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<th>Rain Bird List Price</th>
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Photo illustration by Jeff Belasz
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Be more productive — or take less

There are just three ways to weather a severe economic crisis: expect and take less, work more or become more productive. Most of us prefer the third option, although likely we’re all being forced by present circumstances to accept all three in various degrees.

One thing is clear: The age of extravagant waste is over. Gone. That era is as far removed from our realities as the reign of the dinosaurs. The housing and financial meltdowns of this past year have sobered us to the realities of our new economy, just as surely as the brutal slap in the face of 9/11 awoke us to our vulnerability in an unstable world.

Simply put, uncertainty over the prospects for a short or long economic recovery is not uncertain anymore. We’re in for a long, hard, painful slog. Economists are divided over when our economy will bottom and begin improving again. Some say we’re already there, and predict small, but positive growth by year’s end. Most aren’t so optimistic. Regardless, nobody is predicting that our economy will soon return to the level of activity it displayed just two short years ago.

Better than most
Acknowledging that, Landscape Management’s recent industry-wide survey revealed that the landscape/lawn service industry is faring better than many other industries through these tough times.

Consumers want their properties maintained and established lawn care, and many landscape businesses are plugging along at a steady, if hardly stellar, pace. Some are actually doing better than expected — perhaps because, spooked by events of this past fall and winter, they projected too-low sales and revenues. Other firms serve markets that have not suffered so severely from job losses and home foreclosures. Weather is a factor, too. Lots of rain in the U.S. Southeast caused the lifting of business-killing watering bans.

Other positive factors in our favor include:
> We’re now an expected expense. Many clients that have experienced the beauty and benefits of green, healthy lawns and maintained properties no longer view them as luxuries or extras but as essentials — probably not as essential as, say, cell phones or wireless Internet, but you see what I mean.
> Our services are affordable. The cost for lawn care and property maintenance for most homeowners is about the same as their cable or utility bills, and we’ve made it increasingly easy to pay for these services by promoting pre-payments, online payments and credit card payments.
> We help protect property values. Property owners, whether residential or commercial, realize they need to protect their properties’ value in the face of decreased property prices. Commercial and rental properties in particular must be maintained to attract traffic — and tenants.
> We improve the “staycation” experience. Many homeowners are forgoing expensive vacations and now view their properties as sanctuaries to relax and entertain family and friends.

Of course, if unemployment keeps rising, the construction industry remains in shambles and the credit crisis doesn’t improve (or worsens), even these advantages may evaporate and we will have to rejuggle the options of accepting less, working harder or boosting our productivity.
Introducing a granular that protects like a sprayable. New Heritage® G fungicide spreads evenly over large areas and the granules easily dissolve with just a heavy dew. It’s quick. It’s comprehensive. And it’s founded on a proven active ingredient that provides peace of mind for up to 28 days.

A superior fungicide that transcends liquids.
DIGITAL SLOTS

BY MARTY WHITFORD
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Playing the odds, landscapers move more marketing bets from printed local business directories to their Web sites, search engine optimization strategies, e-newsletters and pay-per-click spots.

MARKETING AND GAMBLING ARE CLOSE COUSINS.

“With both, you gotta play to win — but you also have to know when to walk away,” says Steve Chepurny, president of Beechwood Landscape Architecture & Construction, a $6 million-a-year business based in Southampton, NJ.

Every year, Chepurny, like many landscape company owners, spends thousands of dollars hoping his number comes up — his business’ telephone number, that is, as homeowners leaf through pages of landscaping and lawn care ads in various printed local business directories. Last year, Beechwood Landscape spent more than $14,000 on print business-directory ads.

“Our Yellow Pages ads yielded just 11 calls and zero new business,” Chepurny says. “The few leads that did come in were mediocre, and I’m being generous when I say mediocre.”

After failing to break even on these marketing spends in recent years, Chepurny scratched 85% of his print business-directory advertising. He’s betting — and winning — big on digital slots such as the company’s Web site, BeechwoodLandscape.com, search engine optimization (SEO) strategies — to rank among the top listings when consumers search Google, Yahoo and other Web engines — and online ads with links on referral sites, such as SuperPages.com and AngiesList.com.

“Pulling most of our print business-directory ads was a difficult decision because every Tom, Dick and Harry has ads in those books,” Chepurny says. “But digital marketing is where it’s at. The odds on returns are much better. Our Web site and pay-per-click ads generated 125 leads and 30 new customers last year — and we invested just half the amount there that we spent on printed business-directory ads.”

Chepurny no longer follows the marketing spends of Tom, Dick and Harry. His digital marketing returns place him at the front of a new and growing pack: hungry, savvy landscapers who bet with their wallets, not their peers.

Landscape professionals like Chepurny smartly are following their customers and prospects to the Web. They’re shifting more of their marketing bets from traditional printed local business directories to their company Web sites, SEO strategies, customer e-newsletters and pay-per-click ad spots to attract more prospects, better serve their customers and green their bottom lines.

**Playing the numbers**

Beechwood Landscape recently invested $2,500 to upgrade its Web site and SEO, and routinely spends $500 to $600 per month on pay-per-click ads. The company also pays $400 per month for an expanded listing and link on SuperPages.com — the digital counterpart to Yellow Pages’ print directories — and $125 per month for a similar spot on AngiesList.com. Monthly e-newsletters packed with landscaping tips and special offers help the company nurture its business relation-
WINNING THE WEB’S GREAT RACE

Remember frantically racing your sibling, elbowing each other all the way to the side door, just to be the first to tell Mom your version of the story? Turns out, even those bruising experiences teach valuable business lessons.

Winning The Great Race to tell your story first is what search engine optimization (SEO) is all about, says Jon Wuebben, author of “Content Rich: Writing Your Way to Wealth on the Web.” Wuebben spoke at the Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association’s (TOCA’s) 20th annual meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico, May 12-14.

“An overwhelming majority — up to 70% — assume the companies atop Google and other search-engine rankings are the clear leaders in their fields,” Wuebben says. “Do you know where you rank — and why?”

Some of Wuebben’s SEO tips are:

> Subscribe to wordtracker.com ($275/year) or keyworddiscovery.com ($50/month) to stay abreast of the most-searched words online.
> Write down the search words most pertinent to your business — in order of their popularity.
> Incorporate one to three of these search words on each page of your Web site(s), digital press releases, e-newsletters and blogs.
> Use three or fewer different keywords on each Web site page, taking care to not repeat the words more than three times per page because it will hinder your rankings on search engines.
> Use more-vague search words such as “lawn maintenance” on more-general Web pages, and more-detailed terms such as “zero-turn mower” on more-specific pages.
> Constantly add links to and from your Web site and measure your related traffic progress at linkpopularity.com.
> Hyperlink your press releases, e-newsletters and blogs to your Web site and offer RSS (reader subscription service) feeds.

“Want to grow your Web of influence?” Wuebben asks. “Follow these simple steps and you’ll race right past your online competitors.” — MW
Spurge, knotweed and clover are no match for the power of new Surge® Broadleaf Herbicide For Turf. Energized with sulfentrazine, Surge has the power and speed to knock out tough broadleaf weeds fast. And it even suppresses yellow nutsedge! Visual results in 48 hours – now that has a powerful effect on call-backs.

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- Warm Weather Weed Control
- Reduces Call-Backs
- Rain-Fast in Just 6 Hours
- Designed for Residential and Commercial Turf
- Low Odor
continued from page 10

of the $8,400 annual savings by partnering with ServiceMagic.com, an online generator of qualified leads.

Most consumers have migrated away from print business directories and now surf the Web for services, says Jeff Swano, president of the $700,000-a-year business.

"I can't tell you how many of our customers tell us they don't open those yellow or white books anymore," Swano says. "But I can tell you our return on investment with ServiceMagic.com blows away those print directories — just don't tell anyone."

Swano spends about $400 per month on ServiceMagic.com leads. He also recently invested $1,500 for a Web site renovation and $2,500 for SEO.

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Morse, meet Twitter, your telegram technology replacement.

Twitter is the world's new e-telegram, says digital marketing guru Jon Wuebben, who spoke at the Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association's (TOCA's) recent 20th anniversary meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Wuebben points out that when US Airways flight 1549 crashed into New York's Hudson River Jan. 15, twitter.com broke the news first thanks to a tweet (a microblog of 140 or fewer characters) by one of the passengers on the plane.

Wilson's fear dissipating (no typos were made; no censorship was needed), as his logic and humor surfaced: "This was crash #2 for me. Maybe I should start taking the bus."

Armed with just a cell phone, any tweeter in the right place at the right time (or in this case, in the wrong place at the wrong time) can scoop a pack of reporters. Twitter is easier and faster than blogging, and uploading photos is a snap. It's better for readers, too: "It's immediate, unfiltered and free," Wuebben adds.

"Twitter, Facebook and YouTube complete the SMO — Social Media Optimization — technology triumvirate," Wuebben says. "If you want to be 'in' — to really know things and be known — you better be 'there.'" — MW

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With speed, stability and control, you can go the distance. Tackle the changing terrain with absolute ease. Introducing a new force in lawn maintenance that let’s you do it all—the 31 hp Wright Stander ZK. With cut speeds of up to 13.5 mph, you’ll blow any mid-mount Z out of the water on jobs big and small.

Experience the advantages of standing. Ride Wright.

“By shifting my weight, I can harness the full power of this machine.”
Part of the numbers game favoring digital marketing involves the proliferation of print directories. More than 120 publishers sell ads for a combined more than 7,000 local reference books. Swano and other landscape contractors say consumers' cabinets are stuffed with so many business directories that it's much easier to surf online for services than try and open the bulging Pandora's box.

Yellow free
Dave Flannery, owner of Big Creek Landscapes in Alpharetta, GA, canceled the company's print business-directory advertising in 2005 and doesn't regret it.

Flannery is in the choir when it comes to singing the praises of digital marketing.

PROSPECTING TOOLS
1. Corporate Web site
2. Search engine optimization
3. (tie) Social networking sites and e-newsletters
4. Digital advertising
5. (tie) Blogging and online information such as press releases and free white papers

BETTING ON DIGITAL
Two-thirds of landscape contractors say their digital marketing investments offer greater returns than traditional telephone directory ads.

Three-quarters say digital marketing beats local newspaper, TV and radio ads.

SURVEY SAYS ...

79% of landscape contractors do not e-mail customers satisfaction surveys at least once annually.

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– Larry DeWitt, founder & CEO

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- Dyed green to look like grass
- Single photodegradable netting on top of wood fibers

*Straw Guard 200*

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- Seed Doesn't Wash Away
- Saves Water
- Non-toxic, Biodegradable
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**COVER STORY**

**HOOKING 'EM**

7% of landscape contractors generate more than half of their new-business leads from their Web sites, e-newsletters and other digital marketing efforts.

12% say digital marketing accounts for one-quarter to half of their leads.

27% say digital marketing generates one-tenth to one-quarter of their leads.

54% say digital marketing delivers less than one-tenth of their leads.

**REELING 'EM IN**

20% of landscape contractors convert more than half of their digital marketing leads into new business.

22% convert one-quarter to half of their digital marketing leads.

19% convert one-tenth to one-quarter of their digital marketing leads.

39% convert less than one-tenth of their digital marketing leads.

*Source: July 2009 Landscaping Management online survey with 1700 respondents.*

continued from page 14

digital marketing. In past work lives, he held various sales-and-marketing positions with technology giants Compuware and Peregrine Systems. Now, he's focused on reinventing Big-CreekLandscapes.com.

“We’re updating our Web site because many of the portfolio photos we’re showcasing are a few years old, and in our line of work nothing quite sells like a few great before-and-after shots, coupled with customer testimonials,” Flannery says.

“There are several phases to reinventing ourselves online and becoming a true destination site rather than just an electronic brochure.”

For example, Flannery wants to add an online shopping cart so the company can tap a new revenue stream — marketing retail items such as pond supplies, fish food and bird houses — while feeding new-business leads to the company's landscape design/build business. Later this year, he plans to launch

continued on page 18
Does your insurance company think "photosynthesis" is the latest feature on a digital camera?

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returns on his marketing investments. "You can't showcase your landscape work in those yellow print directories," Flannery says. "The few leads we did get from those ads weren't quality. The people generally were calling us, and three to five other companies, just to obtain the lowest price possible — and that's the kind of business we're not interested in."

Most mix bets
Chepurny and Flannery are atypical. While many professionals are following their lead and moving more marketing dollars to digital venues, most still maintain paid presences in their printed local business directories.

"We cut way back on our Yellow Pages advertising, from a few hundred dollars a month to $60, but we're still in there," Dwyer says. "We get a free one-line listing in one category for being located in the area, and we pay for similar listings under four or five other headings — so we can cover our bets across nursery wholesale and retail, landscape maintenance, design/build and installation."

Printed local directory ads still can help build business. They accounted for 11% of new customers last year for...
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Only one solution has the benefits of both baits and contact insecticides. DuPont® Advion® fire ant bait is one of the fastest, most effective products available today—eliminating the entire colony in just 24 to 72 hours. Thanks to a new class of chemistry, Advion® provides outstanding year-round protection in just one or two applications. And it does it all with an excellent environmental and toxicological profile, and a reduced-risk classification from the EPA. Experience all-in-one fire ant control today. Call 1-888-6DuPont (1-888-638-7668) or visit us at proproducts.dupont.com. Advion.® Unbeatable results.
Austin, TX-based Cutting Edge Lawn Care. The Internet, however, draws more new business, says Jerry Tindel, Cutting Edge's office manager who sidelines as its director of marketing. “Yellow Pages cost us $394.50 for each new client they brought us in the first half of 2009,” Tindel says. “The Web cost us just $183.13 for each new customer. Twice as many customers — 23 — came to us through the Web.”

Printed local business directories not only still win advertising dollars from Tindel, but they also prompted him and his son, Todd — who founded the business in the eighth grade — to change the company's name.

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These days, often the difference between making do and making a profit is the quality of your equipment. Kubota turf equipment is built with your business in mind—to deliver a higher level of performance; to be more fuel-efficient; and to provide more comfort and conveniences that make each job more productive. That's what turf pros all across the country call the "Kubota Factor."

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The ‘8th Waste’ can be the worst

For those of you who are familiar with the Working Smarter and Lean philosophies, you know there are seven types of waste. As a quick review, they are transportation, inventory, motion, waiting, extra processing, overproduction and defects. As you see, waste can be an issue in every part of our businesses — and learning to identify it is the first step.

For the real Working Smarter enthusiast, you may also know of an 8th Waste. If left unmain- tained, it can be more detrimental to your business than all the other types of waste combined. The eighth waste most people never think of is: unused employee creativity.

Our people will always be our most valuable asset. That is not a new concept. I have often said, every great thing that has ever been accomplished or will be accomplished has and will happen through people. It makes sense that it will be our people who will learn to find and drive out waste, and it’s up to us to make sure each individual realizes his or her important role in doing just that.

I’m willing to guess, however, too often we fall far short in providing the opportunity for this great asset to creatively find solutions and produce at its fullest potential.

A continual process
We work to eliminate waste so that our people can work smarter. Remember, however, they are a critical part of the equation. You not only want employees to perform more efficiently, but you want them thinking about continual improvements they can initiate at every opportunity. Imagine what we could accomplish if we consciously worked to provide our team with the opportunity to engage their minds and exercise their creativity on a regular basis. Despite what some may say, everyone can be creative in the sense that they can provide a new perspective or idea on how to improve the business they help support.

A Working Smarter culture flourishes and falters with your team’s ability to gain contribution at all levels. If your culture is reluctant to provide opportunities based on job title or seniority, think of all the wasted creativity that is being passed over. The greatest idea may come from the 15-year crew member who knows his job better than anyone, or from the new hire who has not been around long enough to know better.

What if your culture promoted the following habits?

› An idea board with incentives for posting Working Smarter ideas.
› A management team that regularly asks the newest hires, “How do you think we can do this better?”
› Time set aside each week, without compromise, for your team to communicate on ways to Work Smarter.
› Time set aside each week, without compromise, for crew members to ask one of their clients about ways they can add more value through their service, even if it requires a translator.

Look at your culture and your strategy for improvement, and be cautious not to overlook the waste that can build up in unused employee creativity. Never discount the potential that rests in fully using your greatest asset: the great people who make up your organization.

More than 250 Green Industry companies have participated in JP Horizons’ Working Smarter Training Challenge (WSTC), typically saving tens of thousands of dollars annually. To learn whether your organization qualifies to participate in the WSTC, visit www.jphorizons.com/LM.htm today.
You have enough things to worry about. But with FreeHand™ 1.75G herbicide, hand-weeding isn't one of them. FreeHand 1.75G gives you up to 8 weeks of broad-spectrum preemergent weed control. And since FreeHand 1.75G utilizes two highly effective active ingredients and two unique modes of action, it's a great resistance management tool, too. Free your crew up to do other things, with FreeHand 1.75G.

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The Chemical Company
What the gross margin benchmark means to your business

What kind of gross margins can I expect this year? I get asked this question every week. The easy answer is “lower,” as pricing becomes even more aggressive. This price decline is a simple fact of life in every segment of the Green Industry thanks to the current oversupply of contractors relative to the shrinking stock of work. The tougher question is how to react to this market condition.

Table 1 shows the year-over-year impact the economy is having on gross margins in two segments: design/build and grounds management. Because pricing in the bid/build segment is so aggressive, it is difficult to pinpoint a benchmark. But I have observed gross margins as low as 19% in this segment.

The best strategy is to focus on gross profit dollars in your pricing and estimating instead of target fixating on gross margin percentage. After all, percentages don’t pay for overhead, dollars do. The example below outlines a “before and after” picture of the financial impact of a lower gross margin.

Keeping in mind the primary objective of achieving the same gross profit dollars to pay for our overhead, the strategy combines a decrease in the hourly labor price and a production hours efficiency gain in exchange for an average wage increase (because of increased overtime). This strategy requires no additional equipment and minimizes increases in overhead costs.

In our example, we reduce the price of labor by 10%, from $32.71 to $29.35. A more competitive price should result in increased sales. As a result, labor hours would necessarily increase by 9,000 hours to produce the new work. But by budgeting for 5.5 hours of overtime per man per week (increasing the average wage from $12.50 to $13.26) in exchange for a 5% efficiency gain on the current work (equivalent to two hours per week per employee), we can cover all those hours without adding people or equipment.

If lower gross margins are a constraint and fact of life, you will have no other choice but to respond creatively to lean out your pricing and your production to maintain your gross profit dollars.

As for the old gross margin percentages, forget about them for now. They are an old benchmark that represents the way it was. We all have to deal in the now.
LOOK INSIDE to see how our new, low list prices are helping contractors save big.

Joining the many who pay less and get more.
That’s intelligent.
"Anytime you can reduce your price and maintain quality, you're at an advantage."
Dick Casci, President
Ridgewood Landscaping Inc.

"Lower pricing will help me win more business during this challenging time."
Craig Herring, Owner/President
Cypress Lawn & Landscape

More contractors are talking to their distributors about new, lower Rain Bird list prices—and more contractors are saving big. If you haven't already, now is the perfect time to ask how much you can save.

That's because we've added even more durable, water-saving products to our lower-priced line-up, giving you over 50 options to choose from.

Turn the page to see just a few of these lower-priced products.
Save up to 45% on proven Rain Bird products.

We're proving yet again, The Intelligent Use of Water™ is about saving water and money. Now you can save even more on our industry-leading, water-efficient products—with over 50 low-priced options to choose from. Talk to your Rain Bird sales representative or distributor about how you can save on quality Rain Bird products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Type</th>
<th>Original Rain Bird Price</th>
<th>Original Hunter Price</th>
<th>Savings</th>
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*Based on 2009 U.S. Rain Bird, Hunter, Netafim, and Irritrol* list pricing effective May 1, 2009.
Renewal & Remembrance

WASHINGTON — A couple months ago, our daughter's 8th grade class followed a rite of passage in Northeast Ohio. They visited D.C., something I'd done nearly 30 years ago with my classmates. She and her friends visited the major museums and monuments including Arlington National Cemetery. And I can't help but think her experience, like mine, was one of muted reverence. Our daughter, Sammie, is aware the country is at war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and she's certainly studied our many conflicts in American history classes. But at 14, it's not easy to appreciate the sacrifice war extracts on society. It's difficult to understand the freedoms we've come to expect when you've not had to work or struggle for it. I was no different. I'm sure Sammie thought about those interred around her as she watched her friends lay a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknowns or as she walked passed John F. Kennedy's grave or the memorial honoring the seven astronauts lost in the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster. And I'm sure those thoughts vanished quickly as an ice cube in the summer sun as she and her friends got back on the bus and headed to the next site. I was no different.

Two years ago, I returned to Arlington National Cemetery as part of the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET's) Renewal & Remembrance, an annual environmental enhancement project. And I was blessed to he able to attend again last month. Contractors from 28 states donated their equipment, time and energy to renew the hallowed grounds and to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice. This year, there were about 400 adults and 50 children involved in the program. Some contractors closed their businesses for several days to participate in Renewal & Remembrance, no small feat in this economy. The work includes liming hundreds of acres, adding cables and installing lighting protection to trees, installing plants and trees, and updating irrigation systems.

It's a truly humbling experience — returning to Arlington National Cemetery as an adult. Walking past rows and rows of white tombstones is a reminder of the fragility and fleeting nature of life. The numbers are staggering. There are more than 300,000 people buried at Arlington National Cemetery — soldiers from every war since the American Revolution. And the number grows, on average, by 30 every day.

Etched in many of the tombstones are the wars in which the soldier who lies below participated. How can I not be humbled when there are three wars listed or the man lying there took his last breath when he was half my age.

Walking through the grounds I came across a stone, its carving worn with age. The lettering, still legible, indicated an ID number and had the words Unknown U.S. Soldier. It saddens me to think no one comes to visit the man, that somewhere there was a family that never learned the fate of their son, brother or husband. I said a quiet "thank you" and moved on.

Many who donated their time that day, as they do every year, were veterans or relatives of veterans. Some have sons or daughters currently on active duty and in harm's way. I don't know what path my daughter will choose in life. I can only hope, one day, perhaps when she brings her children to Arlington National Cemetery, she will finally understand and appreciate the sacrifice of those laid to rest there.

Walking past rows and rows of white tombstones is reminder of the fragility and fleeting nature of life.
WALK-BEHIND MOWERS

Cub Cadet Commercial
Tougher than the bolted design found on many mowers, the 1748 wide-area walk-behind mower offers a fully welded, one-piece engine platform and mowing deck. Features include a 7-gauge steel skirt, reinforced solid-steel plates and a 48-in. Command Cut System cutting deck. Its patented Vari-Touch foot controls allow drive-belt adjustments on the go from 8 to 24 lbs., providing traction on wet or hilly terrain. CubCadetCommercial.com or 877/835-7841

Ariens Co.
The new EverRide Wasp Hydro with a 52-in. deck offers twin 10cc hydraulic pumps and motors, as well as a 19-hp Kawasaki Kai engine. Complete with a 7-gauge laser cut steel deck, it also includes long-life, maintenance-free spindles and heavy-duty, heat-treated blades. Additionally, a belt-drive system offers loop handle, operator presence controls, which gives sharp turning-radius trimming ability. Everride.com or 920/756-2141

Honda Commercial Mowers
Both the new self-propelled, hydrostatic drive HRC216HXA (pictured) and push-type HRC216PDA mowers feature Honda's exclusive MicroCut twin-blade mulching technology. Other features include a dome shaped deck design that facilitates both bagging and mulching while delivering finer clipping particles; a front bumper that provides mower deck and engine protection, as well as convenient transport. HondaPowerEquipment.com or 800/426-7701

Gravely
The new Hydro HE 1948FL Pro-Walk mower features 19 hp and a cutting width of 48 in. The drivetrain systems consist of Hydro-Gear 10cc pump and 12-cu.-in. wheel motor, Ogura GT 1A Electric Clutch and 16-in. drive tires. Operator ergonomics include an electric starter system and large-diameter fuel cap for quick refueling. Additional features include semi-pneumatic casters, which are designed to never go flat; a loop-handle Pro Steer Ground-Drive Control with Intuitive Action; and a heavy-duty plastic side discharge chute. Ariens.com or 800/472-8359

Hustler Turf Equipment
With improved features, the re-designed commercial walk-behind TrimStar Hydro offers users a heavier-duty transmission than before, along with improved handling and stability. The redesigned TrimStar also provides a one-step height adjustment system, with a deck lift that has just one lever instead of several sets of pins. To cater to a variety of needs, three deck sizes are available: 36, 48 and 54 in. Additionally, an electric-start option is available for the 54-in. configuration. HustlerTurf.com or 800/395-4757

continued on page 28
You’ll Have a Field Day at GIE+EXPO!

Ready to kick some tires? Step outside at GIE+EXPO and into a shopping playground. Not only is GIE+EXPO the largest buying, selling and learning marketplace in the industry, it also offers the only 19-acre outdoor demo area — open 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. on October 29 and 30. Test hundreds of the latest products, and shop for items that will make you more profitable in 2010.

“When we get to the show, we know what we are shopping for. It is helpful to try it out and see how the specs work in on-site job scenarios.”

Carl Hreha
Owner, Carl’s Lawn Care
Columbus, NJ

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*Blackout dates and restrictions apply.
Scag Power Equipment

Available in 36- and 48-in. deck models, the all-new Scag SFW belt-drive, floating-deck walk-behind features a cutting height adjustment system that requires no tools. Operators will spend less time greasing thanks to the low-maintenance design. A lighter overall weight allows for easier handling when traversing curbs and other obstacles. The company also offers a two-year mower warranty.

Scag.com or 920/387-3150

The Toro Co.

The new Toro GrandStand series features a retractable platform that allows for operation from both stand-on and walk-behind positions. All four models in the series incorporate the Toro Turbo Force deck and twin-lever steering controls for ease of use. Choose from 48- or 52-in. cutting decks with a 19- or 23-hp Kawasaki engine. The weight distribution can be customized to suit individual preferences, and operators have the freedom to easily shift their weight to further influence the machine's traction.

Toro.com or 800/348-2424

Briggs & Stratton Yard Power Products Group

As the latest feature added to the Snapper SE Series of mowers, the Pivot-N-Go variable drive system allows operators to easily adjust the speed of the mower to their own pace. The more the handle pivots forward, the faster the ground speed. Speed choices range from 0 to 4 mph. The system is available on two models: The SPV/HZ21675 (pictured) features a 21-in. mowing deck and rear-wheel drive; the SPV/H2265 features a 22-in. mowing deck and front-wheel drive. Both feature the ability to mulch, bag or side-discharge grass clippings. Snapper.com or 414/289-5333
The nine mowers in the new hydro walk-behind line feature fixed and floating deck designs ranging in size from 36 to 61 in. All models are powered by commercial-grade Kawasaki V-Twin engines ranging from 15 to 23 hp. The new drive system features a Kanzaki 10cc tandem style pump, Parker wheel motors and an easy-to-access control knob for tracking adjustments. A pistol-type operator interface includes an integrated operator presence control, thumb slide locks for neutral, and easy-to-reach drive levers. The speed control lever also features an automatic pump bypass in the neutral lock position to prevent creeping and assist with cold starting. A foot-operated brake helps secure the units for easier transport. USA.Husqvarna.com or 800/HUSKY-62

Now available in 36-, 48-, 52- or 61-in. cutting widths, the ComfortControl Dual Drive mower features an exclusive Torque Tuned Blade system. It's powered by a 15-hp Kawasaki V-twin engine, and offers dual transmissions for improved performance and downtime.

A Cruise Control Bar with independent steering override allows the operator a multitude of handling options. An electronic Sensor-Grip operator presence system detects the operator's hands on the handlebars. This anti-fatigue safety system requires no additional pressure to operate the mower, and it works by detecting moisture from the hands of the operator — with or without gloves on.

FerrisIndustries.com or 800-933-6175

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Sam Lang grew up in a small Georgia town located midway between Augusta and Macon. He earned degrees in economics and agronomy from the University of Georgia — and in 1984, was recruited by and worked for Orkin Lawn Care, headquartered in Atlanta. Looking north (but not too far north), Lang saw opportunity in North Carolina’s Triangle region, and that’s where he established his lawn care company in 1989.

Sam, your company is in its 20th year. How are you celebrating your milestone? We are a close-knit group here at Fairway Green, and we plan to have a family and employee celebration after the seeding season.

You grew up in Georgia and are a proud graduate of the University of Georgia. What possessed you to build your business in and around Raleigh, NC? The decision to open in Raleigh was based on demographics. The Triangle area had a highly educated population with a high- to medium-income level. The Research Triangle Park area had experienced tremendous growth in high-tech jobs. IBM was based here, and the bio-tech industry was beginning to establish itself. All of this growth was enhanced by the presence of the University of North Carolina, Duke University and North Carolina State University. Growth was happening — and future growth seemed certain.

Your market is in the so-called transition zone, and has just about every species of turfgrass imaginable. What kind of challenge is that to your company? Common Bermuda was brought here from Africa in the 1700s, and there is a lot of that. Before the recent economic downturn of last fall, about 600 people a week were moving to the Triangle. A large percentage of these newcomers were moving here from more northern states, and were accustomed to Kentucky bluegrass lawns. We’ve had a challenge educating them about the types of grass that grow well here. We also have to provide them with realistic expectations in regard to the services we provide.

Over the years, you have been a big supporter of the turfgrass program at North Carolina State University. How has that relationship benefited you and your company? Having a close relationship with NC State has been a huge factor in the growth of Fairway Green, and it has enhanced our credibility. Dr. Fred Yelverton and the entire faculty have been a valuable resource for us. Being able to call on some of the best scientists in the turfgrass industry for help is unique, and gives confidence to the customers we serve.

How would describe your involvement with Fairway Green today? I remain very involved in the daily operations of Fairway Green. I have been fortunate to have a management team that allows me to pursue other interests outside of the company. For example, my wife, Carolyn, and I own farms and are venturing into the livestock business.

A RELATIONSHIP WITH NC STATE HAS BEEN A HUGE FACTOR IN THE GROWTH OF FAIRWAY GREEN.”
You've got enough to worry about, so use **Trinity® fungicide** to control anthracnose, brown patch, take-all patch, summer patch and dollar spot, even during summer stress periods. Use it to suppress algae, too, which can lead to higher turf quality. Like the entire family of BASF fungicides, **Trinity** works. So don’t worry. Everything will be a-ok.

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Sell the value of enhancements

At Wilson-Oyler, our philosophy in selling enhancements has always been “treat your clients’ money like it was your own.” In today’s business environment, we believe this concept should be a guiding light. Clients are working with restricted budgets, yet still want to be responsible stewards of their property and its value. So your role should be to partner with the client and guide the investment process.

Clients feel nicked-and-dimed when they get bombarded with extras every month. We all know that. Therefore, we believe you should have a plan for each client’s property.

Client interests lie in several key areas when it comes to making enhancement investments, including:

- **Safety and liability:** These include vision obstruction, slip and fall because of water seepage, trip hazards from buckled sidewalks, etc.
- **Wear and tear:** Refurbishment of worn or tired landscape areas can prevent the decline in appearance and property value.
- **Changes in use patterns:** Changing tenants often leads to different use patterns for the property, resulting in more or different wear issues.
- **Lower water use:** Changing from high water-use plantings to lower-use plantings can often be a good long-term investment for clients. Not only can they save water and associated costs, but they can save in other ways, too: Overspray often contributes to parking or road surface breakdown.
- **Improved life cycle costing of plantings:** Too often, high visual-interest plantings have short life cycles. Creating a better balance between high interest and longer life cycle plantings can be a good investment for a client.
- **Curb appeal:** Vacancy rates are high in some areas, and marketing becomes an important investment choice for owners. You can help by creating focal points.

**Hitting the mark**

Newer account managers often do not have experience in what to sell, but they do have sales targets to hit. Owners and managers must make sure they do not fall into the nickel-and-dime sales mode with no real plan. Training in how to sell value is essential to keeping the customer trust.

When delivering the enhancement proposal, make sure it passes these acid tests:

- “If this were my money, would I make the investment?”
- “Is this a good long-term solution rather than a Band-Aid approach?”
- “Is this the best use of the client’s enhancement dollars?”
- “Which projects have the highest or immediate priority?”

Owners and managers must make sure they do not fall into the **nickel-and-dime sales mode** with no real plan. Training in how to sell value is essential to keeping the customer trust.
In our industry, how to best price snow and ice removal services is always a very interesting — and occasionally controversial — topic of discussion. Do you really know why you charge what you charge? How are you determining what to charge? Are you setting your service fees, or are you letting other factors determine your pricing? Too many times, we don’t know what we don’t know. For nearly nine years, I had no idea why I charged what I charged other than that’s what I thought the market would bear, and that’s what my competition was charging. That pricing methodology had me $90,000 in debt and nearly put me right out of business. As a matter of fact, I thought the only problem I had was that I needed more work.

I had two phrases in my mind controlling the pricing of my jobs. These same two phrases must be removed from your vocabulary as a snow and ice management professional:

1. They won’t do it.
2. They won’t pay it.

That mindset limits the success and profitability of many snow and ice management contractors in the same way it controlled me.

When it comes to snow and ice services, don’t underestimate your value to your customers.

Profitability is a result of a business owner implementing a sound business plan.

continued on page 35
WHO SAYS ICE CONTROL ISN’T AN ART?

The NEW POLY-CASTER spreader line combines dual independent electric motor controls with a rust-proof poly design, for the ultimate in ice control performance.

www.fisherplows.com


Don't follow the herd

Here are some of the most common (and harmful) ways contractors price their jobs.

» I am small; I can do it cheaper than anyone.
» I was making $12 an hour at my "real" job, so this is pretty close.
» The competition is charging this much.
» Our market would never pay more than this.
» I ask the client, "What will it take to get your business?"
» I throw a dart each day and change pricing based on how badly I need the job.
» I keep going until they flinch.
» I use the industry standard; it must be right.

Implement a cost recovery system based on overhead, expenses and use rates.

continued from page 33

Do what's right for your business

Have you ever reconsidered your service fees solely on the basis that you thought it was too much? If so, ask yourself this question: Compared to what? Are you limiting your company's success because you think it is too much to ask for?

The current economic condition may lure you into thinking, "Why consider change now?" In a down economy, it would be very easy to say you are just going to leave things alone and not make any changes until things turn around. However, changing now may be the best choice for your company. Yes, you may be experiencing some tough times, but what are the consequences of not changing?

Efficiency and profitability are the direct results of a business owner understanding and implementing a sound business plan, including the principles and techniques necessary to help become more successful and profitable. Training, education and business knowledge will set you apart from your competition.

I am confident the most significant factor limiting a contractor's profitability is a lack of understanding and implementing an accurate cost recovery system for his or her company. Many times, we blame our lack of profitability on our individual markets, competition and labor force. Are you seeing the forest and not the trees in your company?

As Albert Einstein said, "the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result." I challenge you in 2009 and beyond to take a close look at your own company and see what you can do differently and better than your competition to operate more efficiently and profitably.

The first step is to implement a cost recovery system for your company. I guarantee you that McDonald's knows...
exactly what it cost to build a Big Mac. Do you know what it costs you per hour of operation for your truck, spreader, plow, pusher, labor, etc. to clear a lot, subdivision, driveway or shopping center? If not, I strongly recommend you implement a cost recovery system based on your company's overhead, expenses and use rates.

Too many contractors are looking in the wrong places for the right answers to price their jobs. The reality is that everyone's costs per hour of operation are different. Chat rooms and chat boards are great for some information — but in my opinion, the dollar-a-minute theory and the many other similar pricing strategies are often off-target. Pricing is not a one-size-fits-all proposition.

Here's why you must know what your actual costs per hour of operation are for your company (compare these to the box on page 35, "Don't follow the herd"):

1. **Smaller cannot always do it cheaper.** The more you use a piece of equipment, the less expensive your direct costs per hour of operation become.

2. **The paycheck mentality will hold you back.** Guessing at your hourly rate based on what you were making at your prior job doesn't work.

3. **Ignore the competition.** If you could count on your competition to price your jobs, the failure rate for the industry would not be so high.

4. **Listen to the market.** Before you say your market will never pay "it," have you determined what "it" is for your business?

5. **Don't tip your hand.** When you ask your potential client what it will take to get the job, you are basically telling them you are hungry and you will meet or beat anyone's price. Even though we all need the work, the last thing we want to do is to give our potential customers the upper hand. They will beat you down on pricing for sure at that point.

6. **Don't change your pricing on a daily basis.** When you know what your actual costs are, it is easier to sell it at a fixed price.

7. **Don't count on the flinch method.** I had a contractor tell me one time he used the "flinch method": He kept going until they flinched. It may or may not work, but I am not sure I want to count on this method for my business.

8. **Don't rely on the industry standard, either.** Again, if the industry standard was right for everyone, the failure rates would not be so high. Based on the contractors I talk to across the United States and Canada, too many are not using a cost recovery program for their business. Thus, the industry standard is probably not accurate.

The opportunity snow and ice management offers you compared to your other services is that you do not need to schedule five or more days of work. Snow and ice management is a very time-sensitive service, and you only need to schedule hours of work per piece of equipment, not days. Simply translated, you can be more selective on the types of accounts you want to attract.

The bottom line is simple: You offer a very time-sensitive service that allows you the opportunity to charge based on the value of those services, not the actual costs to provide them. Servicing fewer accounts with a faster response time, at a slightly higher price, is not only good for you, but great for your customer. It is truly a win-win situation for everyone.

**I don't necessarily want to be the cheapest price; I want to be their best option.**

The only number that I am concerned with at my business is my hourly rate. By knowing my costs, I can use my time and effort attracting the type of clientele that I know can afford my service. I don't necessarily want to be the cheapest price; I want to be their best option.

**Look beyond the economy**

Although the uncertainty of today's global financial situation has many contractors worried, the reality is that there is plenty of work available. Hiring a professional snow and ice management contractor is a necessity, not an option, for many of your clients. Although they can put off mowing, landscaping, mulching and other similar summer services, they must be prepared for the reality of winter. That's where you as a snow and ice management contractor fulfill their needs.

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**AUTHOR** is Louisville, KY-based owner of both Wayne's Lawn Service and of Profits Unlimited, a Green Industry business consulting firm. Contact him at 800/845-0499 or wayne@profitsareus.com.
NOTHING'S TOUGHER, SMARTER OR FASTER. Introducing the NEW Poly Power-V XT: a rock-solid combination of professional-grade toughness, Power-V versatility and super-slick poly efficiency. Not to mention 37" tall flared blade wings that throw snow higher and farther than any other plow. Bottom line? There isn’t a tougher, smarter or faster plow on the market today. Simple as 1-2-3.

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*For straight-ahead plowing*, both wings fold forward, defaulting to the scoop position for more snow-pushing and stacking capacity. *When angled for windrowing*, the trailing wing folds back in line with the moldboard while the leading wing retains its forward position to capture more snow, reduce spillover and utilize the entire blade.

Simply Genius.
**Steel edge**

*Pro-Tech Manufacturing and Distribution* created the IST Sno Pusher as the first steel trip edge designed for Sno Pushers to incorporate the longevity and limited moving parts of rubber-edge pushers. This urethane-based technology does not require springs or hinges. The design incorporates extended-wear shoes for a balanced, even push — along with a modified angle in the moldboard. According to the manufacturer, these two features, combined with the urethane tripping mechanism, provide a loaded torque on the steel edge that ensures effective ice scraping ability and a safe, consistent tripping mechanism. *SnoPusher.com or 888/787-4766*

**Know boundaries**

It doesn't matter what type of equipment you use and how clear you clean the pavement — if you gouge turf, you get unhappy customers. Mark boundaries clearly with snow markers from *Blackburn Manufacturing*. Standard snow markers are 4 ft., and for areas with more snow depth, add a bright marking flag to a taller pole. Custom printing of your business name/logo/phone is available on 14 colors of weather-resistant flags. *BlackburnFlag.com or 800/942-5816*

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*Blizzard’s Power Plow* is the original adjustable-wing snowplow that can hydraulically expand its moldboard width at the touch of a button to efficiently match any plowing situation. Choose from four primary wing positions: compact, wide pass, bucket bade (scoop), or windrow. *BlizzardPlows.com*

**Quiet power**

*Fisher’s new second-generation Poly-Caster spreader line* combines a low-maintenance, rust-proof, double-wall poly hopper with a smooth, quiet electric-drive system for the ultimate in de-icing performance to effectively spread all ice control materials. Available in three sizes (1.5, 1.8 and 2.5 cu. yd.), there’s a Poly-Caster spreader ready to meet your ice control needs. *FisherPlows.com*

**Recover costs**

Do you want to implement a costs-per-hour software solution into your back office business software system? Check out *Profits Unlimited*’s “Know Why You Charge What You Charge” CD from Green Industry business consultant Wayne Volz. This CD runs in Microsoft Excel and is designed in a spreadsheet format. Simply fill in the blanks and the spreadsheet calculates your costs per hour of operation based on your specific overhead, expenses and use-rates. *ProfitsAreUs.com or 800/845-0499*

...continued on page 42
Hiniker offers a comprehensive line of professional grade snowplows to meet the demands of the toughest conditions and snowplow operations.

**V-Plows:** Trip-edge design gives smooth operation and effective protection with a nine-inch high pivot point. Double acting cylinders provide positive moldboard position control.

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**Scoop Plows:** High capacity concave shape captures snow to efficiently clear lots and parking areas. Angles left or right for conventional plowing.

**Conventional Plows:** 30 inch tall high-curvature blades roll deep snow off quickly and efficiently. Commercial plowers will appreciate the extra strength and efficient design.

**Homeowner Plows:** Low-maintenance poly moldboard surface reduces friction, never needs painting. 6 vertical and 2 diagonal ribs provide strength and support.

The Quick Hitch mounting system is interchangeable with all Hiniker snowplow models, adding versatility to your snowplow fleet.
High performance

Hiniker has added a pair of 1032 Series 10-ft. plows to its line of trip-edge snowplows, available in either electric/hydraulic or central hydraulic powered configurations. The 32-in.-tall moldboard uses a dent-resistant, corrosion-free plowing surface made of low-friction HDPE polyethylene. A compact joystick controller can be surface-mounted or handheld. Super-bright quad halogen headlamps are included. Hiniker.com or 800/433-5620

Change it up

Available in 8.5- and 9.5-ft. lengths, the all-new Meyer Super-V2 Snowplow features a pistol grip controller with one-button functionality, as well as interchangeable components with the standard Meyer Super-V plow. The manufacturer claims that the blade throws snow up to 62% better than a standard V-plow, and its snow rolling action reduces vehicle stress. The blade's wings taper from 30.5 in. up to 38 in. MeyerProducts.com or 216/486-1313

New size

SnowEx's new 3-cu.-yd. capacity V-Maxx 9300 V-box-style spreader is compatible with 1-ton dump-bed and flatbed trucks. It features the patented SnowEx Material Feed System — a multi-angle, polyethylene hopper with a built-in, inverted "V" baffle configuration. Also included is an attached vibrator to reduce clumping and allow continuous material flow, regardless of what is being spread. A digital LED display with status monitoring and system protection is standard, as well as an auto-reverse function in the event of auger jams. TrynexFactory.com or 800/725-8377

Less weight, all muscle

The new Western HTS snowplow is a full-size, full-featured snowplow designed specifically for today's lighter half-ton, 4WD pickup trucks. It handles standard-duty commercial — and extended-use homeowner — applications, providing pro-like performance without the extra weight. WesternPlows.com
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PONDS

NEED NOT APPLY

Create a disappearing waterfall in 12 easy steps.

BY GARTH EPP

Water features such as pondless waterfalls often serve as landscapes' crown jewels.

POND-FREE WATER FEATURES, also known as "pondless," "no pond" or "disappearing" waterfalls, range in size from 12 in. tall and 8 in. wide, up to 20 ft. tall and wide. Many have long meandering streams, while others are simply falls that vanish into a bed of rocks. Because these disappearing waterfalls do not include ponds, the maintenance and upkeep on these water features is minimal.

The first step in the construction process is to determine the desired outcome of the project by the homeowners. I am not referring to visually how it should look, but more how they want their lives to improve with changes to their landscape. This answer to this question is key to the success of the entire project.

Once you have determined the motives for wanting such a feature, tour the yard and the interior of the home. Consider any location that will meet their desires and be enjoyed from both the interior and exterior of the home. Keep in mind that an outdoor water feature can be enjoyed from indoors.

It is also often believed that a backyard waterfall is restricted to corners of the lot. This is not true. In many cases, the corners are the worst places for falls.
PONDLESS WATERFALL

Begin the build

1. Use a garden hose to form the shape of the base of the falls where the water will disappear into the ground. Use brightly colored spray paint to create an outline on the ground. Make sure the area is not larger than the piece of pond liner you have purchased. This area will become the bottom collection basin for the water.

2. Place the spillway unit for the falls in position. This large plastic container will fill with water, then overflow and become the head of the waterfall. Depending on your desired outcome, you might simply have the unit rest on the ground and mound soil up around it, or you might choose to elevate it higher to get more height to the falls. For a gentle flowing stream, it's generally suggested to have the unit 6 ft. to 8 ft. away from the bottom basin.

3. Attach your plumbing pipes to the spillway before the excavation. Use a sealant like polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE, or plumber’s) tape on all threaded fittings. Now is the time to make sure everything is watertight, before it's all buried and concealed. Once the pipe is sealed and in place, you can cover it with soil you excavate from the basin to hide it from view. It's a good idea to make sure the pipe has a gradual slope from the spillway unit to the basin so it can be easily flushed and drained if needed.

4. Use a level to ensure the unit is sitting on even ground. If the ground is tamped well and solid, it will prevent the unit from becoming uneven from the ground settling.

5. Dig the basin at the base of the falls. The basin does not need to be more than 24 in. deep. It's important to make sure the edges of the basin are level so it will fill evenly with water.

As your team digs the basin, use the soil to backfill around the water feature's spillway unit. It's a good idea to have someone stand in the spillway unit while it's being tamped and backfilled so it does not move out of position.

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Water features routinely rank among the top landscape design/build projects homeowners are interested in adding.
Once the basin is excavated, remove sharp objects such as roots or rocks from the basin. Now lay the geo-textile underlay in the basin, starting at the bottom, and work out all the slack so it conforms to the shape of the hole. The underlay is there strictly to protect the underside of the liner. You don't need to line the future stream bed at this point.

Now place the liner over the underlay. The liner should extend outside the basin. It can be cut back later if necessary. It's better to use a liner that's too large than too small. Provided all was measured and planned ahead, it should fit correctly.

Place the pump vault in the basin, with several large pieces of drainage pipe to act as filler in the basin bottom. This will reduce the amount of rock needed to fill the basin and will eliminate the weight of the rocks resting directly on the interior of your pond liner.

Fill the basin with rinsed clean rock within a couple of inches from the top. Start with larger rocks on the bottom, and place smaller rocks on top. This acts as a natural filter for the feature.

Once the rocks are in the basin, fill it with water to clean the rocks. Use a small sump pump to expel dirty water. This will help
PONDLESS WATERFALLS

Going pondless is a quick and cost effective way to add a waterfall.

the water in the completed project clear more quickly. Now attach the liner to the spillway. This process is very important to do correctly, so the water flows on top of the liner right from the source and does not get under the liner. Specific instructions for this step will be enclosed with the particular equipment that is purchased.

Place a large rock on either side of the spillway spout to frame the head of the waterfall. Secure a flat rock on the spout using black waterfall foam. The rock should be no more than 3/4-in. thick. Slate works well.

Create the stream and waterfall — the toughest part of the project. The goal is to make the stream and waterfall blend perfectly into the landscape, as though the home and yard were built around it. The stream should twist and turn, as this will make it look more natural.

After the stream is excavated, line it with an underlay and liner about 10x15 ft. in size. Then dig several large divots to inset larger rocks.

Do not form a fixed course for the water. It looks much more natural if the water appears to have chosen its own course of flow through a natural random assortment of rocks. In nature, water rocks are "placed" in uneven patterns along a stream or waterfall.

Carefully select and place varying-sized rocks on the perimeter of the stream. Put black waterfall foam into the divots you dug earlier, and place large rocks on top. The foam will restrict water from flowing under rocks and will force it to flow above and around the rocks.

You can adjust and tweak the flow of the waterfall by placing smaller stones and gravel on the waterfall cas-cades until the desired effect is achieved. This will change the sound and appearance of the flowing water. Remember: Without exception, large waterfalls require the use of large rocks.

EPP is editor and owner of BuildingMyPond.com, an online resource dedicated to water gardening and water feature installation. He can be reached at 403/671-0797.
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THE MISSION

Designs by Sundown creates a balance of earth, air, water and fire for a Littleton, CO, residence.

The existing property consisted of 10 ponderosa pines, a few boulders, some dead cottonwood trees and grass — basically a clean slate. Designs by Sundown had a roughly $500,000 budget to create an outdoor environment for the homeowners to enjoy all year long. The design, led by Greg Bobich, incorporates the four classic elements: earth, fire, water and air.

The earth element plays a dominant role in this landscape. The picturesque backdrop is the natural beauty of the Colorado mountains. Stone is used in abundance to blur the line between the foreground and the mountains off in the horizon. From the fieldstone outdoor hearth to the Siloam stone steps, to the use of boulders for fire pits and accents in perennial beds, Mother Nature's creations are showcased.

Fire and water are interspersed throughout the property. The pool area consists of a swimming pool, spa, a water feature, two unique fire elements and a pool house. The water's influence is essential to this experience from the gently flowing mountain stream to the bubbling hot tub and turquoise pool.

Two cozy fire elements are just a few steps from the pool. The upper terrace is home to a charming fieldstone wood-burning fireplace.

Open air is enjoyed in gathering spots throughout the property. Several sitting areas welcome guests to relax and enjoy the view.

The challenges that the Designs by Sundown team encountered were few, but massive. For example, the addition of more than 1,800 cu. yds. of soil, 125 tons of boulders, and the relocation of a leech field, which set the team back about a month.
THE WORK

1 | A BLANK SLATE. In the beginning, just about all the property was offering was potential. Landscapes by Sundown's Greg Bobich worked closely with the homeowners, avid lovers of the outdoors, to create both a front-and-back landscape design.

2 | ELEGANT ELEMENTS. Taken from a similar angle as the photo above, the lower terrace is home to the pool house, two one-of-a-kind fire elements, a custom spa and the 25x50-ft. in-ground swimming pool. Huge boulders anchor the landscape to the surroundings.

3 | OUTDOOR LIVING. On the upper level, Designs by Sundown's in-house masons used cinder blocks with a cultured stone veneer, creating this wood-burning fireplace area.

4 | GUEST-READY. Much-needed patio space and seating for family gatherings was created on the upper terrace. In fact, intimate sitting areas were created throughout the property to invite visitors to sit back and enjoy the view and wildlife. An outdoor kitchen rivals the finest kitchens in town, with wildflowers adorning the dining area.

5 | FOUR-SEASON ENJOYMENT. This landscape was designed to be enjoyed in all seasons—a request from the homeowners. With inspiration from streams found a short distance away, this water feature offers tranquil sounds that can be heard on both levels.

6 | FIRE AND WATER CO-EXIST. The turquoise blue of the pool shows off nicely with the warmth of this one-of-a-kind boulder fire pit burning in the background. The water feature flows adjacent to the Siloam stairs.

7 | TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL. There was no scrimping on the use of stone in this outdoor creation. Siloam stone steps lined with accent boulders and pocket plantings lead guests to the upper terrace.

Founded by Michael Hommel in 1985, Designs by Sundown offers design, construction, waterscapes, masonry, lighting, irrigation, maintenance and seasonal color to the Greater Denver market. This property garnered a 2008 Environmental Improvement Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). For more information, visit www.designsbysundown.com.
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Aquascape launches its RainXchange System for capturing, filtering and reusing rainwater. The RainXchange System combines a recirculating water feature with a sub-surface rainwater harvest storage system. The filtration captures, filters and houses rainwater runoff for future use. The system also reduces flooding. RainXchange.com or 630/659-2097

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The new Cub Cadet Volunteer 4x4D utility vehicle combines the rugged simplicity and low maintenance of an 854cc, 3-Inline cylinder, Yanmar diesel engine with the advanced performance of a fully independent suspension. This combination makes it one of the only diesels that can handle big jobs and off-road challenges. Features include a wide stance, fully welded steel frame, and low center of gravity for stability, traction and control. CubCadet.com or 330/225-2600
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Want to grow on the cheap? Better leverage customers' e-mails.

According to a July 2009 Landscape Management survey with 170 respondents, just 30% of landscapers know the e-mail addresses of even three-quarters of their customers. Very few landscapers know — and use — the e-mail addresses of all of their customers who have them.

This is both a tremendous opportunity and threat: We must better obtain and use our customers' e-mail addresses, today, to enhance sales and service, or our tech-savvy competitors will spirit them away tomorrow.

As outlined in our cover story beginning on page 8, three-quarters of landscapers report their digital marketing efforts deliver returns on investments superior to those reaped from local newspaper, radio, TV or telephone directory ads. We know digital marketing works. We just have to work it better.

E-mailing customers information of value is not spam; it's sound digital marketing. Give customers a good reason to open your e-mails, and an easy out (unsubscribe option), and you will protect and build your business rapidly and cost effectively.

Here are 12 quick e-mail marketing tips:

1. **Mine for gold** — Call each customer and ask what types of information he or she is open to receiving in monthly e-mails. Examples include special promotions, tips on lawn and landscape maintenance, and ways to save water and money.

2. **Dig deeper** — Repeat the previous step with prospects and former customers.

3. **Plan your work** — Create a monthly e-mail marketing campaign that marries customers' digital information wants with your company's sales needs.

4. **Work your plan** — E-mail customers and prospects information of value every month.

5. **Grade yourself** — Measure the return on investment of each e-mail marketing campaign.

6. **Grow or go** — Duplicate your successes and improve upon, or discard, your failures.

7. **Reality check** — Send customers quarterly satisfaction surveys. Surprisingly, just 21% of landscapers currently do this even annually.

8. **Internal intel** — Leverage these surveys to identify and reward employees who exceed customers' expectations and create new, repeatable best practices.

9. **Boost retention** — Give disgruntled customers an opportunity to rant. Better to hear the bad news now than after you've lost this and other business.

10. **Reap referrals** — Reward your raving fans for sharing the names, phone numbers and e-mails of a few homeowners or businesses that could use your services. Give customers a 10% discount for one year for each referral that results in a new customer. Cap the maximum annual referrals incentive to 50%, and mark up new referred clients' fees 10% to cover the program. In the second year, you'll be giving yourself an automatic 10% raise without touching the referred customer's pricing.

11. **Upsell services** — Half of landscape contractors are not e-mailing clients to identify, and capitalize, on opportunities to upsell. In your e-mails, let customers know everything you offer, and give them a reason (discount) to add new services.

12. **Keep at it** — Continuously repeat steps 1-11.

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