



Jeffrey Scott

# In affluence we trust

Developing a trustworthy reputation is key to reaching the wealthy client market. It takes time, effort and a little ingenuity.

BY DAN JACOBS / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**A**ffluent customers don't just live in mansions on large rolling estates. They live in communities all over the country, and they have money to spend.

"There are three kinds of affluent: The millionaire next door — the kind that have the money but you can't see it because they don't wear it," says author and Green Industry consultant Jeffrey Scott. "Then you have the more outwardly affluent. Then you have the ultra affluent who are making the really big, big bucks who live a lifestyle that you or I couldn't even fathom."

Most affluent customers have worked very hard and they want to work with the best.

"They want to spoil themselves; they want to show off. They want to work with somebody who can give them the best quality."

Scott spend several years leading a landscaping business that served many affluent clients. He shares some of his secrets here.

## **LM: How does selling to the affluent community differ from others?**

**JEFFREY SCOTT:** The affluent buy more on referral, on word of mouth. They get a lot of their referrals from their friends and their trusted resources. You've got to build trust in the community and among trusted resources — architects, interior designers, etc. — in order to be referred. The affluent have more to lose. They feel more vulnerable and tend to be more conservative, slow to make change.

You have to have a really good sales process. They're going to decide pretty quickly. How you handle that first phone

call, how you handle that first sales presentation. They're going to make their decisions very, very quickly if you're a company they're going to do business with. You have to have a well-organized process for helping them make decisions.

## **LM: What does that mean for the selling process?**

**JS:** It happens slowly and happens over time doing business with clients that are more and more affluent. It's like climbing the staircase. You've got to prove yourself, get a little bit higher, prove yourself, get a little bit higher.

## **LM: Are there any tricks to getting into their purview?**

**JS:** You don't have to be in their social circles, although it doesn't hurt, but you do want to have a presence. A lot of them are planners. If you're going to do marketing or direct mail, they're watching. It's one way they're calculating whether they're going to get involved with you. Getting involved in their charities and their community projects is a great way to build trust. If you can be seen doing work for one of the influencers in the inner circle, they'll introduce you to other people in that inner circle. You support it with other types of marketing.

## **LM: What about asking for referrals?**

**JS:** It's going to happen by giving great service — servicing them 24/7 whenever they need you or want you. Either they're going to have people over to their house and they're going to say, 'Who did that;

who takes care of that' or they're going to feel like they owe you and you're a unique resource they want to share. If you have to nudge, then you're not doing something right. If you have to really ask for it, then you haven't done enough.

## **LM: What should you do when something goes wrong?**

**JS:** You're always going to make mistakes in contracting. It's important as you're building your reputation to admit your mistakes quickly, embrace them and solve them. On one hand it can ruin your reputation. On the other hand if you can build a reputation as someone who admits their mistakes and fixes them quickly, then that can actually bolster your reputation.

## **LM: How do you make sure the rest of your team delivers all this?**

**JS:** You have to hire the right guys. From the middle management — foreman and above — you have to hire people who like to learn. It takes teamwork to work for the affluent. There's always a new challenge where the team has to pull together to pull off something. You want to have employees that have that thirst for knowledge.

Then it takes a lot of internal reputation — training, teaching, talking about your philosophy over and over and over again. It's like a balloon that slowly loses air. You have to be constantly blowing air into that balloon. Constantly showing examples of what's good and examples of what's not good enough. It's an ongoing never-ending process. **SS**