

# Smart communication

A look inside a successful Smart Irrigation Month marketing campaign. *By ERIC HORVATH*

The Toro Co. is the manufacturer winner of the 2012 Smart Marketing Contest. We spoke with Mike Baron, Toro's national specifications manager, to learn more about how to successfully communicate the tenets of Smart Irrigation Month.

**Q:** Toro's 2012 Smart Irrigation Month efforts included reaching out to diverse audiences, including contractors. Describe Toro's approach to promoting Smart Irrigation Month to them.

**Mike Baron:** While contractors are not monolithic by any stretch of the imagination, they do share something in common: they have direct contact with property owners, property managers and their irrigation systems. In a real sense, contractors are the gatekeepers for both innovative technology and evolving best practices.



Mike Baron

**Q:** So while contractors are an important piece, it is incumbent on the industry as a whole to participate in Smart Irrigation Month promotion?

**Baron:** Contractors are a strategic constituency for promoting Smart Irrigation Month because of their unique relationships with property owners and managers. But a singular focus on only contractors would be much less effective than a coordinated effort. That being said, it's important to remember that contractors influence distributors because that's where they buy their products. There is a synergy that multiplies effectiveness and speeds market adoption when a manufacturer communicates effectively with both the selling distributor and the buying contractor.

**Q:** Toro has won the Smart Marketing Contest manufacturer category twice. Do you have any advice for how other manufacturers and contractors can put together similarly successful campaigns?

**Baron:** Any manufacturer, regardless of size, should ask itself, "How important is the future availability of water to my business?" If water availability is important, then the next question is, "How has that fact been integrated into strategic planning?" Take that information and then think about the primary message being communicated by the IA through the Smart Irrigation Month initiative.

Leverage that message, and what the IA is doing, in ways that help achieve the goals in the strategic plan that are affected by future water availability. The key piece of advice: Don't force it! Make promoting Smart Irrigation Month complementary to and reinforcing of your strategic plan, marketing and sales efforts.

For contractors, the recommendation is to use the same concepts as stated for manufacturers, but adapt it to what's cost effective—especially if you're participating for the first time. Start small, easy and cost effective. During July, you will start to see opportunities for enhancements appear as if by magic. Keep a file and jot down notes. That file will serve you well for next year. And of course, take advantage of the many graphics offered online by the Irrigation Association. Their support gets better every year.

*Horvath is communications manager for the Irrigation Association.*



**Smart practices.**



**Smart technology.**



**Smart business.**

- **Educate** water users.
- **Grow demand** for water-efficient technologies, products and services.
- Provide **real solutions** to today's water challenges.
- Position your company as a leader in **smart water stewardship**.



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