards; Sustainable landscape report
- 20 Employee handbooks**  
Developing a document that details company policies and procedures builds trust between employees and employer.  
BY RON HALL
- 22 Marketing to win in a down economy**  
5 suggestions to keep jobs coming and revenue growing even when everybody else is struggling.  
BY JEFFREY SCOTT

## Technology

- 56 InfoTech**  
The team that can have fun together is more equipped to overcome tough challenges.  
BY TYLER WHITAKER

## Design/Build

- 58 Project Portfolio**  
Pellettieri Associates balanced beauty and privacy for the owners of this residence

## Resources

- 64 Ad & Editorial Index**
- 66 Winners: Hatcher & Associates**  
Letting employees do their job so that he can do his — marketing the company.  
BY DANIEL G. JACOBS

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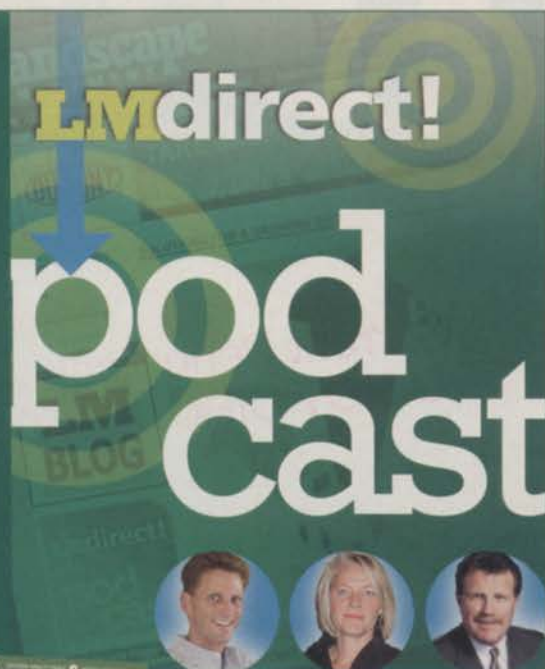
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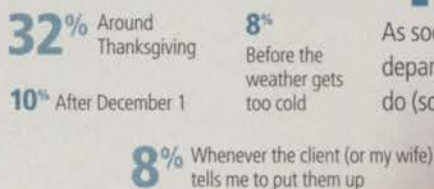
## » Special issue

*Landscape Management's* newest supplement *Livescapes* will publish six times next year. *Livescapes* targets landscape contractor professionals who perform installation services and purchase bedding plants, ornamentals and trees.



## » Readers respond

When do you put up holiday decorations? Here's what you said:



Want to weigh in? Our survey question changes every month and we publish the results here. Visit [www.landscapemanagement.net](http://www.landscapemanagement.net) to voice your opinion.

# 42%

As soon as the department stores do (so August)




» **Overheard** "Continue to evaluate, plan and execute in every aspect of our company. From the CEO all the way down to production, we want to develop our leadership as individuals first, and then help them achieve their career goals."

— A landscaper explaining how he will increase revenue next year, from *LM's* 2008 Outlook survey

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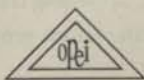
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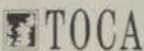
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## Fasten your seatbelts

BY RON HALL / Editor in Chief

**B**usiness as usual is an illusion. There's no such thing. Not anymore. Probably never.

I only have to look at my own profession, journalism, to be reminded of that.

Gone are the manual Royal typewriters and the rolls of copy paper that we fed into these clunky, key-sticking dinosaurs as we furiously pounded out each day's triumphs and tragedies in smoke-filled newspaper bullpens. Gone is the smoke. Gone is the bullpen. Cubicles rule these days. And the hair — its definitely going, going, gone.

From my seat anyway, change in the landscape business has been turtle-like compared to changes in communication. But the pace of change in the landscape business is suddenly brisk enough to challenge even the most astute owner or manager. And while I'm prattling on, I'll add one more obvious observation: Not all of this change is positive.

### Budgeting quandary

Our small editorial staff has spent the past several months seeking written reports from and talking to the owners and managers that we respect and feel run good operations. What we're hearing is that owners are taking sharp pencils to their budgets. Some owners are preparing two budgets, one of them being a "what-if" budget. What if the H-2B extension is not approved and labor becomes a bigger problem? What if the drought continues or worsens? What if home values continue to fall and homeowners go into a bigger funk?

"We've been working in an abnormal market for a couple of years," one owner of an eastern company told me several weeks ago. "There was so much work that we couldn't do it all. We're working a lot harder to get jobs. I think we're returning to a more normal market."

### The year of the price squeeze?

What's happening right now will affect our industry next season and beyond, not the least of which is the drumbeat of negative reports from the national media. That said, nobody knows exactly how much the landscape and lawn services industries will be affected by the glut of unsold houses, declining home values in important markets, tightening credit and the severe drought in some of the fastest-growing areas of the country.

Will there be more fierce competition for work as we roll into 2008? Low-balling? Price shopping by consumers? My guess is "yes" to all three.

But, there's good news, as well. Commercial construction and activity remains strong, and that segment of our customers still need and demand for professional landscape maintenance services. And regardless of economic conditions apartments, condos and HOAs have to keep up appearances.

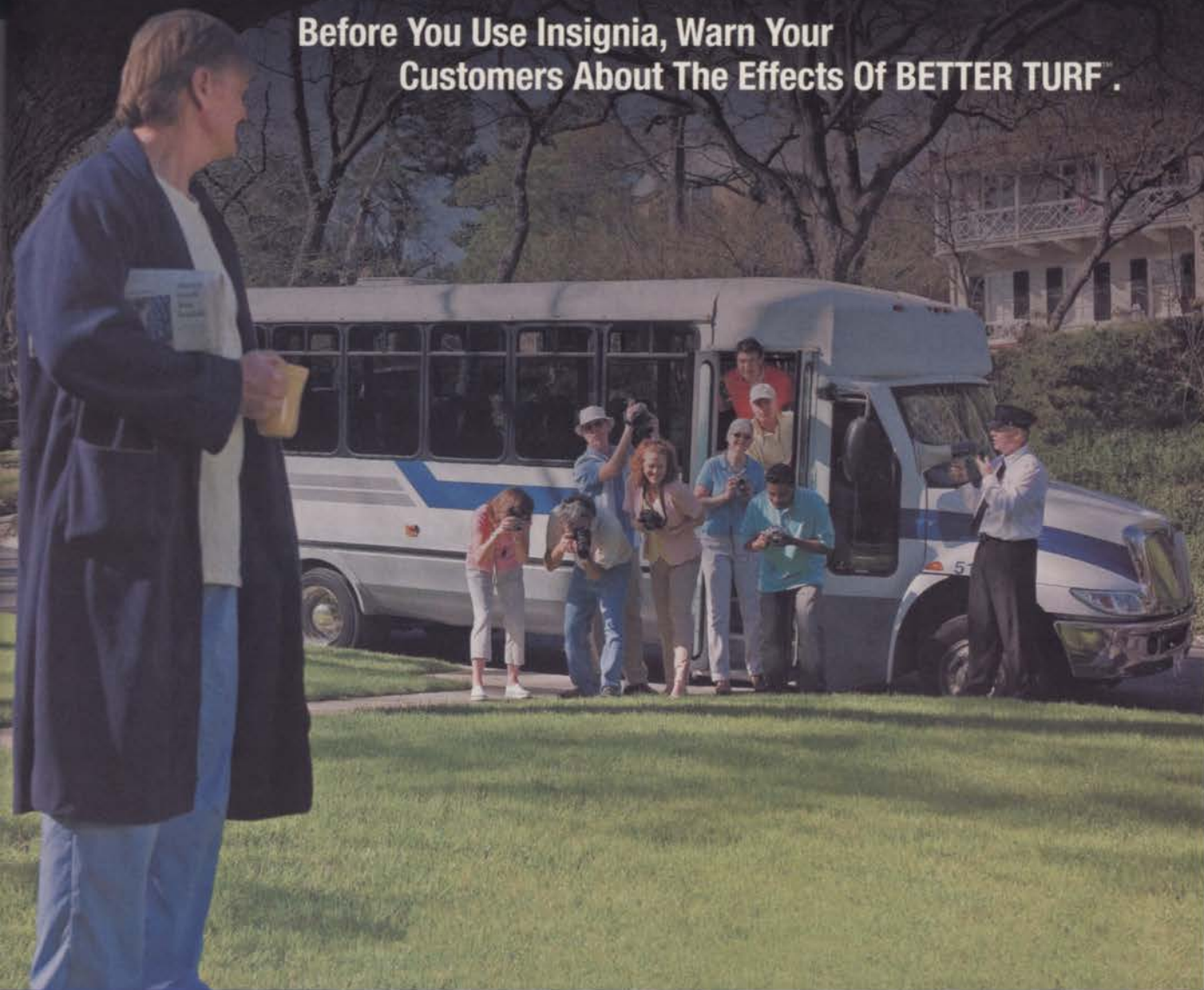
While we remain convinced our industry has years of growth ahead of it, start firing up your marketing and customer relations machines now. The approaching season will be a challenge.

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To make sure that these things happen put the policy in writing. You should have a job start-up procedure and an end-of-contract procedure.



## Documented evidence

BY BRUCE WILSON

**D**ocumenting job conditions is a best practice every maintenance company should do. I'm sure we all have stories where we wish our employees would have documented something that later came back to bite us.

Consider establishing policies in at least three key areas that become non-negotiable policies in your companies.

**1 New job start-up:** Whenever you start a new maintenance job take pictures. Look for specific things like unhealthy plants, missing plants, hazards, damage from previous maintenance practices and other important features of the property.

Having these start-up pictures helps you if a client becomes dissatisfied or the client contact changes. Often you inherit a property that has problems, and during negotiations the client says just clean it up gradually, and then they forget. Documentation reminds everyone of

conditions when you started, and it can demonstrate improvement.

Photos can help support your case when homeowners blame your company.

**2 At the end of a contract:** When your contract ends it is wise to conduct a final walk through, and get a client to agree to a final punch list. That, however, doesn't always happen.

Whether you do this or not, it's wise to document your work as you leave a job.

It's not uncommon for a new replacement contractor to get off to a slow start and start blaming you for things that he allowed to happen. The client may then withhold money from you to pay the other contractor to clean things up. Your documentation with pictures is an inexpensive way to guard against these types of disagreements.

**3 Damage to the landscape:** As time passes, the landscape may get damaged by public use, other contractors working on site, delivery trucks, and even acts of God.

As you know, memories fade as time goes by. Plants may freeze or be damaged by a storm, and the client chooses to do nothing about it. Later when the plants don't recover the client blames you for letting the landscape deteriorate. Again pictures can help prevent you from absorbing costs that aren't yours.

When there's damage, give them proposals to fix things at the time they happen so that you have further documentation that something happened. Even if they don't do the work, you have a record.

### Put the policy in writing

Make sure that these things happen by putting the policy in writing. Develop job start-up and an end-of-contract procedures. Documentation is an absolute must.

— The author is a partner with entrepreneur Tom Oyler in the Wilson-Oyler Group, which offers consulting services. Visit [www.wilson-oyler.com](http://www.wilson-oyler.com).



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# In the Know

BUSINESS NEWS YOU CAN USE

## Arborists, tree care pros receive up-to-date info to fight EAB, HWA

**K**ENNETT SQUARE, PA — Arborists and tree care professionals throughout the Midwest and the Appalachians are gearing up to fight the emerald ash borer (EAB) and the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA). These insects kill ash and hemlock trees, respectively. To help educate and better prepare professionals to combat these devastating pests, the fourth and final Invasive Pest Field Day training session was held at Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, PA, Nov. 13.

Hosted by Bayer Environmental Science and Arborjet, the Invasive Pest Field Day was a free, one-day event where professionals heard a series of informative lectures presented by local experts on the management of EAB and HWA. Topics included information on pest biology, management in natu-



ral settings, survey updates and current quarantine and compliance agreement information, the efficacy of insecticide treatments and building a tree care business on insect management. Attendees participated in hands-on demonstrations of the latest application techniques



The Pennsylvania field day was the final installment in the 4-part series and followed events at BayPointe Golf Club in West Bloomfield, MI, the Biltmore in Asheville, NC, and Pheasant Run Resort & Spa in St. Charles, IL. Each location attracted about 100 municipal arborists, city foresters, tree care professionals, state extension agents and university researchers interested in allaying environmental repercussions due to an eradicated tree population.



## Clendenin retires from Middleton

**ORLANDO, FL** — Greg Clendenin, president and CEO with Sunair Southeast Pest Holdings and Middleton Lawn & Pest Control, announced his plans to retire. Under Clendenin's leadership, Middleton has grown to be a network of 27 branch offices, serving more than 120,000 accounts in 30 Florida counties and been recognized for its strong performance and dedication to giving back to the communities in which it serves.

## JP Horizons sets Sales Jams plan

**CLEVELAND** — JP Horizons Inc. announced the dates and locations for its upcoming Sales Jams. Ariens/Gravelly sponsors the Jams: Jan. 3-4 in Tampa, FL; Feb. 12-13 in Phoenix; Feb. 21-22 in Atlanta; March 3-4 in Indianapolis; and March 10-11 in Providence, RI. Visit [www.jp horizons.com](http://www.jp horizons.com).

## Mid-Am expands education and training sessions

**CHICAGO** — The Mid-America Horticultural Trade Show is now offering more than 130 hours of educational sessions and training Jan. 15-18 at Chicago's Lakeside Center in McCormick Place. "Mid-Am recognizes education is essential to the growth of both the industry and the individual horticulture professional," said Mid-Am President Randy Jaspersen. "Mid-Am provides a perfect opportunity for green industry professionals to advance their careers and improve skills."

[CLIPPINGS]



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**Problem** The autumn display has been removed from the containers. Our client, who manages an upscale resort, wanted a "winter holiday display" installation.



**Solution**

Containers in the winter can be a real focal point in the landscape. If you're not going to put anything in the containers over the winter then remove and store them. Looking at empty containers all season is unappealing.

If the containers cannot be moved then at least cover the surface of the container with large river rock or some other non-combustible materials to avoid any potential fire situations. Covering the soil will help stop it from splashing on to the surrounding surface.

The next level depends upon your design skill. You could fill the container with plants. A specimen boxwood surrounded by dianthus will be easy to maintain and in milder climates bloom



all winter long. For those of you with high design skills, you can create

amazing "winter arrangements" using a wide assortment of cut evergreen, berries and painted or decorated branches. These types of installations deliver the "wow" impact on a site. A word of caution, these types of displays can be very time intensive and material consuming. Make sure you have accurately budgeted and priced these containers.

Every day you see horticultural problems. Sometimes the solution is obvious, but others are much more difficult to solve. Brickman Group Senior Horticulture Specialist H. Bruce Hellerick tackles these issues each month in Problem Solver. He can be reached at [Hellerick@BrickmanGroup.com](mailto:Hellerick@BrickmanGroup.com)







## Illinois law requires rain sensors

**OAK BROOK, IL** — Through the efforts of the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association (ILCA), rain sensor legislation, which will save millions of gallons of water, has been signed into law in Illinois, effective January 2009.

This legislation will benefit property owners through water cost savings, less water will be drawn from aquifers and lakes, and plants will have better survival by avoiding overwatering.

Rain Sensor legislation (S. 730) impacts newly installed irrigation systems for both commercial and residential users. Excluded are irrigation systems on golf courses and agricultural lands.

Signed into law by Governor Rod Blagojevich, the new law requires all automatic sprinkler systems in Illinois to have technology that interrupts operation when there is sufficient soil moisture or rainfall.

The installation of inexpensive rain sensors detect that automatic sprinkler systems do not need to operate when it is raining or immediately after a storm.

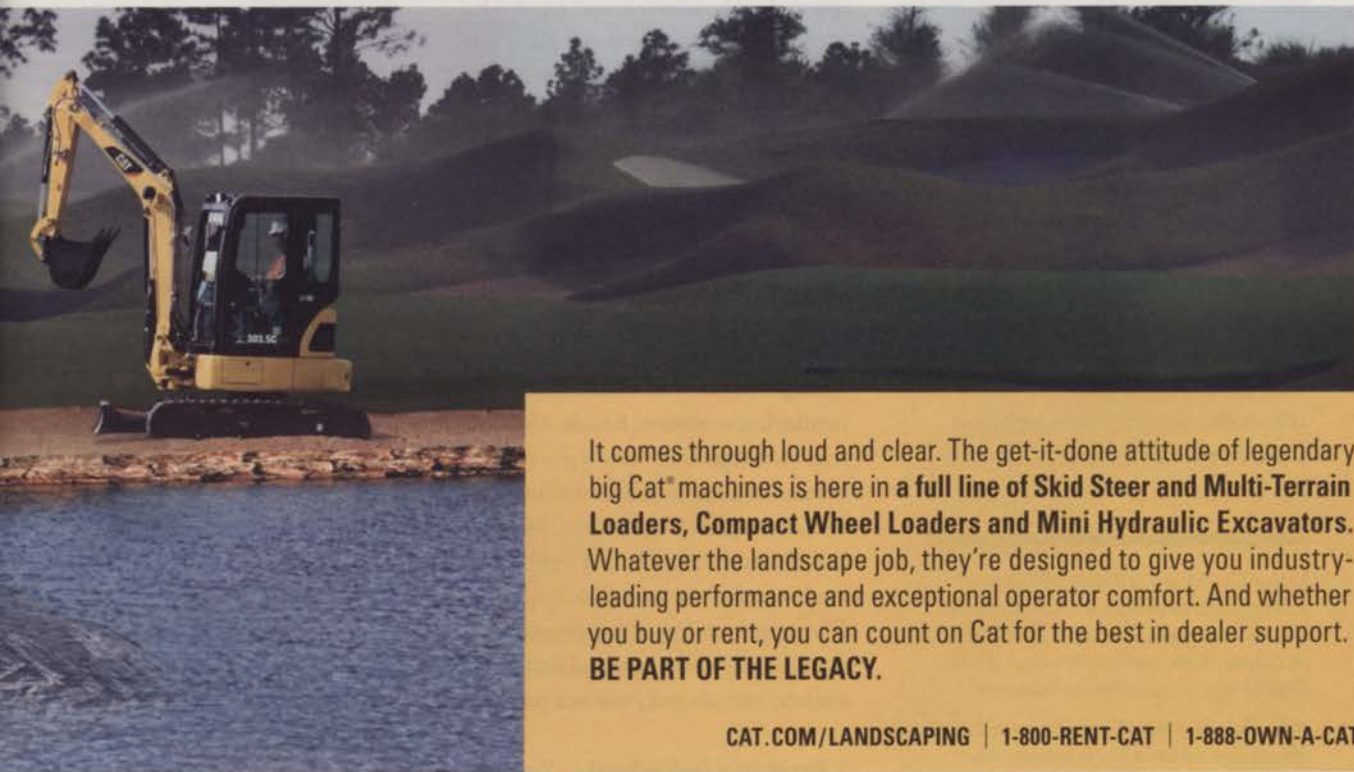
Introduced by ILCA, its lobbyists Dave Manning and Tom Walsh, helped Illinois lawmakers understand the enormous importance and benefit of this bill. This is one example of ILCA's legislation-in-action policy serving as both steward of the environment and consumer issues.

## Wheelbarrow art at GIE+EXPO

**NEW PRAGUE, MN** — Project EverGreen (PE) enlisted 14 members of the Green Industry to create an attention-getting display at the recent Green Industry & Equipment Expo in Louisville, KY.

"Our challenge to them was to convert an everyday tool — in this case a wheelbarrow — into a unique piece of art," said Den Gardner, PE executive director. "The result was innovation beyond anything I could have realized."

Using child-size wheelbarrows donated by John Deere, the firms created entries ranging from abstract "sculpture" to innovative presentations of how they work to enhance green space at work and play. The exercise raised more than \$10,000 to support PE initiatives.



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# In the Know

## LEGALLY Speaking



BY KENNETH D. MORRIS, ESQ., L.L.C.

**Q** My business has a fairly common name, A-1 Lawn Care. How do I protect my name from being used by others?

**A** You should pick your name after having your counsel conduct a full name search (which should include not just the Secretary of State's office, but a common law and federal search) to make sure it is available. In many cases you may be able to have a computer-based company search the availability of your name for state incorporation purposes, but that does not necessarily mean it's clear to register federally as a trademark. And once you select a name for incorporation, you will not want to have to pick another name as a trademark because of a conflict in using the name you first selected. Assuming the name is available both for incorporation purposes and trademark filing purposes, you should secure a federal trademark registration with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office's Web site (<http://www.uspto.gov>) is also an excellent source for information and filing aids.

Kenneth D. Morris, a Philadelphia-based attorney with more than 30 years corporate and law firm experience, offers information on industry legal issues in each issue of LM. Contact him via [www.kenmorrislaw.com](http://www.kenmorrislaw.com).

**Note:** The above should not be interpreted as offering legal advice in any jurisdiction where such practice is not authorized. Engage competent counsel familiar with your jurisdiction when legal issues arise.



**VERNON HILLS, IL** — Going natural at a Winnetka residence, renovating an overgrown Evanston estate and creatively managing the private and common spaces for a Northfield Town Home Development delivered three Environmental Improvement Awards from the national Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) to Vernon Hills, IL-based James Martin Associates Inc.

"Individualizing outdoor living spaces for the lifestyle and needs of each homeowner are the goals of our company," said vice-president and general manager Tom Bolas. "Creating an enviable site takes diligence and hard work. It's an honor to be recognized by our industry peers for our commitment to enriching people's lives through beautiful landscapes."

### 1. Residential Landscape

**Management** — The Grand Environmental Improvement Residential Landscape Management Award given for a Winnetka home involved the homeowner's request to go natural. Healthy lush lawns are the result of fertilizer made of natural minerals and organics. Compost from leaves and trimmings are used as mulch among the plantings, perennials, annuals and even as a path.

**2. Residential Design/Build** — Renovation of an overgrown yard, a garden blocking views of nearby Lake Michigan and play areas for visiting grandchildren,

brought a Distinction Environmental Improvement Residential Design/Build Award to an Evanston residence.



Removal of all plant material allowed the James Martin design team to start with a clean pallet. The new garden retains a formal feel and design with a centered trickling fountain, surrounded by colorful perennial astilbe with paths of bluestone chips bordered by flagstone curbing and Eden stone steps.

**3. Commercial Landscape Management** — Northfield's Landmark Town Home Development brought a national Distinction Environmental Improvement Commercial Landscape Management Award to James Martin Associates, Inc.

Ingenuity to maintain a site with common and private areas for the 25 residences involves various elevations and carrying in of all plant material by hand. The grand waterfall, dominating the entrance with its plant material of annabel hydrangea, spirea, hosta, granite boulders and timber retaining walls are carefully maintained. Colorful annuals as new guinea impatiens, blue salvia and chrysanthemums are rotated throughout the season.





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# New report brings sustainable landscape mainstream

**AUSTIN, TX** — A new report will help usher sustainable landscape design into mainstream use. Featuring over 200 recommendations for designing and building sustainable landscapes, the report is part of the Sustainable Sites Initiative, a partnership between the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center at the University of Texas at Austin and the United States Botanic Garden to create voluntary guidelines and a rating system for sustainable landscape design. The report is available at [www.sustainable-sites.org](http://www.sustainable-sites.org).

"We want to identify the gold standards in sustainable landscape design and marry them to a practical, real-world approach so that designers, planners, builders and developers can utilize them," said Nancy Somerville, executive vice president and CEO of ASLA. "This report is an important step to bring sustainable landscape practices into widespread use."

The Preliminary Report on Standards and Guidelines represents thousands of hours of work in the past year by 32 experts in fields ranging from design and construction to soils, hydrology, and

public health. The findings examine the positive environmental impact sustainable landscapes offer. The preliminary report also details practices that degrade landscapes and should be avoided, as well as techniques for designing landscapes that benefit the environment.

"The truly exciting thing about sustainable landscapes is that they actually help us confront some of the most serious environmental problems the world is facing now, including climate change," said Susan Rieff, Executive Director of the Wildflower Center. "Plants absorb carbon dioxide — a greenhouse gas and a major cause of global warming — from the air and soils can capture it and hold it. Native grasses may be even more effective in sequestering carbon than trees. This can help mitigate climate change."

A primary purpose of releasing this preliminary work is to solicit feedback, comments and additional information from professionals and other stakeholders who can contribute to knowledge about ways to achieve sustainable landscapes. Interested persons can join this review process at [www.sustainable-sites.org](http://www.sustainable-sites.org). The review period lasts 45 days and comments are due by January 11, 2008.



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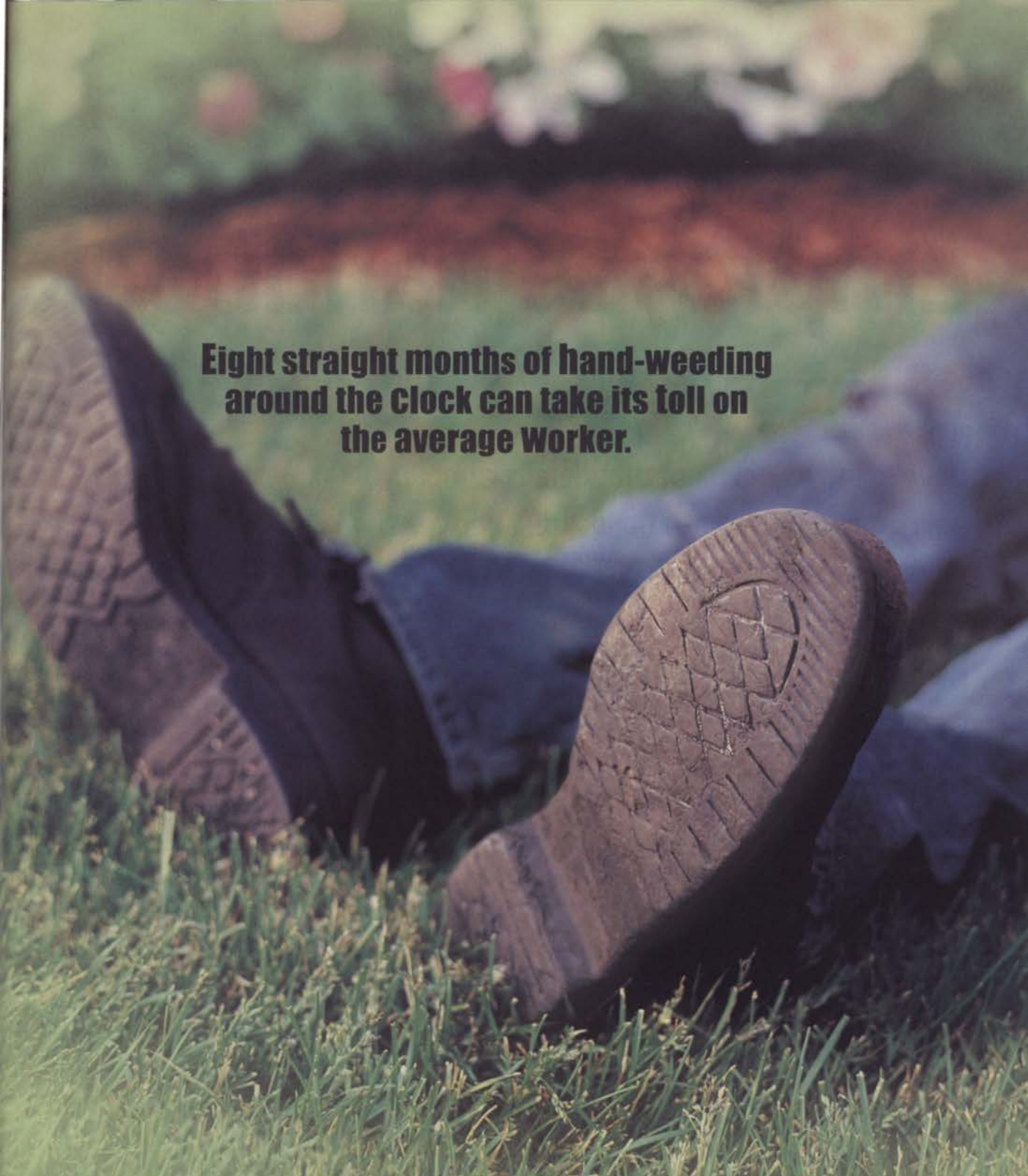


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# Employee handbook

## — *create it and use it*

Developing a document that details company policies and procedures builds trust between employees and employer **BY RON HALL / Editor in Chief**

**D**oes your company have an employee handbook or policy and procedure manual?

If it doesn't, there are compelling reasons why it should, regardless of the number of employees you have, says Donna Huss, human resources director for the Engledow Group, Carmel, IN.

Huss addressed more than 30 landscape and lawn service owners and managers Aug. 25 during a tour of the Engledow headquarters just outside Indianapolis. As part of that afternoon-long tour, she presented an overview of her company's employee handbooks (English and Spanish versions) and told the guests why she feels a well-thought-out, employee handbook is vital.

In the broadest sense, a handbook spells out company policies and procedures — what is expected of employees and what employees can expect from the company, Huss says.

While there are many resources available to help you put together an handbook, including model copies available from most professional trade associations, the

outline of almost all employee handbooks covers the same topics, with modifications to fit particular company situations.

In order, these are:

- ▶ An employee acknowledgement form
- ▶ An introduction to the handbook
- ▶ An Equal Opportunity statement
- ▶ A section on general policies including: personal information, attendance, use of company property, confidentiality, dress code, safety and accident rules, substance abuse, sexual harassment, smoking, performance reviews and employment categories.
- ▶ A section on compensation and benefits that includes: payroll, work hours and reporting, holidays, vacation, sick leave, family and medical leave, maternity leave, funeral leave, jury duty, military service, group insurance benefits, short-term disability, continuation of medical/COBRA, workers' compensation, retirement plans, tuition assistance, employee assistance program and other benefits.

Huss revises the Engledow hand-

book every year to reflect changes within the company. The revised edition is then given to the company attorney for review.

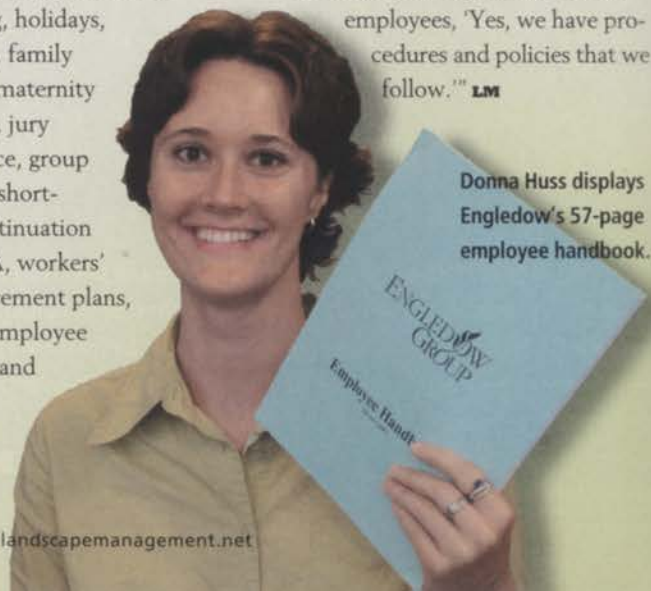
Supervisors and managers must read the handbook because the company wants to do all it can to ensure its policies and procedures are followed in the field, as well. "It needs to accurately reflect how you are operating your business," she told the guests, all of whom were participating in PLANET's Speciality Symposium.

"I try to make it (the handbook) as accessible as I can. It is in just about every room in the building here," she says.

Each new hire is provided a copy, is strongly encouraged to read it and must sign off that he/she received it.

"The handbook explains company policies, and employees then know what the policies are. I think it promotes a lot of trust between employees and the employer," Huss says. "It tells employees, 'Yes, we have procedures and policies that we follow.'" **LM**

Donna Huss displays Engledow's 57-page employee handbook.



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Circle 113

# Marketing to win in a **down economy**

Follow these five suggestions to keep jobs coming and your revenue growing even when everybody else is struggling

BY JEFFREY SCOTT

**E**ffective marketing can be a huge positive for a landscape or lawn care company during a stagnant or down economy. It can spell the difference between merely surviving until conditions improve or continuing to grow and generate profits, albeit perhaps at a slower rate than during a boom economy. Here are five key marketing processes you need to master:

» **1 Generate more leads.** Create a marketing calendar, and do at least one marketing exercise each month. Marketing is like a recipe and is most effective when you mix "ingredients." Pick three to six things you will do, including direct mail, which can be very cost effective.

Decide who you're going to market to, such as property owners that mirror your most profitable customers, professionals in related businesses, other influencers within the markets you service and, of course, existing clients. Narrowly define your target groups to maximize returns on your marketing spend.

Identify your market audience by where they live. Imagine a bullseye. Where is the center of your target market? Where is the middle ring of prospects? Where is the outer ring? The center of your target is your ideal client. For example, your target center may be a specific neighborhood, town or home value. The middle level might be the directly adjacent town, or people in the middle home value range. The outer level might be everyone else in an hour's driving distance.

Figure out and emphasize what makes your firm special? Do you have a unique product? Unique service? Unique skill? Unique equipment? (e.g.

*continued on page 24*







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## Anatomy of a business slowdown

House values are peaking and falling. Homeowner's perceived and real wealth falls when their home value falls.

With gas prices and other prices rising, homeowners become cautious with their spending.

Fewer people are making purchasing decisions, and when they do, they may compromise on quality, frequency or size of their projects.

Contractors are less busy and return phone calls more easily, so the buyer now gets multiple responses to their inquiries — including from new or desperate contractors who bid projects at or below break-even. The buyer now becomes better informed and gets lower pricing (a double whammy).

All this leads to lower revenue and sometimes lower margins. One of the problems with gearing up your company is that you now have a certain overhead to cover and if revenues drop even 10%, you can lose a big chunk of your profits.

The first response is to get overhead down. This is good, but it will only help you so far. Yes, you should be watching your labor more tightly than ever . . . but the new skill you really need to learn is "marketing."

—JS

*continued from page 22*

do you sell refrigerators to Eskimos? Or do you sell mini fridges to Eskimo kids going to college? )

Create a unique message that stands out, based on the needs of the people in your target area. Also base it on what makes you special? (e.g. is your message 'we sell high quality small fridges?' or is it 'we keep college kids stocked with food so they study harder?')

Pick the different ways you will get the message out. Direct mail is always a good approach. Combine it with community projects in your target towns. Network with key influencers in your town and letters to the different groups who need to hear from you.

Develop a communication strategy for speaking with your current clients, to create leads and referrals. Reach out to them at least quarterly with some type of professional message.

Make sure your image is well branded. Choose a logo and company color that stand out, and make sure your stationary, trucks, uniforms and company forms all represent this branded image. Create a Web site that reflects everything you have created above.

» **2 Turbocharge your closings.** Maximize your conversions of leads into sales by making your marketing message clear, including where you work, what you specialize in and at what price level you operate.

Don't list or advertise specific prices; let the quality of your marketing materials speak to the price levels you're selling at.

Start a conversation with prospects prior to setting up an appointment. Find out their needs, gauge their seriousness, the scope of their project, and most importantly, if they're price shopping. Are your sales people skilled at separating price shoppers from serious prospects?

Some contractors charge for the first appointment. They feel that money, even small amounts, filters out tire kickers.

Great images in your marketing materials pique consumers' interest. Use these pictures on your Web site, in your brochures and portfolios. Likewise, include reference lists, letters from customers and, on your Web site, videos and audio recording of happy customers.

In regards to person-to-person meetings with prospects, consider sending a brief but nicely written letter after setting up the appointment. And always call before the appointment. It sets up positive expectations and, at worst, could save you a wasted trip if the prospect has forgotten or isn't available. The qualifying process is a series of interactions and impressions.

While books have been written about sales and the sales process, keep the following simple suggestions in mind.

Use the "show don't tell" process. If you're selling good service, then give good service yourself. If you're selling quality, then show quality during your sales appointments (pictures of your work, in a quality binder, on a video compact disc or in a PowerPoint presentation), and explain what you did to ensure the quality of what you built. Make sure your clothing is clean, your vehicle is presentable and your demeanor is polite, pleasant and helpful.

Always follow up after your sales presentations. Remind prospects of how your services or products will make their lives more pleasant, more beautiful and perhaps even more exciting.

» **3 Offer more, sell more.** Long-term customers can be your most profitable customers.

They take on critical importance to your continuing success in a down economy.

*continued on page 26*

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*continued from page 24*

Keep them loyal by spending more time with them and giving them more of your company's time.

Consider expanding your line of products and services. Keep your eyes open to new service and product opportunities. Yes, you may have to hire sales people on commission to get these ideas up and running, and you may have to use subcontractors to provide the service. That's ok if your plan is solid.

On a more basic level, when the economy sags, people tighten their purse strings and often put off bigger purchases. Even so, they still want to maintain what they have, meaning that renovations and maintenance take on a larger importance with them. If you're not offering these types of services, start by selling seasonal services, then expand to monthly and weekly services. You can then expand by adding other services, such as property cleanups, tree care and garden bed service. And finally, having an account manager sophisticated enough to sell enhancements will raise your revenue greatly, and do so in a stable manner.

**» 4 Get your margin.** Besides good estimating and efficient production, let's look at this from the marketing end. To get a higher price, you need to be worth more. This involves:

- ▶ delivering a service product that's in high demand but low supply,
- ▶ showing that you are worth more,
- ▶ building trust,
- ▶ asking for more,
- ▶ reminding clients you're worth more and
- ▶ understanding the products and services with the highest profit margin, then selling more of that.

The best way to do this is finding and hiring people with exceptional tal-

ent. They will figure out and implement systems and services that are so efficient or different that competitors will have a difficult time duplicating them.

You can also achieve this by packaging your products and services so your clients have to do less work, less thinking and make fewer decisions. Packaging means selling a result and not a package of hours and not a package of separate tasks. For example, instead of selling an irrigation opening and closing, I would propose a "well-watered lawn," including a program to maintain the system. This costs more of course, and it may not be a fit for many customers. Because of its added convenience, it will appeal to some customers. Give them the opportunity.

And, here's a quick note on asking for more money, which is mostly a question of confidence in the value of the services you provide. Something interesting happens here. At lower price points you have to show value first and then you can ask for more money. But as you go up the price points, you get to ask for more money, and it becomes automatically implied that your time and services are worth more. As you build trust, you get to raise your price.

You really can't talk about pricing (i.e. money) intelligently until you know your costs, which is directly tied to accurate estimating, job costing and labor tracking. You need to know, by product and service, where you make your money. Once you do, you can focus your marketing and sales on pushing these items.

## When the economy sags, people tighten their purse strings and often put off bigger purchases.

**» 5 Creating referrals.** There are three groups of people who give you referrals — clients, professionals who hire you or hand you work and influencers who can recommend you. Here are four quick tips on building referrals:

- ▶ Sell your customers ongoing work so you have a reason to stay in front of them and keep your relationship with them up to date. This is a great strategy because your clients in effect pay for you to market to them, Caveat: you had better have consistent processes and well trained people, because you will live and die by your last customer contact.
- ▶ Give surprising customer service, in addition, of course, to doing the basics right. Surprising service is one of those little extras that you can provide often at little cost to you in time or effort. It will cause customers to talk about you at cocktail parties.
- ▶ Use direct mail to stay in touch with all three of the referrers I mentioned above. Mail them things or information they can use and not just toss in the basket. This might include a newsletter, small gift certificates or copies of articles.
- ▶ Ask for referrals/business, and keep asking. Otherwise your clients may assume you don't need the business. When you get referrals, thank the referrers. It's shows them that you appreciate their efforts. **LM**

— Jeffrey Scott is co-owner of Glen Gate Pool & Property. He assists Green Industry companies on captivating clients, building their brands and growing their businesses.

Email him at [Jeff@jeffreyscottbiz.com](mailto:Jeff@jeffreyscottbiz.com).

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**30** In spite of it all,  
sales to continue rising

**34** LANDSCAPE

Landscape company owners forecast continued growth in the face of the most daunting and varied array of challenges in a decade

**46** LAWN CARE

With possible tough times ahead, take control of what you can to cut costs, improve customer service and increase profits in 2008

**51** IRRIGATION

Owners look to more aggressive marketing and stronger education to prosper in the slower economy

# OUTLOOK

## 2008

# In spite of it all, sales to continue

# rising

You express a cautious optimism for '08. Despite sour economic news most say prospects for Green Industry remain 'healthy'

BY RON HALL / Editor in Chief

**IN** September and October we polled readers with our annual "Outlook" survey. We were gratified when 487 of you, our readers, responded to our online survey. Thank you. The number and quality of your responses provide an adequate sampling for an accurate snapshot of the industry as it is now and of your perceptions heading into the 2008 season.

Were we surprised by the results? Yes, we were. A bit anyway.

In spite of the national media's tom-tom beat of depressing news and economic forecasts since August — the sub-prime lending fiasco, falling home prices, stalled home building activity, severe drought in the Southeast and West — you remain surprisingly optimistic.

For example, 78% of you told us you expect sales to increase in 2008. Another 18% expect sales to remain the same and only 4% of respondents expect sales to drop in '08. If these projections play out, this would be better than this past season when 64% said sales improved in from '06 to '07, and 15% said sales decreased from '06 to '07.

You validated your optimism by telling us that, for the most part, you feel the markets where you offer services remain strong with 64% describing your markets as "healthy." Only 8% of you responded "depressed" and another 13% say the Green Industry markets are stagnant where you do business.

That's a reflection of the regional nature of the North American professional landscape and lawn service industry. In fact, apart from agriculture, the Green Industry is one of North America's most regional industries due to obvious differences in climate and geography. Even so, markets sharing similar climates and located in the same region of the country often display big differences in vitality and opportunity. For example, the challenges and prospects for landscape operators in southeast Michigan, where the depressed automobile industry casts a chill over every segment of that region's economy, are certainly different than, say,

*continued on page 32*

## LOOKING BACKWARD AND FORWARD

How did your 2007 sales compare with those of 2006?

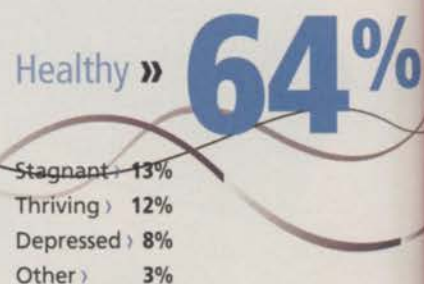


How do you think 2008 sales will compare with this year?



## TAKING THE GREEN INDUSTRY PULSE

How would you describe the Green Industry in your area?







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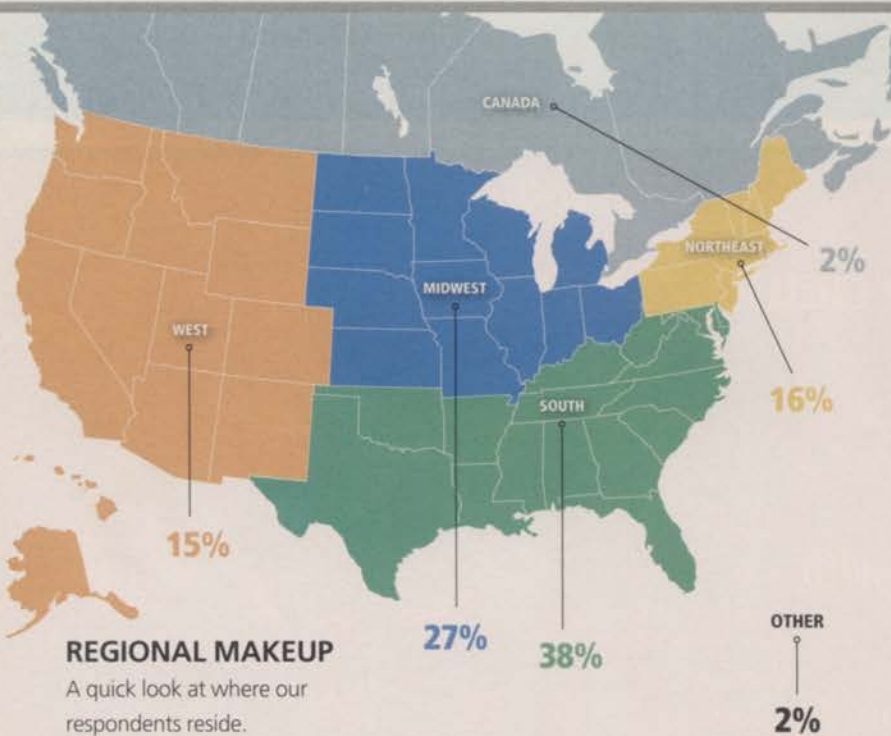
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continued from page 30

Indianapolis or Milwaukee, with their more diversified economies.

Likewise, different service segments of our industry — landscaping (mowing/maintenance), irrigation, chemical lawn care — take on greater or lesser importance depending upon economic conditions and the public's changing perceptions and desires. For the sake of simplicity we break the industry's contracted services into maintenance, design/build and lawn care. We fit services such as design/build, snow/ice management, and property enhancements into the broader category of landscape maintenance.

This special "Outlook" report contains results of our proprietary annual survey along with the valuable opinions and thoughts of people just like you, knowledgeable landscape and lawn service business owners and managers. **LM**



**HOW DO YOU PLAN TO INCREASE REVENUE NEXT YEAR?**

“I am actually cutting some of the services we offer to simplify and stop being the all-things-to-all-people landscape company.”

— PRESIDENT/OWNER OF A LANDSCAPING COMPANY

“Bigger headquarters, more central location and bigger jobs where the crew spends all day.”

— PETER M. SCHEPIS, THE GREENWOOD GROUP, NEW MELLE, MO

“We plan to trim employees and clients that are not adding value. I also plan to pick up more profitable work in 2008.”

— ANDY BATCHELLER, OWNER, HANDY ANDY OUTDOORS, CHAMBLEE, GA

“Bust more a\*\*.”

— RICK SPRING, SPRINGSCAPES, WOODSTOCK, GA

**FUEL BURN**

**77%**

Percentage of readers who say they are very concerned about higher energy/fuel prices in the coming year — by far the most concerning issue they will face

**LESS CAUSE FOR WORRY**

**31%**

Percentage of survey respondents who say they are concerned about the growing housing slump in the United States

“Target baby boom niche needs Many baby boomers selling to downsized homes (and they) need to improve current home for sale. Many baby boomers are not young enough or healthy enough to fulfill desired landscape upgrades. Stay out of the cut-throat commercial bidding projects.”

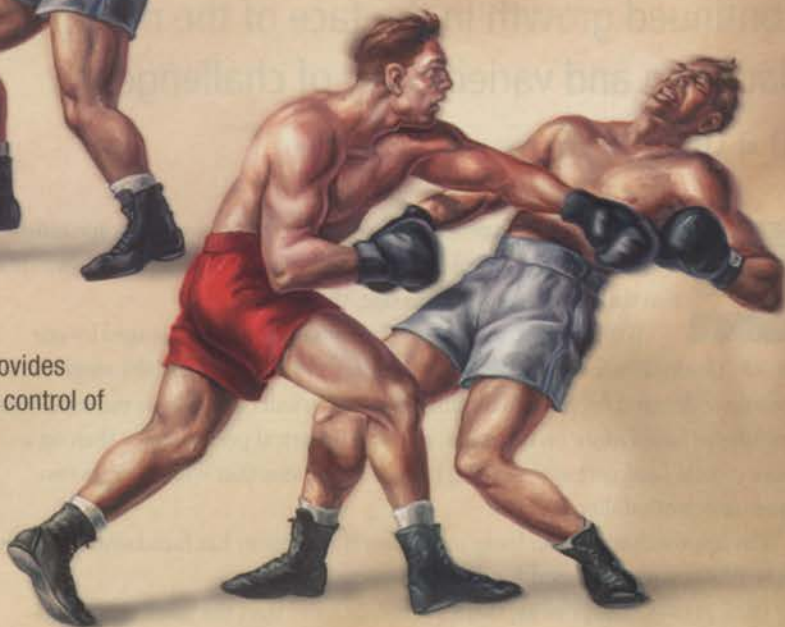
— JIM SMITH, RED MAPLE LAND SERVICES

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Harmony in Growth

# LANDSCAPE

## MAINTENANCE & DESIGN/BUILD

Landscape company owners forecast continued growth in the face of the most daunting and varied array of challenges in a decade

BY RON HALL / Editor in Chief

**E**xperienced landscape business owners say that the landscape industry is usually the last to feel the brunt of an economic slowdown. It's also the last to recover from one, they say.

If that's the case, is the industry's optimism, as gauged by our recent "Outlook" survey, based on the industry's perception that the surge in consumer demand for its services this past decade will continue? Is the industry's confidence based more on its recent, positive historical performance than on a more critical (and perhaps realistic) read of conditions that will affect its revenues and profitability in 2008?

The approaching season looks unlike any the industry has faced since the very early 1990s, a rough period for the U.S. economy.

With 2008 just days away, there's certainly more than the usual share negative economic news being generated to go around. Daily media reports are clearly rattling consumers' confidence. Who can ignore the barrage of news focused on the subprime mortgage crisis, tightening credit, falling home values, rising energy costs, stalled immigration reform and the continuing erosion of manufacturing?

In spite of this, however, the U.S. economy keeps chugging along with relatively low unemployment, inflation under control (for the time being) and robust consumer spending, as this holiday shopping season demonstrates once again.

### Fueling concern

What are the top industry concerns as we close out 2007?

"Right now it appears that fuel prices could make the top of the list," says Bret Achtenhagen of Bret Achtenhagen's Seasonal Services LTD, Eagle, WI. "Immigration reform, the election, the housing market are other challenges that we're watching." In other words, as conditions change, he will adapt.

"We do not spend a lot of time dwelling on circumstances we can't control," he adds. "We set financial and business goals and monitor them closely. If an outside force exerts pressure on us we are able to pinpoint the problem and adjust accordingly."



### GETTING THE WORD OUT

How do you plan to change your advertising budget?



### EYE ON REVENUE

How did '07 revenues compare to '06?

64% of contractors reported a better 2007 than 2006. 21% reported flat revenues and 15% had decreased revenue.



### OUTPACING THE COMPETITION

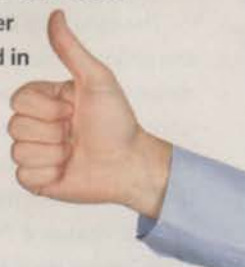
You must be feeling good about your ability to perform. Only 1 in 4 (23%) are very concerned about their competition





## WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS FOR 2008?

77% expect a better 2008 than they had in 2007; 19% expect flat revenues and 4% expect to lose money this year



Higher energy/fuel costs are top of mind for most of you, it turns out. In our mid-autumn survey 77% of you said that you're "very concerned" with these costs. They affect everything from gas and diesel for trucks and power equipment to the cost of fertilizer.

"Fuel costs continue to climb along with products produced through fuel such as fertilizer and PVC products. These costs will eventually be passed on to the end user or recipient of the service," says Ernie Pyle of Heaviland Enterprises, Vista, CA. To offset these higher fuel costs and also to add in its conservation efforts, Heaviland managers now drive Ford Rangers rather than F150s.

"Managing our costs has been the most challenging aspect of managing our business and one of our greatest challenges," says Bob Grover, CLP, CLT, president of Pacific Landscape Maintenance, Hillsboro, OR. "In addition to fuel, many of our costs including fertilizers, job waste disposal and labor continue to rise significantly faster than the rate of inflation.

"We are able to absorb these costs. Having to pass these cost increases on to our customers in a competitive environment is always dicey."

Even so, Grover says his company is budgeting 15% growth for 2008, but will keep a sharp eye on debt and be ready to make "alternate plans" depending upon the seriousness of the labor situation come spring.

Terry Delaney, owner of AAA Lawns Inc., Fayetteville, AR, isn't happy with



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the higher costs of doing business either, but he doesn't see them as slowing the industry's or his company's growth as he budgets for his next sales plateau of \$1.5 million annually. "Everybody's paying the same amount for gas and just about everything else, so it's affecting all of us the same," he says.

Cash flow is almost as large a concern as rising costs, you tell us. More than 60% answered that cash flow is a major concern heading into 2008.

Mike McShane, owner and president of Plantique, Allentown, PA, has been in the landscape business long enough (almost 30 years) to have seen his share of economic highs and lows, and enough of the present situation in eastern Pennsylvania to persuade him to put off major capital outlays, at least temporarily.

"If the work is thin and the debt burden is high it's hard to sleep at night," he admits. "We're responsible to too many people and their families for me to be too much of a risk taker," he says.

Cash flow concerns aren't just affecting small business, of course. Consumers are feeling it too, the most obvious example being the rising tide of home foreclosures nationwide. Also, as home values stagnate or fall and interest rates rise, refinancing options dwindle. Consumers become more cautious about investing in their homes and properties. This has caused home equity borrowing to slow substantially, further reducing demand for mid-level landscape design/build projects. The reverse phenomenon is also at work, thankfully, say readers.

"Homeowners in our market are doing more fix-up projects and renovations," says McShane. "They want more functional landscaping and less of the glitz."

Admittedly, living and working in northern Ohio with its continuing loss of manufacturing colors our editorial staff's perceptions of 2008's potential, so we're more cautious than the industry as a whole. Too cautious?

### 2008 sales

Yes, in general, you tell us that in spite of this coming season's well-publicized challenges you expect to keep growing. More than three quarters of the landscape and lawn service pros (78%) responding to our October survey said they expect to increase sales in 2008. By comparison, a fewer number 65% managed higher sales in 2007 compared to 2006.

(Because 85% of the respondents answering this question describe their titles as either company owners or presidents, we feel it's an accurate gauge of industry sentiment.)

Do you expect growth to match the robust pace that many of you established through most of the past decade?

Your answer is "no."

Growth, even more modest increases, however, in this uncertain economy speaks well of consumers' acceptance and continuing need for professional landscape services, we feel. Of course, this growth is never uniform across the United States, and that will be more evident this coming season.

"Our market for landscape maintenance is growing but at a slow rate," says Todd Dilley, president of 15-year-old

Outdoor Environments Inc., one of the largest locally owned landscape companies in Minnesota's Twin Cities. "The

Terry Delaney says higher fuel prices affect everybody in the industry similarly.

## H-2B situation remains troubling

The industry's growth this past decade has been fueled in large part on a reliable, seasonal flow of foreign-born guest workers, mostly from Mexico and Central America.

These workers typically earn \$8.50 to \$10 an hour, depending upon regional labor markets, and put in approximately 50 hours a week on clients' properties. Most arrive to work in the United States in early spring and return to their homes in November or early December.

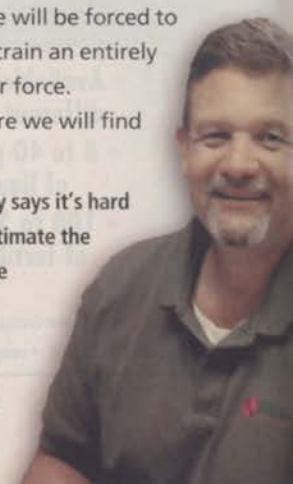
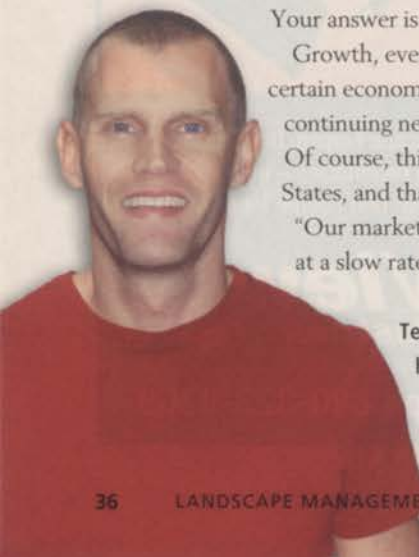
The failure of Congress to expand this program from the federally mandated of 66,000 guest worker visas, is threatening the industry's growth, many owners are telling us. Although the industry sees the expansion of H-2B visas as a "small business issue," some legislators in Congress, responding to pressure from constituents, seem intent on lumping it into the larger emotionally charged immigration issue.

Approaching 2008 the availability (and cost) of front-line employees is a concern that Todd E. Dilley, president of 15-year-old Outdoor Environments serving Minnesota's Twin Cities, shares many others.

"The biggest challenge for next season will be labor and controlling labor costs," says Dilley. "The H-2B issue is affecting our whole industry. If we are deprived of this labor resource we will be forced to hire and train an entirely new labor force.

"Where we will find

Todd Dilley says it's hard to over-estimate the importance of H-2B.



these workers and how to control the costs of wages and training will be a tremendous challenge for our market and the entire industry," he says.

"The whole immigrant labor instability is a huge concern," adds Pacific Landscape Management's Bob Grove. "From the Social Security 'no-match' letter to the elimination of the returning H-2B visa exemption, we fear we may not be able to staff the positions we need next season and beyond. Labor is going to be difficult to find and the cost will likely rise dramatically."

*Editor's note: As this was being written several organizations, including the Professional Landcare Network, the American Nursery and Landscape Association and Save Small Business, were lobbying U.S. legislators to solve the H-2B and larger immigration stalemates, RH.*

economy is causing property managers to be more careful with their enhancement dollars and maintenance budgets.

"New commercial building in our market continues but at a slower pace than the last 10 years," he adds. The combination of these two factors means that available business continues to grow but that the service providers are forced to be increasingly innovative in providing value adds to existing services and competitive in their pricing."

The highly regional nature of the industry is reflected in the results of our survey with 65% of you describing your markets as "healthy," 14% saying yours are "stagnant" and 8% responding that you are providing services in "depressed" markets.

"Growth in the southern California market appears to be slowing down with some landscape companies pulling out or downsizing due to a reduction in new construction," reports Pyle, of Heaviland Enterprises "The housing market too has especially slowed as building contractors are on a wait-and-see approach."

Michael Becker, Estate Gardeners Inc., Elkhorn, NE, describes the situation in his market as a "sluggish buying environment" rather than a bad economy.

"I don't really think that people have stopped spending on their homes. I do think they have become cautious," says Becker. More of them are "taking their time" before giving the go-ahead on projects. Even so, he

**Ernie Pyle says managers at Heaviland now drive Rangers.**



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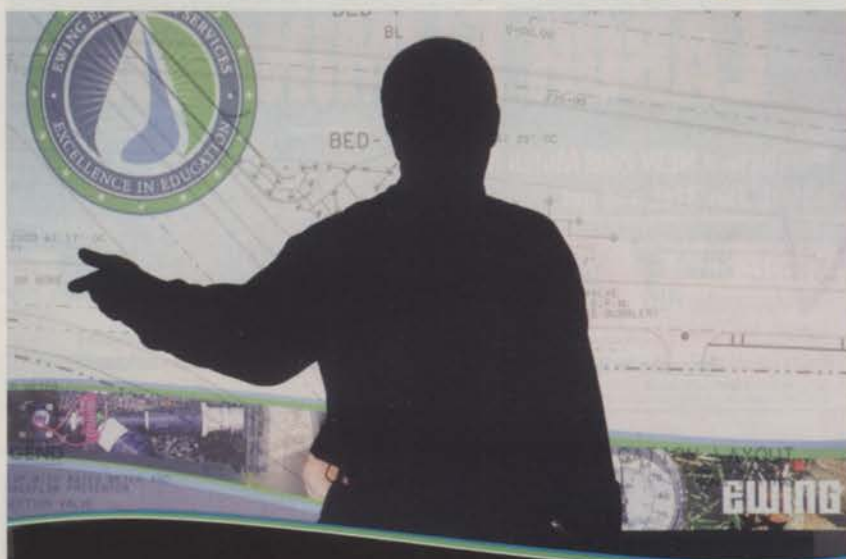
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remains upbeat for 2008's prospects.

"As we forecast our next year we see good things," he adds optimistically. "The pipeline is flowing. We have more work (design/build) on the drawing board and in the development stages for next season than ever before, and we find it refreshing to be able to plan for it now compared to a year of beating the bushes to keep a 2-week backlog."

**The future**

The U.S. landscape industry, our survey reaffirms, remains highly fragmented, and is largely a collection of regional and local markets. Climatic and economic conditions vary markedly for the 300 million residents residing within our nation's 3.5 million square miles.

The landscape industry has grown into an equally diverse industry offering an expanding and varied palette of services generating revenues of approximately \$80 billion annually. The popularity and profitability of these various services (maintenance, design/build, irrigation being the most common) shift according to differences and changes in the economy, climatic conditions and with consumers' ever-changing tastes and desires.

**Michael Becker says customers have become more cautious**



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**Emphasize the positive**

BY JIM MARTIN, CLP

Since my induction as PLANET's president at the 2006 GIC, I have challenged our industry to get the word out that we improve the quality of life in communities across America. I believe there are only three other members of communities — the educational, the religious and health care — that have a greater role in creating and maintaining the quality of life in our communities.

Look around and you'll see what I mean. Green spaces have a huge positive impact on us from the environmental, psychological and financial aspects to overall general health and well-being. Office building managers and owners, homeowners, and those who live in apartments and condominiums realize the value of well-landscaped spaces. Homes cost more when they look out on golf courses and nature preserves. Apartments lease more readily when they're close to a park. Office tenants are more likely to renew their leases when they have beautifully landscaped spaces and trails. Americans understand that a beautiful, well-maintained landscape matters, and they are demonstrating this by supporting our industry.

Even so, we will be challenged in the coming years to demonstrate how we're leading in sustainable environmental stewardship — to use less fuel and maximize efficiencies in geographic scheduling, and to make sure that our equipment, technology and practices are the best possible environmentally.

In 2007, PLANET saw large growth in industry members who are becoming certified. This improves professionalism of the industry and provides consumers a fair benchmark to assess





our knowledge and capabilities. We must also continue to push for strong safety education, including working closely with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

The increase in participation in PLANET's Student Career Days event is especially encouraging. This event gives us a platform to get our messages to schools and to young people across the nation. It's our insurance for the future success of our industry.

But 2008 promises its share of challenges, with the mortgage housing crisis near the top of the list. While many of us rely on work from existing properties, there are also a large number of new communities and new homes that use our services. As these numbers drop, they will hurt a portion of our industry. In addition, the wave of homeowners who refinanced in the past few years and re-invested in their properties, including the landscaping, will slow down.

Mother Nature controls other factors that may threaten us in 2008, such as floods, fires and extensive drought. All of these have a significant negative impact on our revenues. Many equipment manufacturers at the GIE+EXPO reported this as a challenging time for new equipment sales, as well.

PLANET will remain vigilant in the coming year in working with Congress to fix the H-2B program. Our outreach effort with our state association partners is having an impact. With new opposition from labor unions, and it being an election year, this is no easy task.

The industry needs to remain vigilant in communicating the importance of what we do to all our stakeholders, and we need to listen carefully to our customers. It's an exciting time with enormous potential. We need to work together to maximize our efforts and further position our industry as national leaders.

"Housing and construction have definitely slowed in our market, but probably not as much as other markets," says Delaney of AAA Lawns, Inc., in north-west Arkansas. While his company doesn't serve the residential sector, he's beginning to see how weakness in those markets is affecting his business, which is strictly commercial maintenance.

"Companies that were doing a lot of the installs in our market are starting to crawl into our specialty, into maintenance, and some of them are submitting bids as much as 40% or 50% below our bids," says Delaney. "I don't know how they're going to do the work for that. They're going to lose their butts, and we're

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going to lose some clients to them. I'm sure we will get those clients back eventually, and we'll pick up some new work, too."

Delaney says one of the biggest challenges his company faces heading into 2008 — apart from continuing to attract and hire competent managers and field employees — is to "educate his commercial clients to the value" of his company's services.

Delaney points to the presence of Wal-Mart world headquarters as the area's hedge against a significant economic slowdown. In fact, his region of northwest Arkansas has a handful of major corporate headquarters, including poultry giant Tyson and J.B. Hunt trucking.

Scott O'Donnell of O'Donnell's Landscape Services Inc., says that landscape maintenance in the Dallas-Fort Worth market continues to show strong growth. "The commercial building sector has shown no signs of slowing and residential developments are breaking ground across our market," he reports. Since his company is 90% commercial maintenance he's expecting another strong season in spite of obvious challenges.

**Scott O'Donnell says the Dallas market continues strong.**



**NOT SO MINIMUM WAGE**

**56%**

Percentage of landscape readers who say they plan to increase their hourly pay rates in 2008



**COST TO THE CONSUMER**

**59%**

Percentage of readers who say they plan to bump up their rates in 2008

'08 year of the Phoenix in Michigan?

BY DANIEL WEISS

Here in Michigan we hope it will be the year of the Phoenix, the mythological bird that burns up and is reborn from its own ashes. Most of 2007 was definitely scorched. Will the residential landscape and maintenance industry in Michigan take wing again in 2008? Indications are that it will lay another egg.

Michigan is in one tough place right now. The local media often refers to it as a "one-state depression" and the "foreclosure capital." Many small businesses are struggling and there's a lot of residents looking for work. On top of this, our governor pushed a new "services" taxes this fall, which includes a tax on professional landscape services. (As I write this there is an effort in Lansing to get this tax killed.)

The landscape industry here has hit hard. Customers in the ephemeral chaos of consumerism here no

longer have the money, or are even employed, and those that do, are clutching on to every dollar tighter than ever. Also, the competition has gotten fierce. The scramble to secure contracts is creating bidding wars. Prices are going in the wrong direction. A lot of this competition is temporary. It's from companies that won't be around in a year or two. It's damaging and discouraging nonetheless. We're fighting for contracts, and we're battling to retain customers.

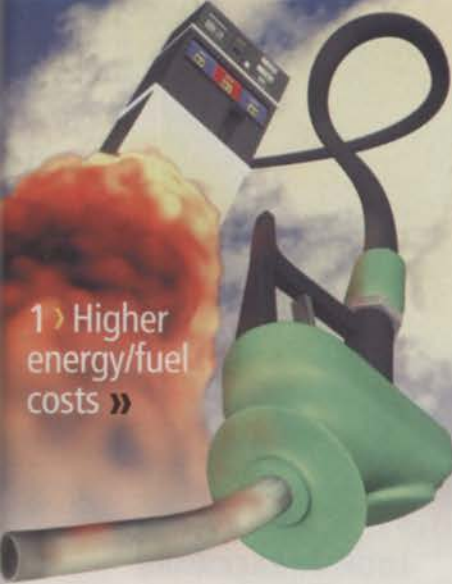
We're going to have to do the following things to survive and continue to succeed in our southeast Michigan region, which is dominated by the struggling U.S. automobile industry:

1. Improve efficiencies so that we can reduce costs in completing projects and delivering services
2. Emphasize and deliver quality and commitment of services
3. Expand boundaries of advertising

4. Make it evident to our clients that we "go the extra mile" for them
5. Get closer to our customers and improve our communication with them

Because of the down market we're considering expanding our geographic market. This is a tough decision because the last thing a business owner wants to hear in a depressed economy is to spend more money. Marketing to surrounding areas, including the expense of advertising, is a decision that takes some serious planning. It also requires us to ask "how are we different?" If we can't answer that question or our services are indistinguishable from everybody else's, why would potential customers give us a try?

The time has long passed to begin cutting the fat out of our company. Margins are lower and business is tougher to get. We're looking to see where we can save money and it may mean downsizing. We realize we have a responsibility to our employees, but we have a greater responsi-



1 > Higher energy/fuel costs >>

**TOP 5 LANDSCAPE CONCERNS FOR 2008**

- 2 > Cash flow
- 3 > U.S. economy (tie)
- 3 > Keeping prices competitive (tie)
- 5 > Health insurance costs

bility to the company. As a last resort we can help downsized employees find employment with colleagues or other friendly competitors.

Finally, we're committed to improving relations with our existing customers. At the top of our list for 2008 is to make customers fully aware of all of the services we provide. We want them to know that if we maintain their properties we can also provide other services and products.

It's not a good feeling when you show up on a client's site and see work that another contractor has recently done — work that you're capable of doing, and perhaps doing even better. And the client says to you, "Sorry. I didn't know you did that."

It's happened to us. We've vowed never to let happen again. Considering the state of our market right now, we can't afford to.

— The author is president of Elysian Design and Landscape Group, Inc., Keego Harbor, MI.

**Regional concern**

Each region of the country, in fact, has unique characteristics, challenges and opportunities, which are viewed differently by each and every owner within those regions.

"New construction is slowing along with the real estate market," says Paul Keyes, Paul Keyes Associates, Tenafly, NJ. "I see it as a market adjustment." This adjustment is painful for companies that have concentrated a lot of their work with residential developers and builders in his market, he believes. Because Paul

*continued on page 44*

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Circle 128

# DESIGN/BUILD

Not all the news is bad. While some markets feel the negative effects of a down economy, some in this sector are doing well and looking to expand their services.

BY DANIEL G. JACOBS / Managing Editor

To borrow a cliché from real estate – it's location, location, location. Despite what the media are saying about the economy in general and the housing market in particular, those in the design/build sector of the Green Industry remain optimistic about 2008.

According to *Landscape Management's* 2008 Outlook Survey, two-thirds of our readers who focus primarily on design/build projects increased their revenue this year compared with 2006. And despite the depressing economic news leading into next year, even more, 78% expect to increase sales in '08. It may not be all wishful thinking. Many areas of the country are growing or even thriving.

But in those areas where the economy is down, contractors face many challenges. People may spend less on projects and as counterintuitive as it might seem, competition can increase. When people in other industries are out of work they look for something with lower barriers of entry. That increases competition, which drives prices and can also have other effects.

"Building in Michigan is down substantially, which means new landscape and new lawn installation is down," says Jim TenBrink of Earth Service and Supply. "With the economy, everyone is looking for ways to generate additional income, we are seeing more pop up companies with a lack of professionalism."

Randy Lightner, president of Green Valley Landscape Co., Kingsport, TN, agrees. "Every retiree, plant worker, college kid thinks (he) can be a landscaper. They don't have to rely on it for a living. So if what they've done for someone doesn't look good, they can just disappear, and all it does is leave a bad taste in people's mouths and they think that ALL landscapers are just out to take them."

## Getting better

Many of our readers echoed the traditional owner's lament quoted here by Fred Botsford, Under the Sun Landscape Inc., Westminster, MD: "I will try to spend more time working on my business and less actual time performing labor."

Another strategy is to focus on the jobs that bring the biggest profit.

Dean DeSantis is "focusing on our niche and saying 'no' to those that don't fit. Focusing more on sustainable landscape services," says the owner of Salem, OR-based DeSantis Landscapes.

Philip Imbriano Sr. of Horticultural and Landscape Services Inc., in Canton, GA, is taking the alternate approach. He plans to "eliminate dead weight, and give costumers value for their money."

## Overcoming problems

The housing market and the pervasive drought across the South and West are having a devastating affect on many companies.



## LOOKING BACKWARD AND FORWARD

How did your 2007 sales compare with those of 2006?



How do you think 2008 sales will compare with this year?



## TOP 5 DESIGN/BUILD CONCERNS FOR 2008

- 1 › Higher energy/fuel prices
- 2 › Cash flow
- 3 › U.S. Economy
- 4 › Health insurance costs
- 5 › Keeping prices competitive



## BUSINESS MAINSTAYS

Our design/build readers have been in business for an average of more than 16 years, and they have stayed with the same organization for nearly 11 years.

# Q

## HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WHAT IS HAPPENING IN YOUR MARKET?

“Too many guys that know nothing about anything, but have a lawnmower, and decided to ruin the entire industry by giving prices that don’t even cover my overhead. The sad thing is that probably half of these companies are putting themselves out of business.”

— STEVE HLABSE, TRUE LANDSCAPING, LLC., WICKLIFFE, OH.

“We continue to grow as a company, as do the other successful landscape contractors in our area. We have nearly \$1 million in landscape work already sold for next year, and we retain a large portion of our existing clients. We have no reason to think that the industry will change, unless a dramatic downturn in the economy happens.”

— JEREMY BOKA, A LANDSCAPE MANAGER WITH PERFICUT LAWN AND LANDSCAPE, ANKENY, IA.

# Q

## WHAT DID YOU DO IN 2007 TO IMPROVE YOUR REVENUE?

“(I) participated in a couple trade shows, (spring and fall home and garden shows), and I connected with a landscape designer who was looking for a company that would perform quality work and excellent customer support/service.”

— MARCUS WAINER, EXECUTIVE CARE, VANCOUVER, WA.

“It seems as though people are worried about the housing market and economy,” says Ken Stephens, owner of Ken Stephens Landscape Inc. in Snellville, GA. “They are also not as willing to make decisions about landscaping with the current drought in our area.”

The more creative and persistent owners are seeking new solutions.

“We are in the middle of the worst drought in 100 years. I plan to offer more native and drought resistant plants – water reclamation products,” says Susan Knoch, Lawrenceville, GA. **L.M.**

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Circle 129

continued from page 41

Keyes Associates provides renovations for high-end residential properties in northern New Jersey, he's expecting robust growth in 2008.

"Many of our clients are not moving to new homes, and their income has not really changed significantly," he says, adding that a temporary slowdown in the industry offers opportunities as well as challenges.

"The slower market presents the best opportunity in '08, as it will thin out the competition," says Keyes. "Many of the people that have enjoyed the recent boom are not qualified, do poor quality work, are not legal or they have too much overhead."

Yes, it may weed out many of the poorly financed and bad operators, but many more will take their place. The industry's low barriers of entry guarantee a steady influx of newcomers, regardless of the state of the economy.

"I know there is a reason for wanting any customer, but low-ball pricing doesn't help anyone," says Jeffrey Bowen, CLP, owner of Images of Green Inc., Stuart, FL.

**Jeffrey Bowen says unrealistic pricing is a huge problem.**

He says his 12-year-old company is facing intense pricing pressures, not just from the region's biggest players, but from a growing flock of one-truck operators. "Maybe one day in Florida we will need a



## 8 survival tips for '08

- 1 > Get creative with marketing
- 2 > Implement programs and empower employees to eliminate wasted time, effort, materials, and to improve efficiencies
- 3 > Build closer relationships with key vendors
- 4 > Increase your presence in maintenance if you haven't already done so
- 5 > Maximize service (and revenue) opportunities for every stop and every client
- 6 > Keep debt in check
- 7 > Improve loyalty programs for key employees
- 8 > Improve customer relations and communications



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Circle 130

## IGNORING CITY HALL

Despite H-2B and murmurs of chemical bans in some communities, only 29% of you are very concerned about government regulations



federal, state or county certified license to be a landscaper, not just a pickup and a mower," he adds.

"Of course we have consumers who expect to pay very little for landscape maintenance services and we also have an abundance of low-bidders," says Achtenhagen in Wisconsin. "Long ago we decided that the two deserve each other and we pay little attention to either."

Becker in Nebraska also suspects 2008 will be a tough year for poorly run companies.

"It remains to be seen, but we believe that a growing saturation of landscape service companies in our market will be thinned out somewhat as the next year or two progresses," he says.

"Many of the smaller firms that proliferated in the strong economy are willing to provide services at pricing levels that are not sustainable even for small firms. As a result the industry as a whole is suffering from decreasing profit margins and increased cost of sales," says Dilly in Minnesota.

Fortunately, he adds, commercial construction continues to offer new opportunities for growth.

As these owners' comments and the results of our survey suggest, the approaching season offers the usual challenges in terms of workers, pricing and costs — but intensified because of stalled homebuilding, uncertainty over labor and, in general, a steady drumbeat of sour economic news.

The only thing that can be said with certainty about the 2008 season right now is that it won't be dull. **LM**

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Circle 132



# LAWN CARE

With possible tough times ahead, take control of what you can to cut costs, improve customer service and increase profits in 2008

BY MIKE SEUFFERT / Associate Editor

**T**he frustrating aspect of the lawn care business is that there are some things you just can't control. The weather. The economy. Gas prices. Customers who don't (or can't) water their lawns. Neighbors who don't pick up after their dogs.

Certainly, for many regions in the country, 2007 did not provide ideal business conditions. Parts of the Southeast and Southwest dealt with prolonged droughts and water restrictions. The Northeast saw floods. Around *Landscape Management's* home editorial office in Cleveland, lawn care companies were applying their spring treatments over two feet of snow. And no region could escape the housing slump and \$3-\$3.25 per gallon gas prices.

Despite all the negative press, lawn care respondents to *Landscape Management's* 2008 Outlook Survey remained optimistic about the industry. More than 70% of lawn care owners and managers described the Green Industry in their region as "Healthy," and 15% more said the economy was "Thriving."

More so, our survey found that 68% of lawn care respondents said sales increased in 2007 versus 2006, while about 26% said sales were flat.

"Last year was our 31st year in business, and for the 31st year in a row it was our best year ever," says Jack Robertson, owner and president of Robertson Lawn Care in Springfield IL. "We expect the same next year. Of course, there are variables out there that concern us all. We could be looking at fertilizer and fuel costs going up 25% next year. We're certainly going to feel that in our pocketbook."

Like Robertson, most of the industry remains optimistic, as 74% expect their sales to increase in 2008, and 19% expect sales to stay roughly the same.

"I don't have a pessimistic bone in my body," says Charlie King, president of King Green in Gainesville, GA. "Given the economy and drought in Georgia, I'd say we had a pretty successful year, and we will again in 2008. Guys who plant trees and shrubs, they just aren't planting. The one area that affected us more than anything else was our overseeding business, which is pretty big for us. We probably lost a couple hundred thousand dollars worth of business there. We hope to recover there.

"If we come out of next year with a 5% to 7% growth, I'll be pretty satisfied," King added.

## Stand your ground

There's a growing movement in the United States asserting that managed lawns and gardens have no value and provide no benefits, and that inputs such as pesticides and fertilizer have no benefit either.

This mirrors local policies restricting or banning the use of lawn and landscape inputs, and sometimes even targeting the use of certain types of equipment. These policies are driven by increased environmental activism, and pressures on local governments related to water quality and urbanization.

### Lawns do matter

Managed lawns and landscapes play a vital role in our increasingly urban and suburban environments. Healthy and well-managed turf protects water quality while bringing other environmental and health benefits such as cooling the air and providing soft landings for those at play. However, a vocal and active minority is achieving some success in making the argument that our lawns have no value. This minority will trumpet that message in 2008 with local policies morphing to become bills in state houses, particularly in the Northeast and states bordering Canada. Our northern neighbor, of course, is awash in local laws that restrict or ban the use of important

*continued on page 48*







## MANAGING THE MARKETING

Do you plan to increase your marketing budgets/efforts in 2008?



## TOP 5 LAWN CARE CONCERNS FOR 2008

- 1) Energy costs
- 2) Equipment/material costs
- 3) Keeping prices competitive
- 4) Cash flow

5) Health insurance costs »



## BUDGET BREAKDOWN

Which markets did your 2007 lawn care revenues come from?

Residential single homes

- 15% > Commercial establishments
- 7% > Condos & homeowners associations
- 2% > Other (public sector, golf courses, etc.)

## Planning for growth

Since no one is predicting a quick turnaround for the economy, how do lawn care businesses expect to keep growing?

Aside from performing rain dances, we heard quite a few different tactics that companies will be using to boost sales, including new and more efficient equipment, better marketing, more personal service, more referrals, new hires and, in some cases, acquisitions.

Yes, some things cannot be controlled. Rather than taking a "wait-and-see" approach, focus on what you can control to improve your operations and service. In the end, success comes down to companies playing up their strengths and tightening up on their weaknesses.

King and Robertson both talked about strategies that will increase business, provide better service and cut fuel costs.

"We're going to take areas of new develop in town and in the surrounding towns and really concentrate on those areas where we aren't concentrated as much as we'd like to be," Robertson says. "Find out where your gaps and try to fill those in with concentrated advertising, rather than driving further and chasing business."

I think we do a good job with our routing now, but you can always do better. And we're going to do whatever it takes to reduce cancels," King says. "We feel that most of the marginal customers — the ones get their yards sprayed because they felt like they ought to, but not because they really wanted to — they're pretty much out of the market now.

"Our customers now are the ones who really have a desire to have a nice lawn. We're going to provide excellent customer service to them and see what other services we can offer them to keep their business," King adds.

## Price increases

It's a tough question every year, but it's especially complicated when the economy is down: Is it time to raise prices?

Our survey showed almost an even split, with 52% of respondents leaning toward a price increase and 48% standing pat. Those planning to increase their prices point to the higher cost of doing business. Those not planning to increase prices don't want to get priced out of the market — knowing that their customers are paying the same gas prices they are.

"I need to do a price increase, or I will have to absorb the extra fuel and fertilizer costs," says Jeff Kollenkark, who operates a Weed Man franchise in Fresno, CA. "I would like to do a 3% to 5% increase but people are pretty sick of seeing everything go up every year."

According to Kollenkark, a 5% increase for most customers would add just \$2 per application, a 3% increase about \$1 per application/lawn treatment. (Because of Fresno's Mediterranean-like climate, his

In spite of a severe drought in his market, Charlie King, president of King Green, Gainesville, GA, keeps smiling because of ongoing growth.



technicians visit properties about every six weeks, or eight times a year, as opposed to the five visits per year that is typical in the Midwest, he explains.)

It does seem that the idea of adding "gas surcharges" to customers' bills is dying out. If prices have to go up, they go up. There's no need to tell the customers why. All that's important is making sure those customers feel they are receiving more value from the service provided than what they are paying.

**Belt tightening**

The only thing anyone can really be sure about for 2008 is that there are going to be a lot of political ads on television all year long. Other than that, 2008 is wide open. With some good weather, things can turn around pretty quickly. But since the economy is already on the edge, any other setbacks could be devastating.

"No one's using the 'R-word' yet, but I think it's coming," says King. "Everyone's going to have to tighten the belt and suck it up for a year." **LM**

*continued from page 46*

chemical tools by professional lawn care companies.

Absence in many of the discussions focusing on our lawn care products is science. Emotions often carry the debate, and our cash-strapped states enact "feel good" fixes to non-existent problems. Also contributing to misperceptions about lawn care is the lack of recognition of the tangible environmental contributions made by the "real" Green Industry.

**State & local issues**

In 2008 look for increased pressure to restrict pesticide use on lawns and gardens, public parks, municipal property and on school grounds.

Restrictions on fertilizer use as a quick fix to state and local issues related to nutrients will increase, also. These are complex issues and much of the problem stems from aging and failing septic and sewer systems and from increasing human and animal populations.

State most likely to restrict or ban some aspect of homeowner and professional pesticide or fertilizer use are (in no particular order): California, Connecticut, Florida, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Oregon and Wisconsin.

**The federal level**

This coming year could also see legislation proposed at the federal level to change the definition of integrated pest management. Don't be surprised to read about new rules involving the use of pesticides on federal property, including our nation's capitol grounds and buildings.

Even with these changes, consumers in 2008 will continue to buy products to beautify and improve their properties or hire professionals to do this. A vocal minority will continue to attempt to influence public policy in the areas of pesticides and fertilizers.

**Q HOW DO YOU PLAN TO INCREASE REVENUE NEXT YEAR?**

“Continue with the selective additions of clients and providing customer incentive for word-of-mouth referrals that result in new season-long clients.”

— **GEORGE YOUNG**, MY THREE SONS MOWING, COLUMBIA, MO

“Streamline labor, reward customers when a viable referral is given, maintain open lines between company and customer to encourage add on sales.”

— **BECKY MALINAK**, DREAMKARE INC., BUFFALO, MN

“We've purchased a small competitor, which will add about 10% revenue growth next year alone.”

— **BRAD JOHNSON**, LAWNAMERICA, TULSA, OK

“Market different services using organic humus and organic tea for treatment on stressed trees and using organic humus for lawn applications.”

— **JOE LOFTUS**, LOFCO INC/ LOFTUS LAWN MAINTENANCE AND TREE SERVICE, LONG BEACH, MS

“It was very dry in 2007. Next year is always a good year.”

— **DAN CHESLOCK**, MOUNTAINEER LAWN CARE, MORGANTOWN, WV

**A HEALTHY OUTLOOK**

**5%** Percentage of lawn care providers who described their market as depressed compared with 80% who said their market was healthy and 9% checked the box marked stagnant. Only 7% used the term thriving.

**IN FOR THE LONG HAUL**

Our lawn care readers have been in business for an average of **more than 13 years** and have been with the same company for **more than 8.5 years**.

# IRRIGATION

Owners look to more aggressive marketing and stronger education to prosper in the slower economy

BY RON HALL / Editor in Chief

**T**he modern irrigation industry is an indispensable partner to the professional landscape industry. Neither can survive without the other. In many parts of the country residential and commercial landscapes, campuses, sports fields and golf courses must have irrigation to remain healthy and attractive.

The two industries are tied together in other ways, as well. As landscaping prospers (we're including professional grounds maintenance) so does the irrigation industry. When landscaping slows, the demand for irrigation slows, in particular the demand for installations.

Drought emerged as a huge challenge for the irrigation industry in 2007. Drought is slowing every segment of the Green Industry in many of the country's fast-developing regions. Record low reservoir levels and burgeoning development are stressing water supplies from Tennessee east across Virginia, the Carolinas and far south into Georgia and Alabama. South and southwest Florida have similar water woes. In response, water agencies are implementing landscape and turf watering restrictions and, in some cases, bans.

This uncertainty carries into 2008, in particular continuing drought and now compounded by a deep drop in new home construction. It's not a time to panic, though.

Ray Green, owner of Atlantic Lawn Irrigation, Milford, NH, tells colleagues the worst thing to do in a sluggish economy is to fight like a pack of hungry dogs over every little scrap of business, especially in terms of pricing.

"I can't understand why that when the economy gets bad, people in this business start dropping their prices," says Green, who has been in the irrigation business for more than 20 years. "I almost think the industry is destroying itself from within.

Like the landscape industry, irrigation has its share of operators with little business knowledge or experience, he says. While most can't sustain themselves in business, their unrealistic pricing and sub-standard work confuses customers and creates unrealistic expectations that ultimately lead to customer dissatisfaction. "The industry is too easy to get into," says Green.

Even so, he doesn't believe that strict licensing or certification requirements are the complete answer. There's little enforcement against people doing work without the necessary insurance or business licenses as it is, he points out.



## Get our message

BY ANDY SMITH

Water use restrictions and irrigation bans plagued several regions this year. Georgia and much of the rest of the Southeast, in particular, are prime examples of what happens when supplies dwindle and landscape irrigation is identified as a non-essential use of water.

While our industry and our customers realize the benefits of healthy landscapes, all of us are almost always late responding to a drought crisis. With the U.S. EPA suggesting as much as half of the water applied to the landscape is wasted, we must take responsibility for the way we use water in the landscape. If we irrigate efficiently (and we have the tools to do that) we will make a big difference for our customers' landscapes and for our businesses.

Governments, be they local, regional or national, develop public policy slowly — that is, until there's a crisis; then things move fast. That's when the highly visible Green Industry is in the most danger. The typical, and usually first, governmental knee-

SPECIAL REPORT FROM  
THE IRRIGATION ASSOCIATION

The irrigation industry will be better served by better educating the public to its value.

"I'm coming out very aggressively next year against this price cutting. I'm going to be very aggressive with our marketing," he says.

Meanwhile, experienced irrigation pros continue to strengthen their seasonal maintenance and repair capabilities. This part of their business is not tied so directly to new construction.

This fall, technicians at Ron Hall Sprinklers (no relation to the author) in

*continued on page 54*

jerk reaction to a water crisis is to target landscape water use.

How do we prevent this? We do this by reducing water waste, and encouraging planning and policy that identifies and rewards efficient water use, penalizes water waste and balances infrastructure with the overall need, including the landscape. Many of these planning discussions are in progress now. We still have an opportunity to provide input and participate in the process. We must participate.

As with too little water, too much precipitation isn't a good thing for our industry either. Texas, extremely dry until this year, is recording one of its wettest years on record. When the rain is falling consumers don't think about irrigation, including adding a new system or upgrading an existing system. Many irrigation contractors there are having a tough time this season, too.

But the wet weather hasn't stopped policy makers there from continuing to plan for "normal weather." Cities such as San Antonio and Austin continue to craft policy aimed at reducing water waste in the landscape through modifications to local ordinances. In a related matter, the State of Texas has passed legislation giving local lawmakers the authority to enforce the rules of the Texas irrigator's license.

Taking the larger view, the U.S. EPA's WaterSense program is a partnership with several water user groups, including the irrigation industry. Its goal is to "foster an ethic of water efficiency." The irrigation industry has developed the Smart Water Application Technologies (SWAT) initiative to achieve exceptional landscape water use efficiency through the application of irrigation technology. The objectives for irrigation in such programs are simple.

*continued on page 54*

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continued from page 52

Great Falls, MT, spent 44 days winterizing 2,200 systems.

Demand for these services keep growing says President Steve Jonas, now in his 27th year in the industry. Since his market gets an average of just 13 or 14 inches of precipitation annually, irrigation is a must to grow healthy turf and ornamentals.

Jonas says that manufacturers are supplying the innovations and when you add them into the mix of good business practices, everybody wins.

"The new technology is what keeps me in this business," says Jonas. "There's always new things to learn and that's what's fun for me." **LM**



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Circle 135

continued from page 52

- ▶ only apply the necessary amount of water for turf and landscape health
- ▶ eliminate runoff and deep percolation and
- ▶ consider alternative water sources such as treated effluent, captured rain water or storm water.

There is more to these strategies than the irrigation system itself. Plant selection, soil science, storm water management, nutrient management and overall cultural practice have significant impact on the amount of water consumed by the landscape. Irrigation and landscape professionals who understand how to implement these comprehensive conservation strategies will have the upper hand on projects where conservation and sustainability are priorities.

### GETTING THE WORD OUT

**91%**

Percentage of readers who say they plan to maintain or increase their marketing budgets next year

### NOT SO MINIMUM WAGE

**52%**

Percentage of readers who say they plan to increase their hourly pay rates in 2008

### TRICKLE DOWN EFFECT

**45%**

Percentage of readers who say they plan to charge their customers more in 2008



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Remember that the team that can have fun together is often more equipped to tackle and overcome tough challenges.



## Hot holiday tech

BY TYLER WHITAKER



1

It's that time of year again when Christmas shopping tends to overshadow day-to-day business operations. So, in the spirit of the season and in an effort to increase your shopping productivity, here is a list of some of the hottest technologies for your purchasing pleasure.

**1. Mitsubishi HC1500 projector.** The Mitsubishi HC1500 projector is perfect for that corporate boardroom that doubles as an after hours movie theater. It can show PowerPoint presentations by day and high definition video by night. It sports a native 720p HD video resolution and 1280x1024 computer resolution. It accepts HDMI as well as component inputs. With a projector like this in the office, you might find yourself using video clips to get the point across in the next team meeting.

**2. Nokia N82 cell phone.** Nokia must be reading my mind. Its new N82 cell phone packs quite the feature list. The 5 mega-pixel camera is a nice addition, but when you combine it with the ability to capture digital video at 30 frames a second, a 20x digital zoom, and a TV-Out port it, this phone gives the knockout punch to my digital camera. It's got WiFi and Bluetooth connectivity, and what is really exciting is the built in GPS and FM radio.

I think I have finally found a device that can replace my cell phone, GPS, mp3 player, PDA and camera. Shedding 10 lbs. of technology never felt so good.

**3. Adams DiXX Digital Training Putter.** I've been known to golf here and there. And while I'm not

going to be giving Tiger Woods a run for his money anytime soon, I think I've found a putter that just might improve my game and satisfy my technology cravings at the same time. The Adams Dixx Digital Training Putter tracks your swing path, tempo, face angle and impact position. It can even give you personalized instructions to correct bad putting habits. I must warn you, however, there is a downside. The DiXX is not USGA approved.

**4. Hornet 3 Mini RC helicopter.** Have you ever had one of those days where just wanted to close your office door and do something that would make a difference in the world? The Hornet 3 Mini RC helicopter is what you've been looking for all these years. Made of "Crash Proof" EPP foam and powered by high capacity Li-Ploy batteries this little helicopter ensures that each 7-9 minute flight is just as fun as the first. This is a must have tool in any business managers office, because you never know when you might be called on to save the world or at least find alternative way to prune the office plants.

Christmas time is great time to do some team building and lighten the mood in your office. Remember that the team that can have fun together is often more equipped to tackle and overcome tough challenges. Hopefully this technology Christmas list can help you foster a fun and creative office environment for the upcoming year.

— The author is a freelance technologist focusing in business automation. Contact him at 801/592-2810 or visit his blog at [www.tylerwhitaker.com](http://www.tylerwhitaker.com).

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# Project Portfolio

DESIGN/BUILD

STRUCTURAL PLANNING / PRECONSTRUCTION / GRADING

## The design

A home, pool facility and landscape that fits the natural slope of the property

## Project Requirements

- Keep as much mature vegetation as possible.
- Work within the natural grade.
- Optimize the location of the house, carriage house and pool facility, taking into account the harsh New England winters.

## Project Specifics

The clients desired a mixture of beauty and privacy for their residence.



**ABOVE** When fitting the more than 12,000-sq.-ft. main house, carriage house and pool facility on the hill, both the slope of the site and heavy clay soils presented grading challenges. The large area of slate roof and its steep pitch allow large amounts of accumulated snow to slide off, creating additional challenges for the landscape. Given the slope of the site, it was decided to hold the pool and associated facilities close to the house.

**RIGHT** The stamped concrete walks, drive and associated subsurface drainage system are all heated to usher away accumulated snow and water in the middle of winter. **BELOW** Large growing, herbaceous plants were selected to ameliorate the resulting impacts and effects.





**ABOVE** After doing a thorough site analysis and presenting the client with several site development options, it was decided to locate the house on a south-facing slope, just below the highest point of this 55-acre property. By not perching the house on the highest point of the property, there was improved solar orientation, privacy and greater opportunity to save mature vegetation and integrate it into the overall design.

### Project Principals

- Greg Grigsby and George Pellettieri, Pellettieri Associates, Warner, NH, [www.pellettieriassoc.com](http://www.pellettieriassoc.com)
- Pellettieri Associates offers a full range of consulting services in site planning, landscape design and construction administration. This includes the preparation of applications for wetlands permits, shorelands construction, sewage disposal systems and various types of zoning and subdivision permits.

**ABOVE** In New England, the pool only sees service for about four months of the year. By lowering the pool facilities relative to the rest of the backyard, the firm was able to reduce retaining wall heights behind the pavilion. This keeps the pool facilities out of view from the main level of the house in the off-season months.

**LEFT** Natural cleft, 8- to 10-ft.-wide bluestone steps gracefully transition grade from the kitchen and screened porch to the pool area.

This project was a Distinction Award winner in PLANET's 38th annual Environmental Improvement Awards program. For more information on the program, visit [www.landcarenetwork.org](http://www.landcarenetwork.org).

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## EDITORIAL INDEX

Company	Page #		
AAA Lawns Inc.	35	Heaviland Enterprises	35
Adams	56	Hornet	56
American Society of Landscape Architects	18	Horticulture and Landscape Services Inc.	42
Arborjet	12	Illinois Landscape Contractors Association	15
Atlantic Lawn Irrigation	51	Images of Green Inc.	44
Bayer Environmental Science	12	Irrigation Association	51
Bret Achtenhagen Seasonal Services LTD	34	James Martin Associates Inc.	16
Brickman Group	14	John Deere	15
DeSantis Landscapes	42	Ken Stephens Landscape Inc.	43
Earth Service and Supply	42	King Green	46
Elysian Design and Landscape Group	41	Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center	18
Engledow Group	20	Mitsubishi	56
Estate Gardeners Inc.	37	Nokia	56
Executive Care	43	Occupational Safety and Health Administration	39
GIE+EXPO	15	O'Donnell's Landscape Services	40
Glen Gate Pool & Property	26	Outdoor Environments Inc.	36
Green Valley Landscape Co.	42	Pacific Landscape Maintenance	35
Handy Andy Outdoors	32	Paul Keyes Associates	41
Hatcher & Associates LLC	66	Pellettier Associates	59
		Perficut Lawn and Landscape	43
		PLANET	16, 38
		Plantique	36
		Project Evergreen	15
		Red Maple Land Services	32
		RISE	46
		Robertson Lawn Care	46
		Ron Hall Sprinklers	52
		Springscapes	32
		The Greenwood Group	32
		True Landscaping	43
		U.S. EPA	51
		Under the Sun Landscape Inc.	42
		United States Botanic Garden	18
		University of Texas at Austin	18
		USGA	56
		Weed Man	47
		Wilson-Oyler Group	10



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Circle 146

## Hatcher & Associates LLC

Letting employees do their job so that he can do his — marketing the company

BY DANIEL G. JACOBS /  
Managing Editor

**M**ichael Hatcher has an easy-going nature, which makes it easy to understand why he's a natural born marketer. He begins the interview with: "I want to hear you chuckle."

With more than 30 years in the Green Industry, Hatcher, turns marketing into a conversation. And it's a conversation he wants all his employees to have. As owner of the 21-year-old Memphis-based enterprise, Hatcher lets others focus on day-to-day operations while he takes a big picture approach.

"I create a vision or a goal for the company. After I create that vision or that goal, I create consensus and excitement around it," he says. "Then I empower the employees to accomplish those goals. It goes along with giving them the authority to fulfill those obligations."

The issue is so important to Hatcher he changed the



**Start every day with a smile.** Executives (l. to r.) VP Chris Reifers, Mary and Michael Hatcher, Rose Willis, office manager, and VP Stephen Shikle.

name of the company from Michael Hatcher Landscape Contractor to Hatcher & Associates to emphasize the team nature of the operation. That message is carried throughout the organization. Employees are there to help their clients take care of their properties and also is to make sure the company grows.

### Internal marketing

With each new chapter in the company history, Hatcher's story has grown. He wants employees to know the story.

"Everybody needs to have a timeline," he says. "That's

through the social media aspect of it. My top managers were hired out of industries."

### External marketing

Employees who know the story are only part of the solution. Marketing only works if it gets to the community you serve. And Hatcher draws on his Green Industry experiences and his time as a local television host to help get his message out.

"My wife (Mary, the CFO of the company) once told me, 'The reason that I was in the landscaping was so I can market,'" Hatcher says. "One time, I kept coming up with all these different ideas she told me, 'You've reinvented your self more times than Madonna.'"

"I'm very, very proactive in our market advertising, television advertising," Hatcher does a lot of television, radio and print advertising. The key is knowing where to place those ads, niche marketing.

Whether it's AM Christian radio or the local college football games, Hatcher knows his audience. "I can guarantee you the phone would ring," he says.

And that, simply, is the point of marketing. **LM**

one of the things that I have shared with my people. They may not remember specific dates; they may not remember specific instances, but almost all my employees can give the history of Michael Hatcher & Associates from the beginning of (my) working at Brookhaven Nursery in Brookhaven, MS (in 1973)." The more people know the story, the more it and the company perpetuates.

Hatcher says that good marketing helps him to find new customers and also to find new talented employees.

"Everybody wants to play on a winning team," he says. "My top managers came

►► **Online:** [www.hatcherlandscape.com/](http://www.hatcherlandscape.com/) **Location:** Memphis, TN **Principals:** Michael Hatcher, President; Mary Hatcher, Controller **Employees:** 104 **Projected 07 revenues:** \$9.2 million

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