

# HOFFMAN LANDSCAPES INC.

**T**en years ago, an important goal was set at Wilton, CT-based Hoffman Landscapes, Inc.: The company would grow its snow business to the point where, despite the fact that it basically closed down normal operations for three months, it wouldn't come out of the off-season at a loss (due to fixed expenses and employees).

Despite the rough economy, the company has reached that point. It actually saw 21.8% growth this year.

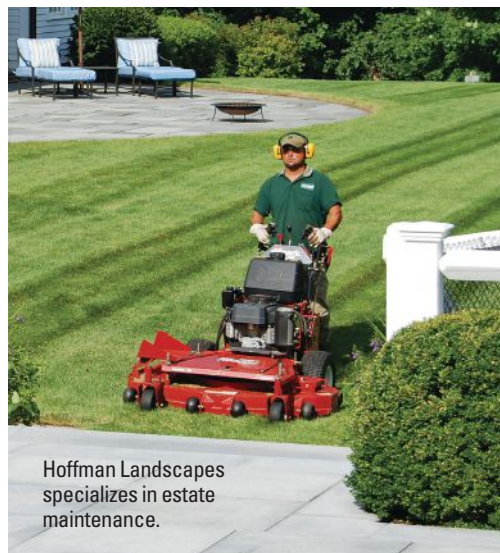
President Michael Hoffman reports that several factors came into play. The first was continuing with marketing efforts. When many cut costs in this area, Hoffman pushed forward. Referrals remain the No. 1 source of new customers, he says, followed by the Internet and then direct mail.

Customer service was another contributing factor to the company's successful year. "It's the reason why referrals still work for us," says Hoffman. "The overarching rule is that you do what you say you're going to do. And, if you make a mistake, fix it."

One way that Hoffman offers exceptional customer service is by being sure customers can always reach someone. He has actually left his cell phone and home phone numbers on the company answering machine. "I've had a lot of people say they can't believe I give that out to customers, but the truth is, customers don't call that often — they're respectful," he says. "If they do call, it's typically because they really need us and I don't want to miss that call."

THE ECONOMY'S  
BIGGEST  
CHALLENGE

*"I think the customers are changing. They're becoming more demanding. They want more for the same dollar. I believe you have to deliver that, because it's a competitive marketplace. If you don't, someone else will."*



Hoffman Landscapes specializes in estate maintenance.

Hoffman says it's also becoming "irreplaceable" that helps retain customers and gain new ones. He says the perfect example would be a customer calling at 3:30 p.m. on a Friday afternoon saying they're having friends over for the weekend and would love the patio blown off.

"A lot of companies might just think it's a pain in the neck, but I view it as an opportunity," he says. "In fact, it's probably the best opportunity you've had all week to become irreplaceable. And once you gain a customer's trust like that, you've easily built a long-term relationship."

Finally, Hoffman says that the company's success can be attributed to the fact that it has always been growth-focused and didn't lose that perspective when times got tough. In fact, out of 25 years in operation, there was only one where the company didn't grow. He believes growth is closely intertwined with employee retention.

"High retention is not possible without growth, and vice versa," he concludes. "You can't keep your employees if you're not growing. You've got to keep them interested." **LM**