

Learning curve

New York lawn care operator creates long-term customers through education.

By EMILY SCHAPPACHER

Brian Marcus started his career as a biology teacher. So it's no surprise the owner of Morning Glory Lawncare & Design in Holbrook, N.Y., considers educating clients one of the most important parts of business, an approach that has helped the company expand from eight clients to nearly 150 in just three seasons—which also may account for its \$100,000 in annual revenue. It's all about providing information and establishing trust, Marcus says.

“Because of the whole teaching thing I never wanted to be that person who just tries to sell customers on, “This is what I’m doing,” Marcus says. “I really try to explain to each customer the details about the products I use and what’s in them, what they’re supposed to do and the results they’re supposed to produce.”

Morning Glory Lawncare & Design, a one-man operation, specializes in lawn care and landscape design, primarily serving residential clients (90 percent) earned through word-of-mouth referrals. All clients have Marcus’s personal cell phone number, which they’re encouraged to call if there’s a concern. And he often makes visits to inspect any problems for free.

“You’re doing the right thing for them and that’s what it really comes down to,” Marcus says. “I want my customers

“*The extra steps of being personable and sociable help my customers feel more secure in giving me money to take care of their properties.*”

—Brian Marcus



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for the next 50 years, and I want their kids and their grandkids, too.”

PROBLEM/SOLUTION

A challenge Marcus came across time and again was a client's lawn looking unhealthy because of inappropriate watering. He found many homeowners don't know how to operate their irrigation systems and don't realize they need to adjust them to provide their lawns specific amounts of water based on the time of year and the weather patterns. He made it a goal to teach all of his clients how to adjust their sprinkler heads and to educate them about proper watering techniques.

To do so Marcus created custom magnets for less than \$150 that he's provided to each customer for the past three years. These magnets detail how much water a lawn needs based on the temperature and the time of year. The simple and inexpensive marketing tool is an opportunity to educate the homeowner in a



In response to customer confusion over watering techniques, Marcus created magnets outlining how to water based on weather and time.

way that benefits everyone: Marcus has fewer problems to deal with and his clients have better-looking lawns all year.

“It was shocking how many phone calls I got saying, ‘Thank you,’” Marcus said. “What wasn’t so shocking is that when I’d go back to my clients’ houses, most of their problems were fixed.”



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Marcus knows not every issue can be solved so easily, though. That's where his time and energy come into play. He makes it a point to drive by his customers' homes in between visits to look at their lawns and try to prevent any significant problems before they start. If a customer does call with a concern, Marcus is at their home within two days, preferably at a time when the client also will be there so they can discuss the problem in person and Marcus can answer questions.

Marcus also knows a client's lawn will only look as good as the product used on it. He opts for premium fertilizer, the same type he uses on his own lawn, and shares everything he knows about the product with his clients.

"Forming the bond of trust and honesty has helped expand the business, and the extra steps of being personable and sociable help my customers feel more secure in giving me money to take care of their properties," Marcus says. "Knowing your product and being able to communicate well with customers or possible customers is a big thing.

"It's actually just being a good person and an honest, actual human being—which is what you hope most people in the world are, but it's not always the case," he adds. "That is how I try to run my business." LM

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Charlotte, N.C.



The Ticker: LAWN CARE

APRIL is... National Lawn Care Month

With April marking the celebration of **National Lawn Care Month**, the **Professional Landcare Network (PLANET)** created resources for landscape professionals to share with customers, which are downloadable at buff.ly/1jQH7w9.

In an interview with the *Memphis Business Journal*, **TruGreen** President David Alexander divulged the company's plans post spin-off from **ServiceMaster**, noting this year it will focus on improving internal operations; it intends to make acquisitions in 2015; and it plans to add 100 people to

its Memphis, Tenn., headquarters in the next two years.

Two lawn care companies unveiled they'll be tackling pests this season, with **Lawn Dawg** and **Noon Turf Care** forming new pest control and pest prevention divisions, respectively. Lawn Dawg's service, which is available in Maine, Massachusetts and Albany, N.Y., includes perimeter pest control and mosquito control. Noon Turf Care's division in Marlborough, Mass., offers insect and rodent control, termite treatments and bed bug control.

Total Lawn Care (TLC), located in Indianapolis, won **Holganix's** Roots for You competition with its 13-inch turf root entry. As the victor, TLC received a \$500 cash prize and a \$500 donation made in its name to **PLANET**.

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