

A commercial success

Employees of Lawn Ranger star in a nationally televised ad for AT&T. BY DAN JACOBS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

With the advent of digital video recorders that allow viewers to pause live television broadcasts and later zip past commercials, you might wonder if anybody watches ads anymore.

Well you can bet the employees of Eden Prairie, MN-based Lawn Ranger (and their families) recently spent a lot of time zipping through the shows to get to the commercials — at least one commercial in particular.

The company and some of its employees were featured in a nationally televised 30-second commercial for AT&T.

“It was an amazing thing in Minnesota,” said Joe Unger, president of Lawn Ranger. “They spend a lot of money on these ads. We had people that did our clothes, catering, make-up artists.”

The commercial features Lawn Ranger’s use of the Xora, a smart phone application combined with the AT&T network, explains Todd Dilley, operations director. Xora is a mobile enterprise application designed to help organizations improve productivity and service goals by giving them real-time visibility into the locations and activities of employees and vehicles and by eliminating manual data collection and paperwork.

The commercial was unscripted. The company’s employees were simply asked to talk about their work and how they use the smart phone and computer app.

Horticulturist Bobby Jensen, for example, talks about why Lawn Ranger is actually a misnomer because the company



It took four days and a production team of 50 people — including make-up artists, light designers, camera operators and a director — to produce a commercial featuring Lawn Ranger employees.

takes care of far more than just lawns.

The irony? Unger never appears on screen. “I mumble too much, and I’m not very good in front of the camera,” he says. “I couldn’t remember my lines very well.” Maybe so, but he’s been running a successful business since 1985.

Dilley gets a lot of screen time (at least in the long version of the commercial, available at: <http://yourbusiness.att.com/smallbiz/story/lawn-ranger>) showing the company’s old way of tracking workers, machines, materials and jobs — a massive whiteboard. “It was utter chaos,” he says.

AT&T’s Minnesota-based sales representatives nominated Lawn Ranger to appear in the commercial. More than 100 companies were up for the spot. That list was narrowed to four and ultimately down to just Lawn Ranger.

The production team comprised about 50 people, which spent four days

at Lawn Ranger’s facilities in late January. Although snow is a large part of the company’s business, the commercial was filmed using a lot of artificial snow, dry ice and foam.

The spot aired about 350 times on various networks over a six-week period. And while the employees were required to join the screen actors’ guild, none expects to be appearing in any Hollywood productions anytime soon. Although there is some hope AT&T will use Lawn Ranger in a “sequel” featuring the company’s summer services.

Lawn Ranger’s sales are up heading into the spring. Whether or not you can attribute it to the commercial, Unger is not sure, but many of Lawn Ranger’s customers have sent congratulatory emails.

“It’s built a lot of confidence in us,” Dilley says. “It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and it was super fun.”