

By Dan Jacobs/Editor-in-Chief

Recession proof?

It's all in the



While other companies are tightening their marketing spending, Clintar Landscape Management bucked the trend and is reaping the rewards of focusing on efficiency and vendor relations.

It's no surprise that companies that have survived this economic downturn are leaner and more efficient than they were just a few years ago. Business owners have found ways to do more with less and the result has been a jump in productivity (what that means for quality or the physical and mental health of the people left in your organization are separate issues). Cutting back on "discretionary" spending is almost always the first step consumers and business owners take when money is tight. But it might not be the best solution. There's an old line "it takes money to make money" and Clintar Landscape Management has taken that notion to heart.

The company continues to spend about 3% of its revenue for advertising promotion and education. That's not much different from previous years. Instead the company has taken a closer look at where its marketing money is spent. As a result the

company has redirected money to increase "sales" education (more about that below). The result was a 4.9% increase in revenue from 2010 over 2009 and a 15.9% increase this year over last.

With the most impactful recession of the millennium still holding strong, the landscaping industry is picking up the pieces and rebuilding. Clintar Landscape Management is doing that by investing in marketing. We had the opportunity to talk with Bob Wilton, president of the Toronto-based company, to learn how marketing allows Clintar to grow in the current economy.

4.9
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Q. Why is Clintar doing so well while other companies are struggling?

A. We are attributing Clintar's growth to a consistent, and 'over the top' marketing effort. Today, more than ever, there is an abundance of competition in every market we service. So what does that mean for us? It gives us great opportunity

to become the leader of the pack, or as we like to say 'getting out of the pile.' The Clintar brand has stood for consistency, honesty, and professionalism for almost 40 years, and we make sure our customers know that. We do what we say we're going to do, when we say we're going to do it and this is exactly what our success is accredited to.

Q. Can you describe your marketing efforts?

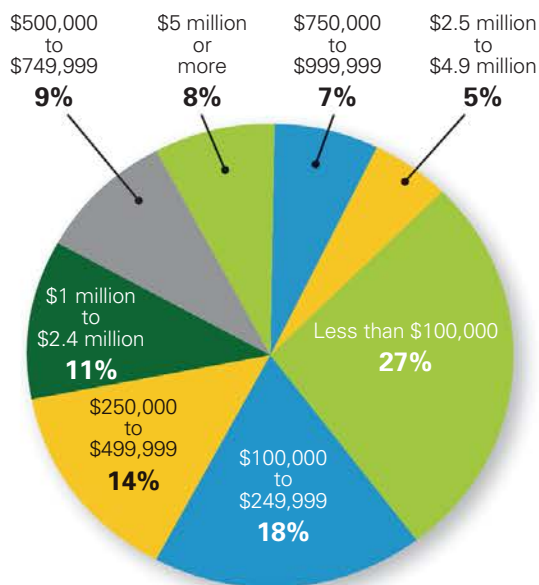
A. We're in the businesses of creating a crisp, professional and clean atmosphere for each of our customers on the outside; how could we sell the concept of perfection with a less than ideal looking crew, and sloppy machinery? Our crews and equipment alike are both famous for being the cleanest in the industry. Some statistics say that almost 50,000 people will see our trucks on the road on any given day, and we hear constantly that we are the cleanest on the road. What is your fleet saying about you?

Clintar has always been diligent when it comes to marketing. Our campaigns reflect our philosophy of services: consistent, professional, and reliable. Our intense direct mail campaign is a religion. Simply passing out a quarterly newsletter won't cut it either. We are sending out monthly postcards to each and every one of our customers to be on their desk as often as we can possibly be. These promote a different service to them just days before they started thinking about it themselves.

Q. It must take more than that?

A. Marketing is nothing without the follow up sales calls to back it. With each piece of direct mail we send our customers there are follow up phone calls. To make these sales calls more effective, each of our owners and their key staff are invited to a professional sales training seminar held by a professional sales coach periodically throughout the year. We have increased the frequency of this training in the last little while as a response to the recession, and the interest of our group (Which has embraced every minute of it). Our customer service is second-to-none in all our markets.

WHAT WAS YOUR TOTAL REVENUE FOR 2010?



DUE TO ROUNDING, TOTAL ADDS UP TO 99%

Q. How do you ensure your message reaches the right audience?

A. Without your customers, you have nothing to sell, and with nothing to sell you don't have a business. Understand each of your customers on an individual basis. In our 40 years in operation we have never come across two contact people who are exactly alike. Find out what is important to them, and deliver it on a consistent basis. What are you providing to them that no one else is? Find this out, and make sure they know it. Use your differentiation as a marketing tool, and push it every opportunity you can. Bragging about your strengths

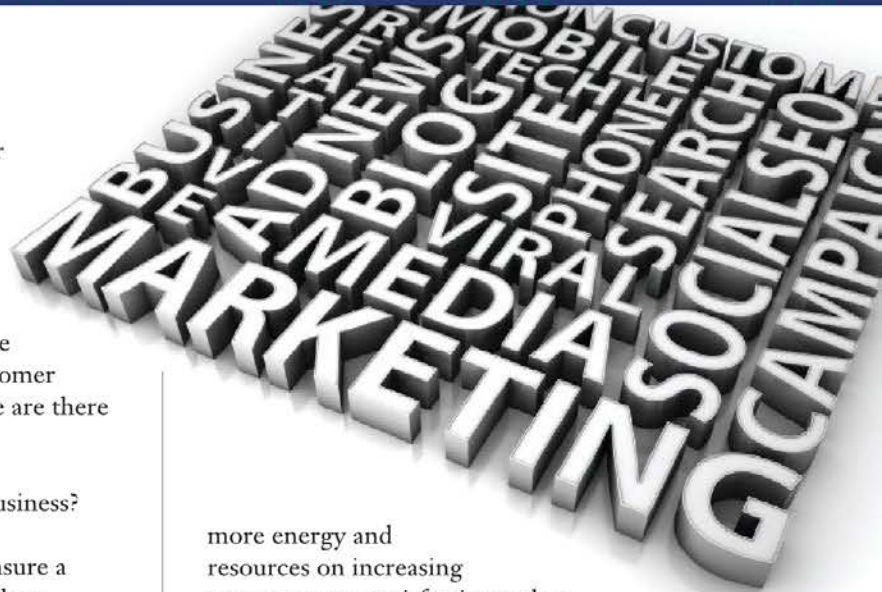




is what is going to separate you from your competition. Clintar has adopted a 24-hour live phone answering policy. This means that our customers can call at any hour, and they will be able to talk to a live person. This is invaluable when it comes to any client that needs to be able to talk to someone immediately. Our customer is our boss, and we need to ensure that we are there whenever they need us.

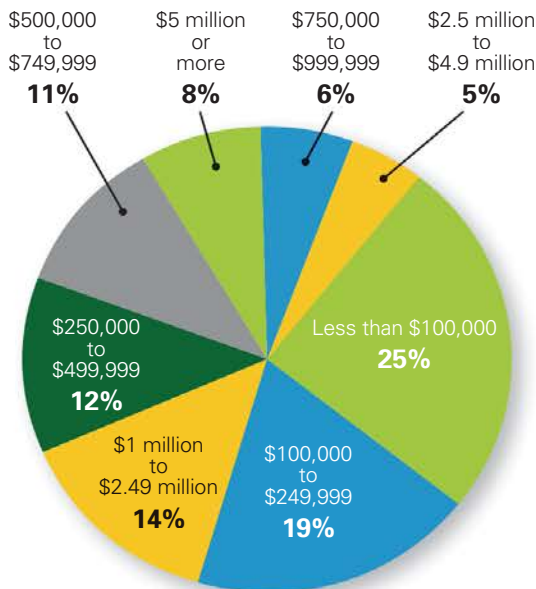
Q. What effect does this have on your business?

A. Customer service is the best way to ensure a positive cash flow, and losing touch with them can provide a negative effect. We have conducted formal survey systems to ask our customers simply how we are doing. The result: Issues are uncovered and resolved leading into more business. The net effect of these surveys allowed us to dig deeper into our services and find out exactly how our customer perceived us and in a few cases, resulted in extra work just for asking. If you could focus



more energy and resources on increasing your customer satisfaction rather than cold calling, you will be surprised on how much your business will grow financially and sustainably. Maintaining consistent service is one of the most predominant challenges any franchised organization must face, but with a successful program, we can use these services as their own marketing force. If our customers know that their property in Toronto is being maintained exactly to the quality they see at their condo in New Jersey, then they know that no matter where they go in North America, a local Clintar Landscape Management is going to be providing exactly the same quality. **LM**

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT YOUR TOTAL REVENUE FOR 2011 WILL BE?



WE ARE SPENDING ABOUT

3%

of our revenue for Advertising, Promotion & Education.

LAST YEAR (2010) OUR REVENUE INCREASED

4.9%

over 2009, and this year we are up 15% over 2010.

Compared to prior years, we have looked more closely at where our marketing dollars have been spent, and as a result have re-directed monies to increase "Sales" education rather than increasing the % of total revenue spent.