Ryan Van Haastrecht started working in the family business as a 12-year-old boy delivering flyers after school alongside his father, Lou. The elder Van Haastrecht launched Dr. Green in 1985 after discovering lawn care at a franchise show. But instead of buying into an existing concept, he went out on his own. “Dad ran the company and grew it to more than 10,000 customers by 2002,” says Ryan, now president. “During high school and college my brother Lee and I worked on the trucks. In 2002 Lee, our current VP of operations, and I joined the company full time.”

Where did the name “Dr. Green” come from? Dr. Green came from the concept of providing preventive care to people’s lawns. (My father) thought it would be clever to have a mascot of a green blade of grass in a doctor’s outfit, and this was an immediate hit with women and children.

What makes your company unique? We are able to offer compelling programs with very friendly service at a relatively low price. What allows us to do this is our productivity in sales and operations. Having an efficient delivery system and a lower cost per new sale than our competitors allows us to be competitive with our prices and aggressive with our promotions. Many competitors have indicated that our prices are too low, yet we make 20% profits almost every year and have an average annual growth rate of 17.6%.

Can you describe your market and your customers? We are 100% focused on the residential lawn care market, and we only provide lawn care services (no landscaping). We used to do landscaping and we dabbled in commercial, but we discovered we are better off doing one thing very well. We currently serve three markets (Ontario; Calgary, Alberta; and the Chicagoland area).

In the past few years we have seen an increase in the number of female buyers. We are also experiencing a large increase in the number of online purchasers.

What is your strategy for growth? In the past our strategy for growth has always centered around telemarketing, door-to-door and flyer delivery. To today we are moving back to more of a guerrilla marketing approach whereby no one method of selling dominates the others. We need to create a lot of synergy through many smaller campaigns (telemarketing, door to door, flyer delivery, direct mail, email, social media, Google ad words, lawn signs, referrals etc.) Another aspect to our growth model is to improve service. We need to improve retention to improve our marketing ROI.

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By Dan Jacobs