

For even more Lawn Care Forum coverage, see page 34 for five lessons you can learn from Florida's fertilizer restriction climate.

Face to face



Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care's Tom Lynch meets with Direct Solutions representatives at the Lawn Care Forum.

Landscape Management's inaugural Lawn Care Forum provided attendees with excellent networking and educational opportunities. **BY MARISA PALMIERI**

There's a first time for everything, and in December *Landscape Management* debuted a new concept in the Green Industry: the Lawn Care Forum.

This invite-only event takes a three-pronged approach to delivering value for both attendees and sponsors: networking, education and one-on-one supplier meetings.

So, was this first-of-its-kind meeting a success? Take it from attendee Matt Owens, vice president of landscape operations for Potomac Garden Center in Urbana, Md.

"There was a relaxed atmosphere throughout the entire three-day event that allowed me to create and strengthen relationships with the sponsors and other leaders in the industry from around the country," Owens said. "I encourage others to attend this event in the future to experience the same benefits I gained."

The schedule slated golf and a formal dinner on day one. On day two, one-on-one sponsor meetings were interspersed with meals and speakers, followed by a casual barbecue dinner. The event wrapped up with a half day of speakers and sponsor meetings on day three.

RISE-ing above

Karen Reardon from Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) keynoted the opening night dinner, addressing "Lawn Care Regulations: Emerging Threats & Issues."

Public opinion research RISE has conducted shows that antipesticide activists' messages are not necessarily reflective of registered voters' opinions or those of the public as a whole, Reardon said, noting the activists often have the loudest voices in their communities.

At the same time, RISE's conversations with policymakers reveal that the industry doesn't interact with them unless they have something to gripe about, so there's a need to be proactive, Reardon said.

She detailed RISE's move to form a nationwide "grassroots network" five years ago to bring together profession-

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Teeing off at the Lawn Care Forum:
LM's Pat Roberts, Swingle's Tom
Lynch, Potomac Garden Center's Matt
Owens and LM's Craig MacGregor.



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als on the ground to provide support and a voice for the industry in places where pesticides and fertilizers are under attack.

"We're still seeing a lot of local bans. We need another voice to be in the conversation," she said, referring to the need for industry representation to combat activists' claims. RISE's grassroots network has engaged 5,000 people so far, with an aggressive goal to add another 5,000 per year.

What's coming down the pike? A perennial hot spot on the map is New England, where it's easy for ideas and laws to "go back and forth across state lines, good or bad." In some states, "pre-emption will be on the table," she said, referring to state legislation that pre-empts local governments from enacting stricter fertilizer restrictions. She also said to look for attacks on nitrogen to rise. Phosphorous has been the nutrient on the chopping block for the past few years, but many states are not meeting their Clean Water Act regulations and may look to restrict phosphorous inputs. Even though lawn care is estimated to be plus or minus 1 percent



RISE's
Karen
Reardon

of the impact on nonpoint source pollution, it's perceived by lawmakers to be low-hanging fruit and a better option than spending thousands of dollars to treat waterways.

Rather than be defensive in the face of state and local regulations, Reardon encouraged lawn care professionals to "show up in a powerful way" to talk about positive messages, such as their impacts in the community and integrated pest management.

"The conversation with lawmakers should be much more like one you'd have with a customer or prospect—you want to sell them on your perspective," she said.

Content is king

Chris Heiler, founder of Green Industry inbound marketing firm Landscape



Landscape
Leadership's
Chris Heiler

Leadership, spoke on the second day, waking up attendees with questions about their websites during his talk, "How to Use Inbound Marketing to Convert Website Traffic into Qualified Leads and Customers."

Seventy-five percent to 90 percent of people visiting your website are not ready to buy—they're in fact-finding mode, Heiler said, adding most companies don't know how to turn a visitor in fact-finding mode into a qualified lead. Most sites appeal to the 10 percent to 25 percent of people who are ready to buy right now by providing a phone number and a form for a free estimate or consultation.

"They're ignoring everyone else who's researching," he said. So, how do you turn those in the middle of the buying process into a lead? It starts with relevant content, Heiler said, such as informative blog posts or downloadable guides, like a regional lawn care calendar or a tip sheet for watering during a drought. Providing such informative content positions your company as an expert in the field and keeps you top of mind when they get closer to the buying stage, he said.

"Content is the meat of your cheeseburger," he said, noting that search is the bun and social media is the cheese. "To have a really good cheeseburger, you need to have all three."

WANT TO ATTEND NEXT YEAR?

To be put on the list of potential attendees for next year's Lawn Care Forum, contact LM Editor Marisa Palmieri at mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net, and we'll notify you when it's time to apply.

LAWN CARE FORUM > BY THE NUMBERS

1 The Lawn Care Forum is the industry's *only* event that pairs one-on-one supplier meetings with networking and educational offerings.

28 Number of attendees, comprising leading lawn care operators from around the country.

30 minutes Length of prearranged one-on-one meetings between suppliers and attendees.

3 Number of impressive industry speakers: RISE's Director of Communications Karen Reardon; Chris Heiler, president of Landscape Leadership, an inbound marketing firm; and Don Rainey, statewide coordinator for the Florida-Friendly Landscaping Program's Green Industry Best Management Practices.

1 ft. 1 in. Winning "closest to the pin" score during the golf tournament, made by William Iddings, co-owner of Advantage Green Lawn & Pest Solutions, Summerfield, Fla.

5 Sponsors for this year's event: Dow AgroSciences, Direct Solutions, FMC, PermaGreen and Lebanon Turf