

## Necessity breeds profitability

A Midwestern region's need for grub control leads to an instantly profitable add-on division.

**A**FTER A LARGE outbreak of grubs in the Illinois area 12 years ago, Jack Robertson recognized the need for adding a grub control service to all of his lawn care packages. It was a necessity at the time, yet it's since become a profitable division.

"When we started the white grub control service, it was automatically added to everyone's program and if they wished to decline, they could," explains Robertson, the president of Robertson Lawn Care Inc., a company with primarily residential clients. "But by letting them have the option to decline the program, it put the ball in their court. If they end up having a problem, they can't say it's something we did wrong."

For those who do decline the service, which is performed annually around the start of summer, Robertson mails a postcard reminder to customers explaining their lawns are not protected. "It's a sales tool, but even more so, it's a communication tool," he says. "A cover-your-butt type of thing making sure clients know we've given them the opportunity to protect their lawns. We don't want to force the service down anyone's throat."

### GOING WITH GRUB CONTROL

The obvious but quite important factors in whether to add a grub control service is if there is a need in a particular market and whether it will be profitable. The Midwest, where Robertson is located, certainly has a grub problem, helping that division to thrive. Since landscape companies should already have the necessary equipment, the product itself becomes the only investment. But the product is costly, adds Robertson, so you should ensure it will be a profitable entity to start recouping those costs. "Your clients don't want to have a grub problem," he says. "It can lead to skunks and raccoons hanging



Jack Robertson

around their yards and digging holes."

Lawn care companies don't want their clients to have grub problems either, points out Robertson, making it even more of an incentive to sell them on the service. "A grub problem becomes a concern for the landscaper, too. It can hinder seeding, cause brown areas, and make caring for the lawn more difficult."

Each year, Robertson starts the grub control applications in early June. It's done once annually, however, he says sometimes retreating the property is necessary, especially after heavy rainfall. That makes pricing the service profitably even more important. The best time to sell the grub service is in the springtime, so you can get clients lined up for the summer. However, Robertson says this is also a challenge. "The spring is not when customers are thinking about the grub problem they might have had last September," he says. "It's out of sight, out of mind when you're selling it. and that can make the sale more challenging."

One of the most important things, says Robertson, is to sell a preventive service. It's better to protect the lawns with a simple application than try to apply a curative application to lawns that already have problems. "Grubs will turn a customer off to the landscape company, even though it's not your fault in any way they're causing a problem," he says. "The last thing you want is an unhappy customer so it's best to keep them from having any problems in the first place."

The author is a freelance writer with six years of experience covering landscaping.



The notorious — and ugly — grub.

### » SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**COMPANY NAME:** Robertson Lawn Care Inc.

**HEADQUARTERS:** Springfield, IL

**WHY GRUB CONTROL:** There's a strong need for grub control in the Midwest.

**INITIAL INVESTMENT:** Product only. The basic lawn care company would already have a spreader, the laborer and a truck. It's just choosing which product you like best.

**INVESTMENT RECOUP TIME:** Immediate, assuming the need for the service is there. You should pre-sell the product to ensure immediate profitability.

**WHY CUSTOMERS LIKE IT?** Nobody wants a grub control problem. If they're investing in making their lawn look nice, why let grubs ruin that?