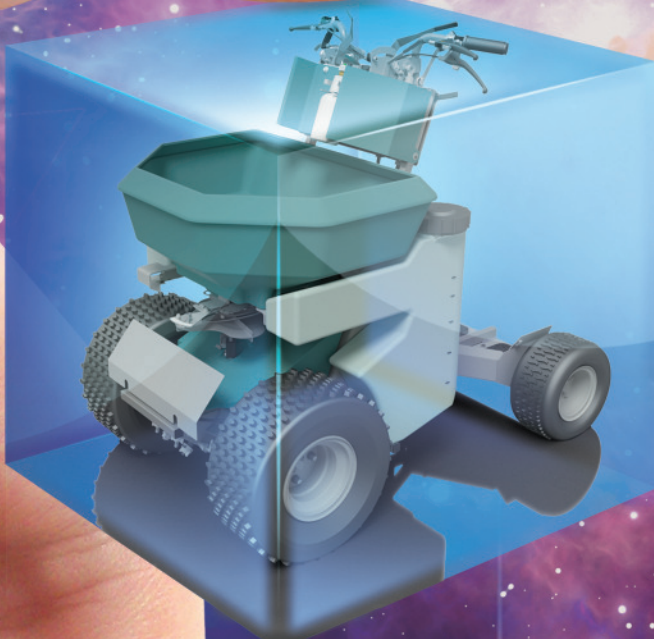


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YOUR GUIDE TO GROWTH™

LOOKING UP

Landscape professionals had another growth year, the *LM* Industry Pulse shows. And they're even more optimistic about 2016.

December 2015

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ILLUSTRATION ©ISTOCK.COM/PINNACLEANIMATES



NEW VIDEO ON LANDSCAPEMANAGEMENT.NET



→ Visit LandscapeManagement.net/video to check out LM's latest video interviews and stories. In one of our latest, LM's Editorial Advisory Board members, including Adam Linnemann of Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping; Kevin Kehoe of 3PG Consulting and Aspire Software; Richard Bare of Arbor-Nomics Turf; Phil Harwood of Pro-Motion Consulting (above); and Dan Gordon of TurfBooks, add color to our Industry Pulse report with their takes on the state of the landscape market.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI
EDITOR

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mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net



Nevers + Always

If you own or run a landscape or lawn care business, you likely have a knack for customer service. You wouldn't be here, reading *LM* right now, if you didn't. That's why it may be difficult for you to understand why employees don't come to work with the same mindset you do.

Dave Murray, a customer experience consultant for Cleveland-based The DiJulius Group, says several elements contribute to a person's service aptitude.

Murray was the (outstanding) workshop presenter at the *LM* Lawn Care Forum last month in Orlando.

He defines service aptitude as a person's ability to recognize opportunities to exceed a customer's expectation, regardless of circumstances. There are three main factors, including:

1. Previous life experiences;
2. Previous work experiences; and
3. Current work experiences.

“It's easy to forget employees are our internal customers.”

You have zero influence over the first two things on the list, but you're certainly in a position to affect No. 3. And Murray makes it clear that excellent customer service starts at the top. That's why your team needs to understand your vision for your company's service culture. In most cases, the most recently hired, least trained, lowest paid employees are the ones who deal with customers the most. They need your guidance.

For starters, he suggests developing a short list of your company's "always"

and "nevers." He calls these principles the "burden of the brand." Your list might include: "always offer a friendly greeting," "always make it easy to be a customer," "never prioritize tasks over customers" or "never view customers as an interruption."

He urges companies to throw policies out the window and offer guidelines instead. Guidelines empower your employees; policies hinder them.

"Too often, good employees are doing things that don't make a lot of sense for customers," Murray says.

It's also important to note employees often don't understand the customer's viewpoint, he says. For example, they might not be married with kids or homeowners, like many of your clients. Or they may be busy getting the job done and forget the customer is just a regular person who could be having a bad day.

Murray followed up this point by playing a training video Chick-fil-A shows all employees before they ever get in front of a customer. You may find it over the top for a fast food restaurant, but it's worth watching (vimeo.com/13509635). The company says it created the video, called "Every Life Has a Story," to "remind us that everyone we interact with is a chance to create a remarkable experience."

Do your employees think about your customers that way? Just as importantly, do you think about your employees that way? It's easy to forget employees are our internal clients. They need good customer service, too.

As Murray says, "Your customers will never be any happier than your employees are."



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What's your prediction for the state of the landscape market in 2016—better or worse than 2015?

"Better!"

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Wilson-Oyler Group
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"Though 2015 was a great year, the backlog and activity going into 2016 is the strongest I have experienced since being in business."

"I predict it will improve even more. Housing in my market area is still booming and folks are spending more on extra, nonessential, services."

"Prediction: Interest rates outweigh everything and with cheap money comes spending. It will be a good year but not great for revenue. Profits are my concern."

"Better for demand, but more difficult for staffing."

"Slightly better. The economy is still growing, but rising interest rates will keep that growth in check."

MORE ONLINE

See more great advice and complete answers from our Editorial Advisory Board in the online version of this feature at LandscapeManagement.net.

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BIG PICTURE

A WALK IN THE PARK

LOCATION Southern California

COMPANY ValleyCrest Landscape Cos., Calabasas, Calif.

THE DETAILS The mission of this private, 6-acre park in a rehabilitated neighborhood was to attract home buyers and to encourage interaction among residents.

ValleyCrest managed all design and construction work. The team developed \$11 million worth of work in 11 weeks, including the selection and management of all subcontractors, consultants and vendors—a total of 19 coordinated trades.

The team was challenged with preserving 40 heritage trees on the site. Because of their size, the trees needed to be planted in their final locations in conjunction with grading. This request required advanced planning to protect and care for the trees while the site was under construction. All 40 trees, valued at \$20,000 each, were preserved.

The results earned ValleyCrest a 2014 Grand Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' National Landscape Awards of Excellence Program.

PHOTO With its custom hardscape and iron work, the park entrance reflects the knotted nature of the preserved heritage trees and provides a segue for buyers wanting to explore model homes.


See more photos from this project at LandscapeManagement.net/BigPicture.

PHOTO: VALLEYCREST LANDSCAPE COS.



WHO'S WATCHING THE SITE TONIGHT?

Networkfleet Asset Guard

A large yellow excavator with a white cab is the central focus of the image. It is positioned on a dirt construction site. To the left of the excavator, there are several large concrete pipes and some black corrugated hoses. The background shows a construction site with mounds of earth and a sky filled with dramatic, orange and blue clouds, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The excavator's tracks are visible in the foreground, and its arm is partially visible on the left side of the machine.

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NEWS HOW-TO'S

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RECOMMENDER

BRUCE'S VIEW

STEP BY STEP

NEW STUFF

SAFETYWATCH

GOOD QUESTIONS



As it gets more difficult to find qualified team members, it's more important to focus company resources on this effort, says Andrew Ziehler, president of Ziehler Lawn & Tree Care in Centerville, Ohio. But he realized the company was spending too much time reviewing applications and interviewing candidates who didn't meet company requirements.

So, about two years ago, the company added another step to the hiring process: A list of six yes-or-no prequalifying questions. The receptionist or whoever greets the prospective employees reviews these questions before even handing the person an official application. The questions are:

- 1** Do you have a valid driver's license with fewer than four points?
- 2** Have you ever been charged with a DUI or reckless operation of a vehicle?
- 3** Have you ever been convicted of a felony?
- 4** Are you available for work from 6:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m. March-June and 6:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. July-December?
- 5** Can you physically lift 50 pounds and operate machinery on a daily basis?
- 6** Do you have reliable transportation to get to and from work?

"One 'no' disqualifies them," Ziehler says. The results have been less time spent on people who ultimately won't work out and more time available to recruit great employees.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



JOHN DEERE

RECOMMENDER

What attachment is essential to your business and why?

The Bobcat MT85 mini track loader uses the common industry interface for attachments.



ALEX FRANSEN
PRESIDENT, FRANSEN GROUP
LOUISVILLE, KY.

"Augers are huge for us because of the amount of trees and plant material we install. Excavators are great for our hardscape guys because they can dig out for a new patio or retaining wall. Snow pusher boxes are great for effectively and efficiently clearing parking lots of snow. I hate making a payment on something that I can only utilize for seven to eight months a year, so we use all these attachments on a skid-steer at a fraction of the cost of a stand-alone machine. This is huge when making a large equipment purchase decision."



BRYAN STOLZ
CHIEF MATRIX OFFICER,
WINTERBERRY GARDENS
SOUTHINGTON, CONN.

"The most essential attachment we use is the excavator thumb. When pulling out old trees and shrubs, it allows us to avoid using chokers. Without the chokers, we don't need to keep a crew member in the area, freeing him up to do other work and reducing the likelihood of injuries. We also use it for placing boulders in plantings and for water features, again eliminating the choker and keeping our crews working safely and efficiently. Loading trees, slabs of concrete and pulling out stumps are all made much easier."

BRUCE'S VIEW



BY BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at bwilson@wilson-oyler.com.

SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

Landscape companies take great pride in delivering a quality product. And we love nothing better than the big job or marquee project. It takes a great organization to execute the complex projects, and when we master those, it's good for our brand.

Equally important to our reputation for service are the little things that affect how customers perceive us. When neglected, details can destroy our customer's experience and threaten our relationship. That's why we should train our teams to sweat the small stuff.

Do any of these sound familiar?

- A project manager falls short on finishing the detailing of a design/build job.
- Account managers fail to follow up on requests for nuisance items from important clients.
- Crews miss details that are the customer's pet peeves.

The worst part is customers often don't call you out on these little glitches. But they become disgruntled and, out of the blue, you receive a cancellation notice when you thought everything was going well.

We resent high-maintenance customers, but they make our teams better. We should learn from them. The things they constantly call to our attention are happening to the silent customers, too.

Never take your customers for granted. Fix their small problems with the same enthusiasm you use to tackle their large ones. And remember: It's the little things that generate the biggest results. 🍷

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STEP BY STEP

How to prep a landscape bed

DOWNLOAD IT

Visit LandscapeManagement.net/StepbyStep to download a PDF of this page to use as a training tool for your team.

An annual color, perennials, ornamental grasses and other plant selections can make a huge impact to your clients' landscapes. But before you start installing them, you need to prep the bed to make sure the plants will grow and thrive.

Start by mapping out where the bed will be and what shape it will have. The contour should match the style of the landscape. For example, formal or contemporary gardens have sharp angles, while traditional or rustic landscape have soft curves. You want the shape to look purposeful.

Mark the edges with an edging shovel and marking paint. Make sure you have a clearly defined edge. Dig into the ground about 6 inches deep around the border.

Cut into the ground along that edge. Angle the sides of the edges toward the bed. This step will help keep your soil, mulch or other planting material contained to the bed.

Remove the bed's current vegetation—like existing grass or weeds—down to the root.

Once you remove all the grass and plants from the designated area, grade the bed. For larger beds, you can use a string line and level to help with the grading.

Unless you have extreme drought conditions year round, grade the bed so it doesn't hold water. Send water out of the bed and away from the adjacent lawn, patio or building foundations.

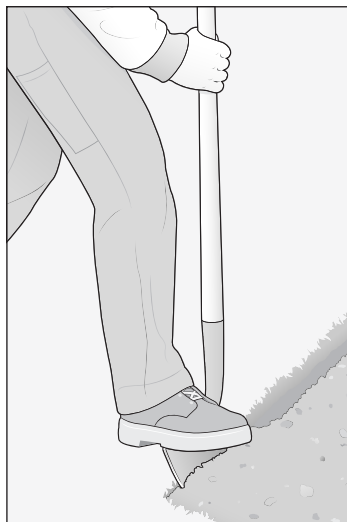
Add topsoil, compost or a blend of the two to replace the soil you removed with the vegetation. Amend the bed based on your region, soil type and plant material. In most cases, you can plant in the native soil and amend over the top with compost.

Also, consider adding landscape fabric or applying preemergent herbicides before planting to prevent weed growth. After prep, you're ready for plants. 🌱

SOURCE: Ben Bowen, landscape designer, Ross NW Watergardens in Portland, Ore.

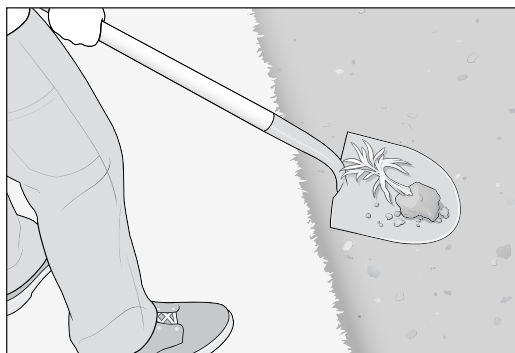
STEP 1

Use an edger shovel to outline and cut the edges of the bed. Dig into the ground about 6 inches all the way around.



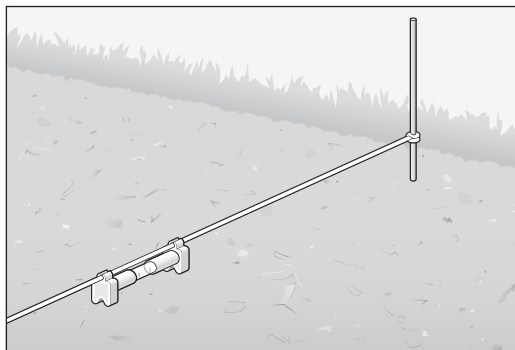
STEP 2

Remove existing vegetation like grass and weeds. Make sure you remove all the roots so they don't grow back.



STEP 3

Add soil and compost, and grade the bed so it doesn't hold water.





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NEW STUFF



1



2



3

1. 2K752 MINI SKID-STEER**COMPANY:** Ditch Witch**URL:** DitchWitch.com

This construction-grade mini skid-steer features a platform measuring 74 sq. in., a two-way auxiliary control foot pedal, a standard dual-lever ground drive control and an optional joystick. A 24.8-hp Kubota diesel engine powers the machine, which has an 860-lb. operating capacity and a hinge-pin height of 83 in.

2. FX739V-EFI ENGINE**COMPANY:** Kawasaki**URL:** Kawasaki.com

The 25.5-hp EFI power plant is designed with a multiport sequential fuel injection with an open loop design. An engine temperature monitor combats overheating. The EFI engine will be available on select models of FX Series and FS Series engines, and the company plans to incorporate it in additional models in the future. The engine also features a diagnostic system, accessible by PC or tablet, for troubleshooting and monitoring of machine performance.

3. LED PATH LIGHT MODULE**COMPANY:** Kichler**URL:** Kichler.com

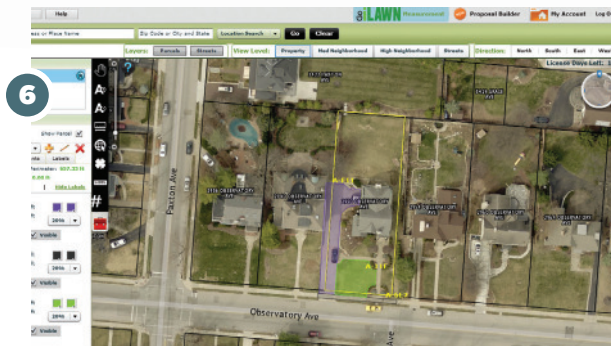
For illuminating pathways and walkways, contractors can choose between six path lights in traditional and contemporary designs intended to have slimmer profiles, patterned shades and two-toned finishes, Kichler says. The module is designed to be moisture-proof and evenly distribute light. In addition, it's being retrofitted into existing wall wash and path light designs.



4



5



6

CHECK OUT MORE NEW STUFF ONLINE

To stay up to date on all the latest landscape industry products and services, visit LandscapeManagement.net/tag/product-news.

4. SPARTAN ZERO-TURN MOWERS

COMPANY: Spartan Mowers

URL: SpartanMowers.com

The Spartan Mower features smart ride technology (SRT), designed to absorb shock or jostling. The Spartan features a shock-assisted lift deck, a low center of gravity and angled front forks. Additional features include soft ride steel belted radial tires, an ergonomic cockpit and new brake system. Contractors can choose from the SRT Pro Series (pictured), HD Series or XD series mowers.

5. VERSATTACH SYSTEM

COMPANY: Honda Power Equipment

URL: PowerEquipment.Honda.com

Two Honda VersAttach System power head models—the UMC425, powered by a Honda GX25 Mini 4-Stroke engine, and the UMC435 (pictured), powered by a GX35 Mini 4-Stroke engine—pair with six attachments, including an interchangeable edger, line trimmer, blower, hedge trimmer, pruner and cultivator. The attachments fit into the attachment shaft with Honda's SureLoc joint-locking system. The antivibration system includes two rubber-mount shaft inserts between the shaft and clutch and the handle assembly.

6. GO ILAWN 19.4

COMPANY: GIS Dynamics

URL: GoiLawn.com

Go iLawn's property management software now allows users to see an overhead image from any angle on a 360-degree rotation. The update also gives users new overlay of property parcels and road names on the property map. It's also now compatible with Windows 10 and Microsoft's Edge browser.

SAFETYWATCH

➔ This photo was staged to show several safety hazards or dangerous work habits. How many can you identify? Flip to page 75 for a list of potential hazards.

DOWNLOAD IT

Visit LandscapeManagement.net/SafetyWatch to print a PDF of this page. Post it at your facility and encourage your employees to challenge their hazard-spotting skills.

Ed. Note: Thanks to Schill Grounds Management in North Ridgeville, Ohio, for participating in our SafetyWatch photo shoots. Schill and Landscape Management do not practice or condone the unsafe methods demonstrated during photo staging.



PHOTO: LAURA WATLOBLAKE

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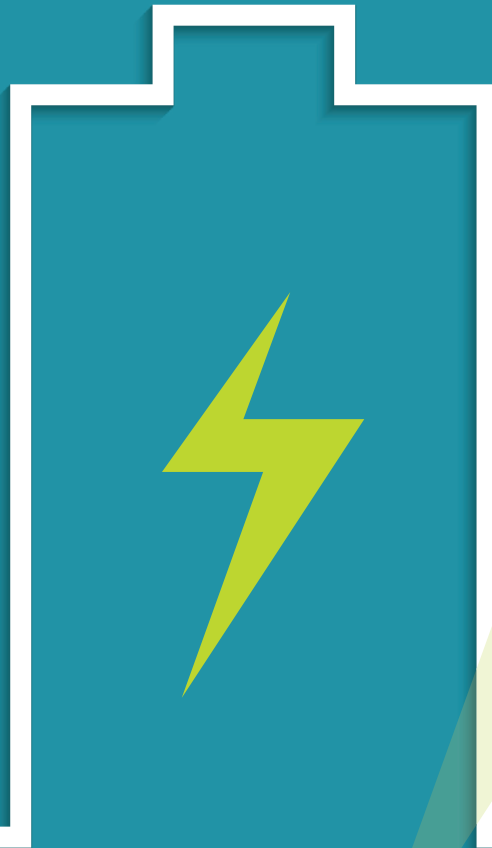
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GOODBYE TO GAS

A look at three companies that are forgoing gas for battery-powered equipment.

BY LINDSEY GETZ

Willamette Landscape Services has two solar-powered equipment trailers.

Nationwide, many landscape companies are looking for ways to make their operations “greener.” While some business owners have shied away from replacing gas-powered equipment with battery-powered alternatives—because of the cost to swap out equipment or the fear that it wouldn’t work as well—those that have made the switch are finding that their efforts have not gone unnoticed. And goodwill with customers isn’t the only benefit of switching to batteries. To learn more, we caught up with three different companies who’ve made the switch.

CARVING A NICHE

Willamette Landscape Services

Headquarters: Tualatin, Ore.

Client mix: 100% commercial (homeowner associations)

Service mix: 80% maintenance, including enhancements; 20% irrigation

Employees: 60-80

Since 2013, Willamette Landscape Services has been investing in going electric. The company runs eight, 20-inch walk-behind mowers from Mean Green Mowers and has about a half-dozen string trimmers and one blower from the same manufacturer.

The electric equipment is hauled in one of two trailers rigged with solar-powered panels for in-field charging. The company’s in-house service department developed these equipment-charging trailers in collaboration with a local RV dealer.



“We’ve been slowly adding more electric equipment to the fleet,” says Greg Beck, area manager for Willamette. Approximately 20 percent of the company’s walk-behinds are now electric. “It’s definitely helped us carve a niche in our market. There are certain accounts—such as those in downtown Portland, Ore.—where it’s particularly appreciated. That’s because there’s already a noise problem and they really appreciate that the equipment is quiet. And it’s also because there’s a strong movement to go green there.”

Because the company works exclusively with HOAs where the homes are typically close together, the residents prefer the quieter equipment.

“If you switch from running loud, conventional equipment outside of their window to something much quieter, it’s going to get noticed,” Beck says.

PHOTO: WILLAMETTE LANDSCAPE SERVICES
ON THE COVER: ILLUSTRATION: ©ISTOCK.COM/SUMKIN



BATTERY-POWERED EQUIPMENT GUIDE

Regarding productivity, Beck says the equipment is getting at least two hours of battery life, which is longer than a tank of gas. However, Beck says the equipment is not as powerful as the gas-equipment the company used to run. In Willamette's rainy climate, where grass is often thick and may need to be mowed wet, he says it can be tricky.

"It does require us to slow down a bit," Beck says. "In an industry where it's all about efficiency, that's contradictory to the crews, so we do need to educate them about why we're doing this and what the benefits are. Once they understand, they're on board."

Still, the company switches back to gas-powered equipment during the wettest parts of the spring and fall. But Beck says the mowers work great in drier conditions.

The other downside has been the investment. While a gas-powered walk-behind mower might cost the company around \$1,000, Beck says an electric equivalent with batteries can cost more than twice as much.

"However, we hope that with no gas and no oil, the return on investment will be pretty good," he continues. "Since all we have to do is swap out blades, the mechanic should never have to touch it. And in the clients' eyes, they don't know about the extra cost or that we're moving a little slower. All they see is the benefits to them—and that's a huge plus for us."

Beck hopes the demand for this equipment will grow. It would not only drive the prices down, but it would encourage manufacturers to produce even better equipment.

"As demand grows, the equipment will get better and better," Beck says. "We believe that electric will be the way of the future and will continue transitioning our company that direction."

GIVING 'GREEN' A CHANCE

Madison Earth Care Landscaping

Headquarters: Madison, Conn.

Client mix: Primarily residential

Service mix: 70% design/build; 30% maintenance

Employees: 45

Four years ago, Bob Blundon, owner and founder of Madison Earth Care Landscaping, was already using solar power at his home when he decided to



Bob Blundon runs propane mowers in addition to a fleet of battery-powered equipment.

see if he could use it to recharge some of the Stihl electric equipment his company invested in.

Around the same time, in an effort to operate "more sustainably," the company switched to propane-powered Scag zero-turn mowers.

Overall, Blundon says the changes have put the company in a "league of its own," and it's been a major differentiator from the competition.

The switch was big. About 80 percent of the company mowers are propane, its string trimmers are all electric and its hedge trimmers are 95 percent electric. He has two enclosed, solar-powered trailers to charge all the electric equipment.

"Our clients were thrilled," Blundon says. "We marketed it to our customers saying that 'with no price increase, they could still be greener consumers.' It's basically a no-brainer for the client."

Blundon says he's invested about \$8,000 in the solar-powered trailer setup. While he expected the ROI to come from fuel savings, he says the bigger savings have come from labor and maintenance.

"Instead of going to the gas station twice a week, we're going once every two weeks," Blundon says. "That's been the bigger benefit. And we no longer have to rip up carburetors because of cruddy gas ruining our equipment. And it's quieter and lighter weight. We really see a ton of benefits to this change."

In fact, Blundon says his crews have been more efficient since the change. Pushing and toting around

lighter weight equipment has allowed them to increase their productivity. Blundon says on average his two crews combined are maintaining an extra lawn per day.

Blundon has marketed the service through social media and email blasts. The company even created a slogan: “Give Green a Chance,” which it painted on its trailers and includes with marketing materials.

“The landscaping industry has traditionally been slow to make changes, but it’s important for contractors to break away from that mold,” Blundon says. “There are better mouse traps out there. You just need to be willing to make a change. For us, we see these changes as a key part of our future.”

VALUES-BASED BUSINESS

Clean Air Lawn Care Miami

Headquarters: Miami, Fla.

Client mix: 100% residential

Service mix: 90% maintenance, including fertilization; 10% installation

Employees: Less than five

Mariana Ureta, owner of Clean Air Lawn Care Miami, has been using electric-powered equipment from Stihl and Black & Decker since she started the company a year ago. Her Miami location is one of 46 franchise locations of Clean Air Lawn Care, founded in Fort Collins, Colo., in 2006.

All the company’s equipment, including their walk-behind mowers, blowers and string trimmers, are battery-powered. They’re charged with a solar-powered trailer that was developed in-house.

She can’t compare her electric, solar-powered equipment to gas-powered alternatives because

she’s never used them, but she says has no concerns about the equipment’s production abilities. Plus, the equipment is lightweight and quiet—which both crews and clients appreciate.

“When I decided to go back to work (after spending several years at home with her children), it was important for me to open a business that fit my personal values and that I feel good about,” Ureta says.

Ureta says her “green” angle—including using solar-powered equipment and organic fertilizer—has been a point of differentiation for her business.

“Our equipment uses lithium batteries, which are very light, efficient and quick to charge,” she says. “I can charge the batteries for my blower and trimmer in about 10 minutes.”

While it’s certainly been a great selling point with clients—and the company heavily promotes its “green” services—Ureta says the catalyst behind her green operations had more to do with personal values.

“Battery-powered equipment fits with my personal values of sustainability,” she says. “I am proud of providing a service that produces minimal emissions.”

Getz is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.

BATTERY-POWERED EQUIPMENT MANUFACTURERS

Looking to buy non-gas-powered equipment? Start your research here.

Core Outdoor Power
CoreOutdoorPower.com

DeWalt
DeWalt.com

Echo USA
Echo-USA.com

Ego Power+
Egopowerplus.com

GreenWorks
GreenWorksTools.com

Husqvarna
Husqvarna.com

Infaco
Infaco-USA.com

Kobalt
KobaltTools.com

Makita
MakitaTools.com

Mean Green Products
MeanGreenProducts.com

Oregon Cordless
OregonCordless.com

Ryobi
RyobiTools.com

Stihl
StihlUSA.com

Tanaka Power Equipment
Tanaka-USA.com

Worx
Worx.com





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EGO POWER+ is the undisputed industry leader in cutting-edge technology and design, delivering the performance of gas without the noise, fuss, or fumes. The first of its kind, EGO's patented 56 Volt Lithium-Ion battery features a unique ARC shape, Keep Cool Technology, and individual cell monitoring to prevent overheating and maintain maximum power potential even in the most challenging conditions. With the best run times in their class and quick charging capability, EGO POWER+ products deliver power beyond belief.

MOWER

The EGO POWER+ Mower is powered by a 600W, high-torque, strong magnetic motor that produces far less noise than gas. A compact design that folds flat in seconds makes storing and cleaning more convenient than any other mower. 3-in-1 functionality provides superior performance whether you are mulching, bagging, or using the side-discharge chute, while LED headlights allow for easy mowing in evening conditions.



BLOWER

The EGO POWER+ Blower is the first cordless blower to exceed the performance of gas. Inspired by advanced aeronautic technology, the blower uses turbine fan engineering to deliver exceptional power. A high-efficiency brushless motor and a lightweight compact design result in reduced vibration, and extended motor life.



Infaco USA



Infaco's line of battery-powered tools offer powerful, clean cuts without the noise or smelly fumes.

The Electrocouple F3010 pruning shear

features 2 tons of torque and offers cutting heads with a capacity from 1.6" to 2.2". Convert from hand-pruning to pole-pruning by snapping the shear onto any of Infaco's light carbon-fiber extension poles ranging from 4'- 11'6". The entire shear is waterproof and can be used in nearly any weather condition. The F3010 also offers a revolutionary safety system to prevent workers from accidentally losing a finger and it is the most ergonomic electric shear in the world. Increase worker safety even further by using poles to eliminate the need for dangerous and time-consuming ladders.



F3010 shear with medium head snapped onto a telescoping extension pole.

The Powercoup's interchangeable heads

and extensions allow it to be used as a saw, hedge-trimmer, or chain saw (coming soon!). Instead of noisy tools that emit smelly gas fumes, the Powercoup line is incredibly quiet and completely electric.

Just how quiet is the Powercoup? The Powercoup is used by the Sydney Zoo in Australia because zookeepers found that the quiet tools didn't disturb the animals like most hedgers and saws. In Riverside, a group of cemeteries has also begun using this ultra-quiet tool to maintain a peaceful atmosphere. An exclusive gated community in Calabasas already uses Infaco's line of electric tools to trim hedges and clean up palm tree trunks with zero fumes.

Infaco offers both NiMH and Li-ion batteries that are compatible with Infaco's entire landscaping line. Users wear a light battery pack fitted in a Camelbak-style vest that distributes the weight evenly across shoulders and hips.

Coming Soon: Infaco's Powercoup will soon offer 8 different attachments making it one of the most versatile hand-held tools on the market. Contact us at 1-800-425-8809 to be alerted when this new line arrives!



The new Powercoup fitted with a saw head



Mean Green Mowers



Mean Green Mowers offers powerful, quiet, lithium-electric mowers and hand held equipment to the commercial landscape professionals! Designed, developed, and manufactured in the heart of the USA, these powerful products provide zero emissions, low noise, no routine maintenance, and zero fuel to purchase. Mean Green Mowers provide a complete line of commercial electric equipment including the patent pending CXR 52/60" ZTR, 48" Stalker stand-on, 33" WBX-33HD walk behind, MGP-20 push mower, world's first electric BLAST! Backpack blower, and operator-cooled battery backpack line trimmer, pruning saw, hedge trimmer, edger, and hand-held chainsaw and hedge trimmer.

Mean Green's ride-on mowers are constructed of a thick 7 gauge steel chassis and a welded steel deck. Multiple angular bends and lightening holes borrowed from the aerospace industry make for the lightest, strongest, commercial mowers on the market today. Proprietary blade motors and spindles maintain the highest blade tip speeds in all types of grass for the best possible cut. All day run



times are obtainable thanks to super efficiency and Mean Green's patent pending "Green Lithium" battery systems. Cut all day on one charge and charge overnight!

The new commercial lithium BLAST! backpack blower propels air at a battery electric industry best performance of over 150 mph and 500 cfm with single exchangeable battery run times as good as comparable "full tank" gas backpack blowers while producing about 1/4 the noise and zero emissions!

The all new Mean Green hand held line trimmer package offers awesome power comparable to the best commercial gas line trimmers while expelling zero emissions and 1/4 the noise! The patent pending "operator-cooled" exchangeable battery backpack weighs only 13 pounds and provides run times similar to 3 full tanks of gas of a typical gas trimmer.

With fast Return On Investment from fuel savings alone, Mean Green Mowers offer a huge competitive advantage for contractors. Stand out in the crowd with powerful, quiet equipment! Mow green, Save Green!



Oregon

Oregon BL300 40V MAX* Cordless Blower

The Oregon BL300 Blower offers gas-like performance in a convenient cordless package. Powered by Oregon's premium lithium ion battery technology, it's the best performing blower currently on the market, with an industry-leading maximum volume of 507 CFM and speed of 132 on Turbo. Designed with landscaping professionals in mind, the BL300 features a high performance fan and brushless motor that maximize blower output and deliver the ideal balance between power and run time.

With no fuel to mix or cords to pull, the BL300 is ready to work when the pros are. A variable speed trigger allows workers to choose the right power and speed needed for the job, while maximizing power and runtime. On its lowest setting, the BL300 can deliver up to 90 minutes of runtime before a recharge is needed. Weighing in at less than 9 pounds with Oregon's highest capacity battery, the BL300's ergonomic design reduces operator fatigue while enhancing comfort and control.

The quiet, environmentally friendly blower is silent between trigger pulls and compliant with most community noise regulations—making it ideal for early morning work or areas with low noise requirements.



OREGON®

The BL300 is part of Oregon's 40V MAX Cordless tool system, powered by premium battery technology that holds its charge in storage for months. All Oregon cordless tools are compatible with the company's full line of lithium ion battery packs and chargers. Other Oregon tools in the 40V MAX Cordless tool system include the new self-sharpening CS300 Chain Saw, HT250 Hedge Trimmer, ST275 Trimmer/Edger and PS250 Pole Saw.





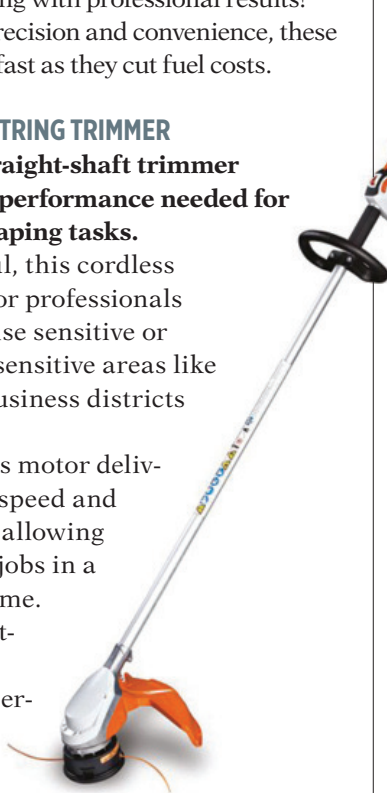
STIHL Battery KombiSystem

Portable, quiet and powerful, the full line of STIHL Battery KombiSystem products is powered by advanced 36-volt lithium-ion battery technology for environmentally responsible landscaping with professional results! Packed with power, precision and convenience, these tools cut job times as fast as they cut fuel costs.

NEW STIHL FSA 90 R STRING TRIMMER

Battery-powered straight-shaft trimmer delivers the cutting performance needed for professional landscaping tasks.

- Quiet, yet powerful, this cordless trimmer is great for professionals landscaping in noise sensitive or exhaust emission sensitive areas like school grounds, business districts or hospitals.
- Powerful brushless motor delivers a high cutting speed and 15" cutting width, allowing users to complete jobs in a short amount of time.
- Balanced and lightweight, delivering excellent cutting performance and low vibration for easy, smooth operation.
- Saves time and money on the job by eliminating the need for gasoline and two-cycle oil.



STIHL®



NEW STIHL BGA 100 BLOWER

The newest member of the STIHL Battery KombiSystem family also happens to be the lightest, quietest and most powerful handheld blower in the STIHL line.

- Jet engine-inspired axial turbine fan delivers more blowing force (up to 17 Newtons*) than any other battery products on the market – and many gasoline-powered models.
- Elimination of on-board battery reduces weight to only 5.5 lbs. reducing operator fatigue on the job.*
- Variable speed throttle trigger delivers four performance levels; boost mode activates the highest power with air speeds of up to 140 mph for tough blowing tasks.
- Ultimate performance with blowing force rivaling top-rated STIHL backpack blowers.

*Blowers tested in accordance with ANSI B 175.2 standard. One Newton is the force needed to accelerate 1 kilogram of mass at the rate of 1 meter per second squared. The BGA 100 is designed for use with battery belt or AR backpack battery with connector cable.

WHAT THE PROS ARE SAYING

Ralph Meyer • Sebert Landscaping • Chicago, Ill. "With as many crews as we have working in the field, any time the equipment is down for repair, it affects our efficiency. Dependable products like STIHL help keep us as productive as possible, which we believe saves us both time and money and makes us more profitable as well."



REAL PEOPLE. STIHL PEOPLE.

Zack Kline | A.I.R. Lawn Care

JOIN US. #RealSTIHL

"I trust STIHL to get the job done."

Zack Kline is committed to finding a better, greener approach to landscaping and he chooses STIHL. "STIHL electric and battery-powered equipment is powerful, efficient and stands up to hard work," says Kline. "STIHL earns my loyalty because of the great service they provide. If I ever have an issue with my equipment, I can take it to my local STIHL Dealer and they'll take care of me so I can keep taking care of my clients."

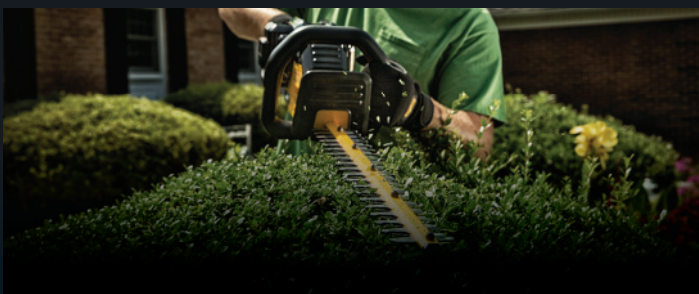
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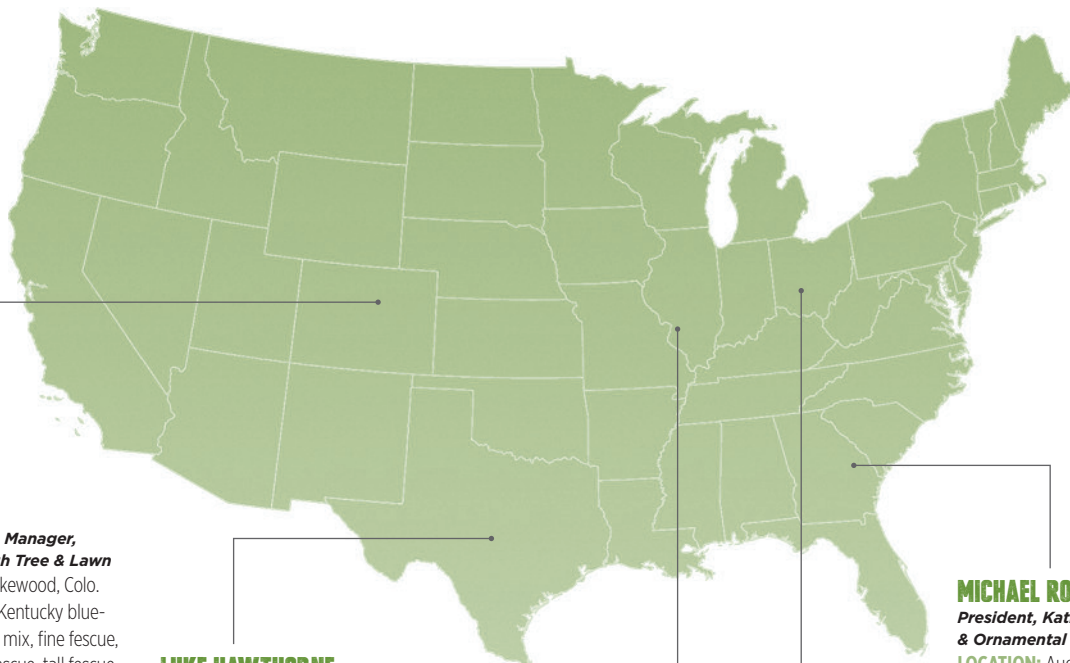
WALK THE WALK

Some contractors say
walk-behind mowers are
their go-to equipment
for residential accounts.

➤ PAGE 34

Liquid vs. granular debate

See what type of herbicides lawn care professionals across the country choose for various turf types. **BY DILLON STEWART**



LEE KRAL

Lawn Service Manager, Mountain High Tree & Lawn

LOCATION: Lakewood, Colo.

TURF TYPES: Kentucky bluegrass/ryegrass mix, fine fescue, creeping red fescue, tall fescue

PREEMERGENT: Liquid

POSTEMERGENT: Liquid

TRADE TIP: "It's far more about results than cost for me

because it costs more money for me to send a truck back out and respray the weeds than to buy something that really works. So I'm much more interested in effectiveness than cost of the product."



LUKE HAWTHORNE

Owner, Emerald Lawns

LOCATION: Round Rock, Texas

TURF TYPES: St. Augustinegrass, Bermudagrass, zoysiagrass

PREEMERGENT: Liquid and Granular

POSTEMERGENT: Liquid

TRADE TIP: "If someone is just starting out, I'd probably tell them to use granular. They can kind of learn along the way.

If they make mistakes, it's not necessarily going to be the end of the world for them. If they're experienced, I'd say use liquid because it's better coverage, more effective and less money."



BRYAN KIRCHNER

Lawn Care Manager, Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping

LOCATION: Columbia, Ill.

TURF TYPE: 95 percent fescue

PREEMERGENT: Granular

POSTEMERGENT: Liquid

TRADE TIP: "We use Z-Spray machines, so we can cover a lot of ground in a short period of time. Even though with liquids you're not having to take the time to blow off sidewalks, granular is faster for us."



ANDREW ZIEHLER

President, Ziehler Lawn & Tree Care

LOCATION: Centerville, Ohio

TURF TYPES: Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue

PREEMERGENT: Granular

POSTEMERGENT: Liquid

TRADE TIP: "During (the preemergent) time of the season, we're still dealing with freezing conditions off and on. We don't want to worry about liquids, sprayers, pumps and all that freezing over night. In the past, we've used liquid, and we had to keep the trucks inside and use heating elements to keep the pumps from freezing overnight. Or you have to blow out the lines every day, which becomes kind of a pain compared to granular application. It's just for a few weeks in the early spring that you have that problem, but during that time, it's a little easier to use granular."



MICHAEL ROGERS

President, Kathleen's Lawn & Ornamental Pest Control

LOCATION: Augusta, Ga.

TURF TYPES: Fescue, zoysiagrass, Bermudagrass, St. Augustinegrass and centipedegrass

PREEMERGENT: Liquid

POSTEMERGENT: Liquid

TRADE TIP: "Postemergent really makes a difference to me because when I spray that weed it goes to work then. If I had to use a granular, I'd have to wait for the homeowner or nature to water it before they get started."





Dan Loughner

ASK THE SCIENTIST

“One determining factor when choosing liquid vs. granular is grass types. In the cool-season grasses (Kentucky bluegrass, ryegrass, tall fescue), a lot of times people will choose granular because there will be a fertilizer component with the herbicides applied to the granular, so they’re putting on their fertilization at the same time. In the warm-season environment (Bermudagrass, zoysia-grass, St. Augustinegrass), you often make these early preemergent applications before the grass is greening up. It’s still dormant, so in that situation you don’t want to stimulate the grass to grow, you want it to come back to life on its own without stimulation. So you’ll generally use a liquid application without fertilization for the first early preemergence applications.”

—DAN LOUGHNER,
FIELD SCIENTIST, DOW AGROSCIENCES

NEWSPEED

ORGANIC CERTIFIED

The Andersons’ Humic DG and Black Gypsum DG are now certified as an Organic Input Material in California. These products already carry Organic Materials Review Institute listings for organic use.

AND THE WINNER IS...

In October at GIE+EXPO in Louisville, Ky., Dow AgroSciences gave away a Perma-Green Triumph sprayer as part of its Defend Your Turf Give-away. The winner was lawn care operator Jason Creel, owner of Alabama Lawn Pros, based in Trussville, Ala. The manufacturer was also slated to give away a Z-Spray Z-Max sprayer on or after Dec. 2.



SITEONE IS OFFICIAL

John Deere Landscapes officially rebranded as SiteOne Landscape Supply in late October. With more than 460 locations in the U.S. and Canada, the Roswell, Ga.-based company is the largest wholesale distributor of landscape supplies in North America. The company, which filed for an initial public offering earlier this year, has a reported \$1 billion-plus in annual revenue.

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Dec 10 & 11, 2015

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interview

THE LANDSCAPE OF A FAMILY OWNED BUSINESS



BY:

JUSTIN O'CONNOR

With over a decade of experience, Justin O'Connor knows the landscaping business inside and out. After graduating from Penn State University with a Bachelor's degree in Landscape Contracting (with options in both Landscape Design/Build and Landscape Management), he gained the foundation needed to become President of Growing Seasons, a family-owned and operated company located 15 miles South of Pittsburgh.

Here, he shares his insight, discusses the steps taken along the way to achieve his company's current success and tells us how real-time technology has helped his landscaping company thrive.

Q: Can you tell us about your family history and the generational transition involving the management of your business?

A: Growing Seasons Landscaping is family owned and operated and we're located 15 miles south of Pittsburgh. We took ownership in 2007 after the previous owner decided to sell the company. Before we took over, the company was geared more towards turf and landscape maintenance at the time. We decided that we also wanted to pursue landscape construction and focus more on business-to-business projects, as well as snow and ice management. With the growth of the gas and oil industry in our area, we also expanded our services to include erosion control, which has also helped our company grow over the past several years.

In addition to our unparalleled Landscape Division, Growing Seasons also offers a 24/7 comprehensive Snow & Ice Management service and a USDA certified Firewood Division for residential and restaurant use.



Q: Family-owned businesses can be as unique and distinctive as the families that own them. How does being family-owned and operated work to your advantage, and how does it help set you apart from your competition?

A: [Jim O'Connor]: Being faced with the task of managing the business along with two of my sons, we decided to hire a business coach. What this has done for us is to keep each of us in "our lanes". What I mean by lanes is Justin is in charge of sales and estimating, Josh is in charge of operations and equipment and I am in charge of finance. We discuss our areas and do help each other when needed, but hiring a coach keeps us focused and accountable.

My middle son Ryan doesn't work in the business, but he is our insurance advisor. My wife Sue does not work in the business, but she is a huge asset in keeping us all grounded. There is nothing more rewarding than seeing your sons grow,

mature, and be hard working honest business people, helping each other achieve their goals and solve their problems. Please don't think we have it all together, we go through a lot of problems as well. But knowing we are all focused on the same goal is a huge asset to us. We invest in education, seminars and visiting other companies when we can. Education is a big part of our growth and success.

Q: How has technology helped contribute to your company's success?

A: Our company uses and relies on LMN. We had looked at several software programs and knew we needed to streamline our company's process to a single platform. After meeting Mark Bradley, Founder of LMN, in a food line at the Green Industry and Equipment Expo in 2013, we got started with LMN shortly afterwards, in early 2014. We wanted to implement it right away and there wasn't any training class near us at the time, so we used all the online resources and short videos. It made the process simple and straight forward.

We were able to build our budget for the year and setup all of our estimating catalogs. The videos on www.learnlmn.com also gave us a better understanding of our companies' numbers and how to recover all of our costs. Once we had everything setup, we immediately saw results in the speed and accuracy of our estimates. Our customers compliment us on how professional and easy to read they are. When you know your numbers it gives you the ability to bid with confidence.

In the past year, we have transitioned a lot of our work to commercial construction and erosion control. With this growth, LMN has been a big part in our estimating and job costing on projects. We had a very big year for growth, without adding any additional management or estimators.

Q: Can you give us a specific example of how LMN's software and training have boosted your company's success?

A: This past summer, we had an opportunity to bid a commercial construction project with a fast turnaround time. By understanding our numbers and our overhead through LMN, we were able to adjust our numbers not by cutting our price, but by understanding how this particular job offset our overhead costs. Because of that, we were able to lower our bid amount and win the project. If we didn't end up making these changes, we would have lost the bid and the opportunity to work with this client. This was all because of LMN's resources and its education, which gave us the insight and understanding we needed to achieve our goals.

Q: With the upcoming snow season right around the corner, how will your company thrive during this busy time of year?

A: We attended a landscape business management workshop this past July taught by LMN and held at our local Caterpillar dealer. The workshop was geared towards snow and we are now converting all of our snow operations to LMN. LMN is not only going to help our field staff, but also the office staff – by boosting their efficiency and eliminating paper route sheets. The GPS time stamp also gives us the ability to confirm when our trucks leave our on-site.

In combination with LMN, Jobsite Watch, is giving us another competitive advantage. We plan on using this app for a client that we service over 50 of their sites. Jobsite Watch is going to allow our client to see in real-time which sites have been serviced and at what time. This application is allowing us to offer something that our competition is not. Our commitment is providing the best service in everything we do. We strive to build a long lasting relationship with every single client, while exceeding their expectations every step of the way.



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MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

Get walking

For John Erbert, walk-behind mowers are the driving force behind the success of his company, Erbert Lawns. The \$3 million firm in Littleton, Colo., exclusively uses 21-inch walk-behind mowers to serve its all-residential clients.

This strategy is part of an effort to take “the extra time and effort to do it right the first time.”

“The 21-inch gives a beautiful cut,”

Erbert says. “Just about the best cut you can get.”



John Erbert

Like Erbert, many landscape contractors are seeing the benefits of using walk-behind mowers.

Particularly on residential properties, they provide a level of craftsmanship that homeowners appreciate, these companies say, sending the message the client’s property is worth the extra work. As manufacturers improve, these machines become more efficient and user friendly.

Erbert Lawns started as a full-service company with residential and commercial clients. But about 15 years ago, Erbert found his niche. The com-



Some contractors use walk-behind mowers to give homeowners the pristine cut they say larger mowers can’t provide. BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER

pany now offers only mowing and fertilization services to residential clients. He targets dense neighborhoods with homes that have small lot sizes and “dominates them, if you will,” using only 21-inch walk-behinds.

“The residential people didn’t like the big mowers on their lawn,” Erbert says, citing complaints about ruts, matted grass and messed up landscapes from the larger mowers. “We saw it as a unique selling proposition for us.”

After switching to walk-behinds, productivity has increased though the mower’s deck sizes decreased. His crews mow faster with the maneuverable machines, and they are easier to get on and off the trailer. With only one mower on the truck, his crews no longer debate which machine to use for each job. The larger mowers also left behind clippings and debris, a mess eliminated by using the smaller mulching mowers. Training has also become more streamlined. Erbert says it took 30 to 45 days

for employees to get comfortable on the larger mowers, but they master the 21-inch in a day.

“We can bring people in, train them fast and get them to do a professional job fast,” he says.

Commonwealth Irrigation & Landscape in Fredericksburg, Va., also uses walk-behind mowers on its residential properties, which make up about half of its business. The \$2 million company offers 40 percent mowing/maintenance, 30 percent irrigation, 20 percent landscape/hardscape installation and 10 percent snow removal services.

“The walk-behinds are more forgiving in tight spaces, gates and fences,” says Mike Garrett, grounds maintenance division manager for Commonwealth. The company uses 36- and 48-inch walk-behinds and 21-inch self-propelled push mowers.

GENTLE CUT ↑
Walk-behinds are softer on lawns and don’t cause rutting and matting, some contractors say.

Continued on page 36

NEWSPEED

STIHL RECALL

Stihl recalled certain gas-powered edgers, trimmers/brushcutters, pole pruners and KombiMotors due to potential fuel

tank leaks. Only products with serial numbers between 501830112 and 504083576 sold from Nov. 2014 through Sept. 2015 were included.

CALIFORNIA MERGIN'

Two Northern California companies, Marizco Landscape Management and Coast Landscape Management, merged operations. Coast Landscape Management, the name the

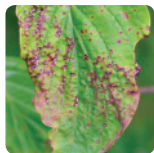
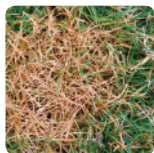
companies will operate under, ranked No. 146 on the 2015 LM150 list. The company’s 2015 revenue was \$8.3 million.

RUPPERT HONORED

Ruppert Landscape, based in Laytonville,

Md., was named one of the 2016 Future 50 award winners in Washington D.C. by *SmartCEO* magazine. The program recognizes the region’s 50 fastest-growing mid-sized companies.

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MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

Continued from page 34

"They give the customers on the residential side a level of workmanship that you can't get from the zero-turns," he says.

Using walk-behind mowers streamlined transportation, Garrett says, because the company can fit more mowers on each truck. Plus, many of the company's clients have lawns with hilly terrain, and the walk-behind mowers help prevent sliding.

Some customers, particularly those in retirement communities who are often home during the day, appreciate seeing Commonwealth's crews on their properties for an average of 40 minutes on each property, compared to five to 10 minutes with a zero-turn mower.

Garrett also notes the health benefits of operating a walk-behind each season.

"We have had some employees come to management by midseason telling us how they have lost weight, have more stamina and feel much better," he says.

Erbert and Garrett agree their exclusive use of walk-behind mowers is a selling point for their residential customers and say they've gained clients who didn't like the larger mowers on their properties because they damaged the turf and the landscape. Both companies market their use of walk-behinds on their websites and other company collateral and view it as a differentiating factor



Mike Garrett

that sets them apart from the competition.

"It's part of our sales estimating tool when doing residential sales," Garrett says, adding that the company boasts a 99-percent annual customer retention rate. "People call us because they've heard that we use small mowers. It differentiates us from everyone else. We taught our clients to want a small mower."

BUYING WALK-BEHIND MOWERS

When it comes to purchasing his walk-behind mowers, Erbert says he first looks for a manufacturer that supports the contractor. Next, he looks for a trustworthy dealer. Erbert, who opts for Toro mowers, replaces his machines yearly, so he relies heavily on first-year warranties and requires a dealer who quickly fulfills his needs. At the end of each season, he sells his mowers back to the dealer, receiving credit for his next purchase, or to contractors looking for used equipment.

"Your dealer is an integral piece of your business: It's almost like an employee that works for you," Erbert says. "I would pay more and drive farther for a better dealer."

Commonwealth uses each of its John Deere walk-behind mowers for an average of three years, so Garrett considers a mower's expected lifespan before purchasing. With an in-house maintenance department, he looks for mowers that are user-friendly and easy to maintain. Garrett also looks for lightweight mowers with even weight distribution.

"Many of our customers have irrigation systems and often have wet lawns," he says. "You want a lighter walk-behind so you don't cause as much turf damage. Weight distribution was a big problem for us, but most mower companies have fixed that issue."

Mower manufacturers are always looking for ways to improve their products and make life easier for the landscape

contractor, experts say. For example, Erbert observes mowers today have fewer parts that are easier to access and maintain, which keeps them out of the shop and in the field.


"Knowing that time is definitely money for these business owners, Honda places durability, reliability and low cost of ownership at the top of the list for new design attributes," says Alex Torre, Honda Power Equipment manager of marketing and market research.

Kubota Tractor Corp. recently introduced three commercial walk-behind mowers with fabricated welded steel decks, an electric PTO clutch and maintenance-free spindles. These features are a response to contractor requests for products that are durable and reliable, says Tom Vachal, Kubota senior product manager for turf equipment.

"If our new walk-behinds are versatile enough to professionally cut different grasses in various terrains and exceed the quality standards that the turf professional expects, then we're doing our job as a manufacturer," Vachal says.

Additionally, restrictions on disposing lawn debris have increased the demand for mowers that can mulch and shred.

"More disposal restrictions have led to more demand for mulching mowers," says Torre. "Commercial operators expect these restrictions to become even more stringent during the coming years, so demand should continue to increase."

Erbert agrees. "Technology has come a long way in getting grass to mulch," he says. "It just blows my mind how some of these mowers handle the volume." 



Alex Torre



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

PHOTO: KUBOTA TRACTOR CORP.

REGISTER FOR OUR FREE WEBINAR

Is GPS Fleet Tracking Right for Your Landscaping Business?



THURSDAY, JAN. 28, 2016
2:00 P.M. EDT 11:00 A.M. PDT

Webinar Description:

GPS tracking solutions are being utilized more than ever by landscaping businesses to gain insight over fleet activity and to increase efficiency of both their vehicles and mobile workforce. Fleet owners and professionals are surely aware of the benefits to GPS tracking by now, but may still need to assess if the technology is right for their business.

This presentation will feature Nolan Butterfras, who will discuss how his business is currently using GPS tracking in its fleet operations, and Evan Korn, who will share his

expertise on what to look for in the technology to receive the most significant benefits.

This webinar will cover:

- Identify Business Challenges: Will GPS tracking solve them?
- Build Criteria: Set benchmarks for potential providers
- Pilot a GPS Tracking Solution: Put the technology to the test
- Calculate Expected ROI: Determine if the investment is worth it to your business



PRESENTER: Evan Korn, Regional Sales Manager, GPS Insight

Evan is a top tier sales executive at GPS Insight with extensive experience in GPS tracking and has helped numerous landscaping businesses deploy the technology in their fleet operations. Along with his extensive background in GPS tracking, Evan also utilizes his previous experience in the construction industry as a tradesman, general contractor and owner to help other fleet owners make the right choice when selecting a GPS tracking partner. Accessing over 25 years of combined vehicle management and construction management experience, Evan maintains the highest level of capability and quality in the analysis of customer needs.



PRESENTER: Nolan Butterfras, Owner, Texas Turf Management

Texas Turf Management was established in 2000 when brothers Nolan and Neil Butterfras were still in school. Since obtaining a Bachelor's of Science in Agriculture at Texas A&M, Nolan now runs the business operations for Texas Turf Management with help from his wife Shannon. With over a decade of experience, Texas Turf has grown from its humble beginnings to servicing many commercial and residential areas around Houston, Texas.

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How to explain design fees

Landscape design expert Jody Shilan gives his perspective on this tough question. **BY JODY SHILAN**

Q: HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN TO CLIENTS WHY YOU CHARGE FOR YOUR PLANS WHILE OTHER COMPANIES DON'T?

A: That's a great question and one of my favorites to answer.

It's amazing to me that in 2015 we still have to justify to ourselves and our potential customers why they need to invest in a drawing before having their landscape installed. Why do some people believe that all plans are created equal, regardless of whether they are "free" or have a cost associated with them? There's no industrywide standard or cost structure to this process, and I've got some news for you: There never will be. So once and for all, we need to stop thinking that somehow we can get everyone in the design/build industry together to agree to charge design fees.

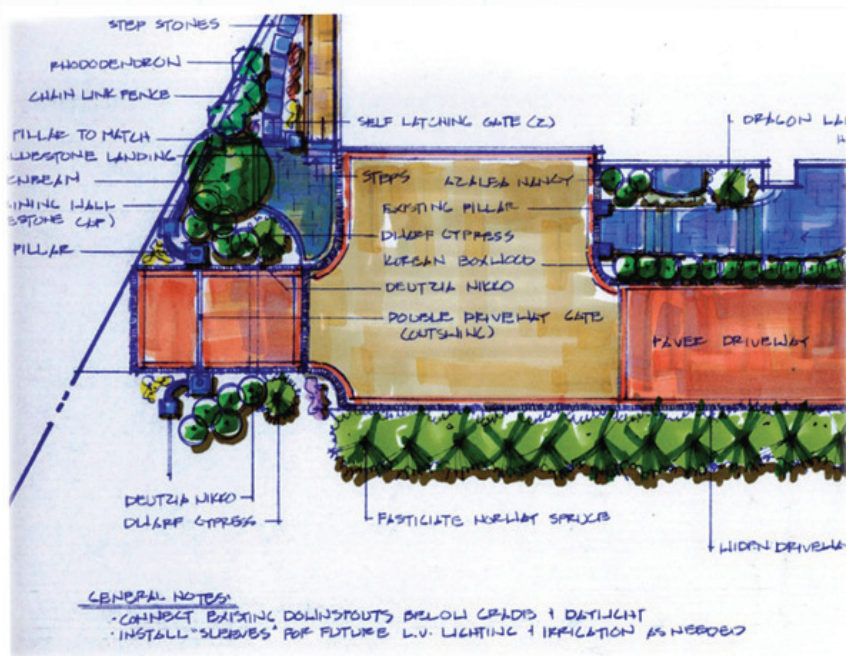
Not only is it impossible, it's probably illegal. (Can you say collusion?)

After 40 years working in landscape design/build,

NO FREEBIES
If you're going to charge for designs, your plans must be professional, Jody Shilan says.

I can tell you, unequivocally, that you'll have more success and install more work with customers who pay for plans than those who don't. I acknowledge that it's easier to charge design fees for master plans for the entire property, but you

should still charge for partial property plans, as well. Let me add one caveat to that last statement. If you're going to charge for your designs, they need to look professional. You must draw them to scale with colorful graphics and



PHOTOS: JODY SHILAN; ©ISTOCK.COM/DNY59

NEWSPEED

TOOL BOXER

Morbark, the manufacturer of Boxer Equipment, released maintenance kits for

current and legacy model Boxer mini skid-steers. The kits include a service reminder decal, synthetic blend

replacement engine oil and various filters.

NEW EXCAVATOR FOR CAT

An addition to the 7- to 8-ton weight class, the Cat 307E2 mini hydraulic excavator

features a 50.3-hp Cat C2.4 turbo engine and high-definition hydraulic system.

BESTWAY ADDS HITCH

The new Retriever Transport Hitch is

designed for towing large attachments with two-point or drawbar-type hitches. It uses a semitrailer wet kit to provide hydraulic power to the lift system.

proper labeling. If the project is small it can still be done on an 8.5-by-11-inch sheet of paper, but at least do it on graph paper instead of notebook paper. I also recommend bringing some sample plans so you can manage client expectations.

Now that we're all on the same page, let's answer why you charge for your plans while your competitors don't. Like most things in life, honesty is the best policy. All you need to do is educate your customers about what happens when they choose to participate in the "three for free" design/build process instead of working with a company like yours and paying for a design.

Your explanation should sound something like this: "Well Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, I certainly understand why getting a free design from other contractors sounds appealing as opposed to paying for one with us, but if you have a few minutes, I would like to explain why that approach is not in the best interest of you, your family and the project itself. You see, when homeowners like you call multiple companies to get a free plan, you're taking the first step into a time-consuming and frustrating process that usually does not end well.

Let's say you call five companies for an initial consultation. This means you'll need to schedule five appointments when both of you are available. Next, let's assume you like three of the companies and you ask each of them to provide a plan and proposal. A few weeks and multiple phone calls later, you finally line up a second round of meetings to review everything. Maybe you like the design from contractor A and the price from contractor B, but contractor C can start earlier than the other two. So what do you do? You ask each contractor to go back and make the appropriate revisions to the design, proposal or schedule, hoping to get the perfect outcome from at least one of them.

Several weeks and multiple phone calls later, you schedule your third round of meetings. Although each contractor

“You'll have more success and install more work with customers who pay for plans.”

—JODY SHILAN



has gotten closer to what you want, you're still not satisfied. Obviously, you can send all of them back to the drawing board, again, hoping that at least one of them comes back with what you want. The other option is to pick one of the contractors now since the clock is ticking and you want to get on somebody's schedule. For argument's sake, let's say that you choose to sign a contract now instead of having a fourth round of meetings.

A few months later your project is complete, but unfortunately you're unhappy with the finished product. As you make your final payment you get that gut-wrenching feeling as you realize

that you spent a significant amount of money on your landscaping project and you don't even like it. Plus, it probably cost more than you wanted to spend.

So the reason that we charge for our designs is because we want to protect you from that scenario. We understand what it takes to design and build the perfect landscape for you and your family. At the end of the day we want to make sure that you don't just like your landscape but love it.”

Shilan is the editor of FromDesign2Build.com, a members-only website for design/build professionals. He's also a member of the LM Editorial Advisory Board.

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IRRIGATION+WATER MANAGEMENT

Man on a mission

Russ Jundt hopes to change the way people water their lawns throughout the U.S. and, eventually, the world.

BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER

Russ Jundt has an appreciation for water. After all, the Minnesota native is from the “Land of 10,000 Lakes.” So it makes sense that he founded his Richmond, Va.-based company, Conserva Irrigation, on the basis of saving water and with the goal of irrigating lawns as efficiently as possible.

“I’m not the guy out there hugging every tree,” says Jundt. “But I sure love the water and nature that we have.”

After nearly five years in business, Jundt is ready to take his company’s sustainable approach to irrigation nationwide in the form of franchises. In partnership with Outdoor Living Brands, a franchise brand family, Jundt plans to expand Conserva Irrigation to

10 locations by the end of 2016.

“The dynamics are changing in the industry,” Jundt says. “There is an increased demand for irrigation, but we have limited resources. The costs associated with water are increasing, regulations are increasing and we have climate change, too. The timing was exactly right to ride the wave.”

BACKING IN TO IRRIGATION

Jundt and his business partner “backed into” the irrigation industry in the early 2000s. The childhood friends owned an underground utility construction company and were solicited by irrigation contractors to help with high-end or difficult projects. They soon began installing irrigation systems themselves,



but they were concerned with the industry’s lack of focus on water conservation at that time. With water becoming such a limited and valuable commodity, the partners decided the irrigation industry as it was just wasn’t a good fit, and they took their entrepreneurship elsewhere.

“I felt very uncomfortable about spewing water arbitrarily without rhyme or reason,” Jundt says.

In 2006, Jundt and his partner became the first franchisees of Mosquito Squad, Outdoor Living Brands’ mosquito elimination company. The pair has since also opened an Outdoor Lighting Perspectives franchise. As their enterprises grew, Jundt became fascinated with the business model and began thinking of a way to apply it toward building a better irrigation company. In 2010 he attended the Irrigation

Show and was blown away by the new technology that had been introduced since he left irrigation.

“My eyes were just amazed with what had changed over the last five or six years since we left the industry,” he says. “So we started studying.”

Conserva Irrigation was founded in 2011. Today, the Ham Lake location, which Jundt runs, earns \$500,000 in annual revenue. The company offers 90 percent system maintenance and upgrades and 10 percent installation services to an 80 percent residential, 20 percent commercial clientele.

Conserva focuses on professionalism, innovation and environmental responsibility. These values drive every decision Jundt makes within the business, he says, and they will be at the heart of every franchise.

NEW SPEED

PILOT PROGRAM

Hunter Industries and Ewing Irrigation & Landscape Supply are testing a new sprinkler-

recycling program in California and Texas through March 31. Reusable



materials from the collected sprinklers will be reclaimed and used by Hunter to manufacture new products.

TRUGREEN GOES BLUE

National lawn care company TruGreen launched an irrigation system maintenance and repair business. Currently available in select cities in Florida,

Missouri, Nebraska, Arkansas and Tennessee, TruGreen Sprinkler Repair and Maintenance will be launching in more than a dozen markets in 2016.



TOP TECH
New technology
inspired Russ
Jundt to return
to irrigation.



Jundt first considered the idea of franchising on his own but decided that Conserva Irrigation could make more of an impact by using the teams and systems Outdoor Living Brands already had in place. Conserva Irrigation is now an official component of Outdoor Living Brands and shares systems such as marketing, branding and accounting.

Conserva Irrigation currently has pilot sites in Dayton, Ohio; Chagrin Falls, Ohio; Glen Ellyn, Ill.; Merrimack, N.H.; and Long Island, N.Y. Jundt plans to add five additional pilot locations by spring 2016 to perfect the business model, collect more data and further identify regional differences before opening fully functioning franchises by the end of next year. The goal is to reach 400 locations nationwide within 10 years.

Jundt says the ideal Conserva Irrigation franchisees are contractors who don't want to reinvent the wheel, but who want to be part of recreating the way we use water. Another target is business leaders outside of the irrigation space who can identify smart business opportunities and attract good technicians.

Prospective franchisees can expect a first-year investment of \$50,000 to \$100,000.

EVALUATE FIRST

A unique aspect of Conserva Irrigation, and the process

that helps the company save water, Jundt says, is its System Efficiency Score (SES). It's a 12-part irrigation system audit that determines how well an irrigation system functions. The evaluation is part of the free inspection that takes place during the first meeting with the client. Through the SES, clients get a score based on a 100-point scale; each client is encouraged to have an efficiency score of 75 or higher. Conserva technicians educate clients on the reasons behind the score they receive, and Jundt says most scores motivate their clients to upgrade or repair their systems. Clients receive at least one SES evaluation per year.

"We wanted to establish a consistent approach so it's the same message no matter who sits down with a client," Jundt says. "We want the homeowner's interest to be piqued about why their system is failing, and we want them to ask what they can do to improve it."

"The SES ultimately demonstrates to the client our professionalism, our innovation and that we are environmentally responsible," he adds.

COMMERCIAL APPROACH

The company's tiered audit process is similar to the SES but is geared toward commercial clients who are more concerned with cost savings. Jundt developed an algorithm that uses property

data to create a baseline for ideal water usage based on a normal weather year. Tier one educates the client about how much water they've been using compared to how much water they should be using. Tier two is an on-site system evaluation to identify the problems. Tier three is "really getting picky," Jundt says, and is a very specific zone-by-zone inspection.

"In the residential market, the client wants a green landscape, they want someone trustworthy to show up and then they want to be water conscious," Jundt says. "In the commercial market, it's the opposite—they are all about bottom-line savings."

"The commercial sector has LEED certification and other conservation opportunities, but no one has grabbed the tail of the beast when it comes to water savings," he adds. "This is how we are attracting national chains."

TRAIN TO GAIN


Employee training is also an important aspect of Conserva's business model. Using Irrigation Association (IA) programs and course work, Jundt is developing what he calls Conserva University, an operations manual of standard field protocols which will provide information about problems a technician may encounter. The curriculum will include topics like how to diagnose

a wiring issue and reference guides on irrigation controllers, he says.

Conserva Irrigation techs, who will be required to obtain IA certification, also will have tablets equipped with information they can access from the field, and every location will conduct weekly training on problems relevant to the region and season.

"We're going to home-grow the next generation of irrigation techs," Jundt says.

With no shortage of goals, Jundt will be busy making his vision a reality. And his enthusiasm for change and for introducing a better way to water will keep him going for the long term.

"I felt that there were two ways to affect change in regard to the use of landscape irrigation water: We could picket on the Capitol steps and try to make change with legislation or we could create a company that would ultimately change how we water the world," Jundt says. "I'm always impacted by the quote, 'If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got.' It's a very simple statement, but it's important. If we had created a company that was just like every other company, we would just get the same result." 

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



Russ Jundt

[INDUSTRY OVERVIEW]

LOOKING UP

Landscape professionals are having a good year—and they expect 2016 to be even better.

BY MARISA PALMIERI

The numbers are in: It was a good year for the landscape industry.

Eighty-five percent of landscape professionals described the state of the market as “very healthy” or “relatively healthy”—up five points from last year, and nearly double the level we reported in 2010.

“2014 was our strongest year ever, and we’re about to close this year stronger than last year on the top and bottom line,” says Chris Joyce, president of Joyce Landscaping in Marstons Mills, Mass. The \$11.5 million, full-service company primarily serves the high-end residential market.

The company has the best construction backlog in its history going into next year. And on the maintenance side, it hit all its revenue targets for 2015 and the margins are good.

“We’ve got all indications 2016 is going to be tremendous across the board,”

Joyce says. “I’m very excited about this upcoming season.”

He’s not the only one who’s looking forward to next year. Nearly nine in 10 industry members are very or somewhat optimistic about 2016. That figure is up more than 20 points from 2010 when we asked the same question heading into 2011. At that time, more than a quarter of people said they were “uncertain” about the coming year, compared to less than 10 percent who gave that answer this year.

Research firm IBISWorld predicts the next five years will continue to improve for the landscape industry, which it calls a \$76 billion market with a 3.7 percent annual growth rate since 2010. It points to steady per-capita disposable income growth, which encourages people to hire professionals and helps the residential market. General economic recovery will boost the commercial market, the research says.



Chris Joyce

Even in low-growth areas of the country, contractors are hopeful. Lowes Landscaping in Cuba, Mo., which sits on Route 66 about 90 miles southwest of St. Louis, is growing, although the region is not, says President Erik Lowes. Still, he says the state of the landscape industry is good for reputable companies.



Erik Lowes

"I don't think our economy is great, but I know company owners are realizing how to get smart," he says. "It's one of the easiest businesses to get into, so there are a lot of people who are around for a few years and then get out."

The full-service company will do about \$450,000 in revenue this year, a 30 percent bump over 2014. In 2015, the company added tree care to move toward services with a "higher perceived value" than mowing.

"I'm hoping at the end of next year that we'll have 20 percent of our revenue coming from tree care," Lowes says. But overall, he plans to put the brakes on growth next year to focus on internal systems and determine if he should add management to help manage the crews and add capacity.

Near Dayton, Ohio, Andrew Ziehler is seeing a comeback. The president of Ziehler Lawn & Tree

Care, a \$1.9 million company with about 31 employees, says client spending is steady again. The bulk of Ziehler's business is in the residential turf care market.

"I think it's strong," he says. "We're seeing people spend more money, take additional services, and we're seeing a renewed demand for quality service."

The company, which added pest control, expects to be up more than 30 percent over 2014, and he'd like to maintain that level of growth next year.

Reliable Property Services, a Minneapolis commercial maintenance and snow management company with branches in Iowa and Wisconsin, is also seeing an uptick.

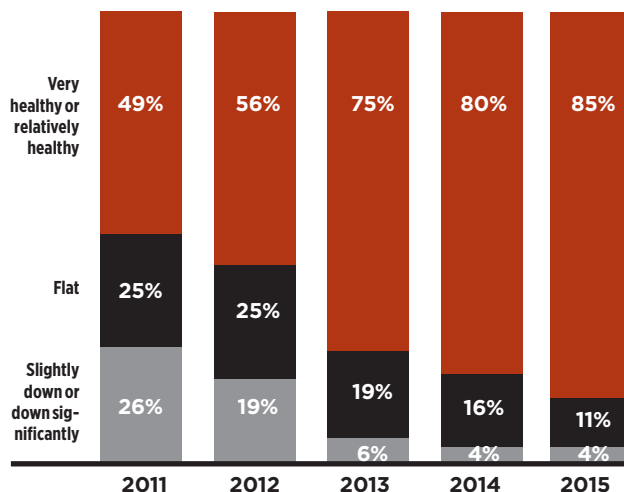
"In the three states we're in, our customers are starting to spend more money again," says Tom Hougnon, president and CEO. "Occupancies are up, so there are fewer ownership groups paying the landscaping or



Andrew Ziehler

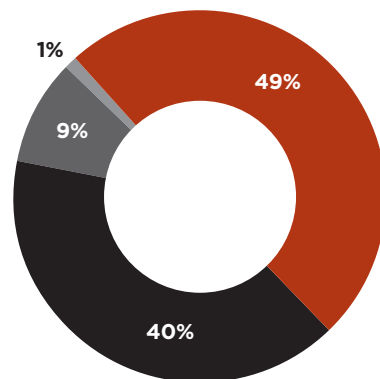
STEADY IMPROVEMENT

How landscape professionals describe the state of the market.



What's your 2016 business outlook?

■ Very optimistic
 ■ Somewhat optimistic
 ■ Uncertain
 ■ Somewhat pessimistic
 ■ Very pessimistic (0%)



Percentages don't equal 100% due to rounding.

Methodology

For the 2015 Industry Pulse report, *Landscape Management* surveyed subscribers online in October and November garnering 523 responses. Respondents were offered the chance to win one of three \$100 gift cards as an incentive. Based on the number of responses, we assume a +/- 5 percent margin of error. Unless otherwise noted, all charts and figures in this report come from this survey.

HOUSING: NEAR NORMAL

According to the National Association of Home Builders, economic and housing recoveries continue at a slow, steady pace. In particular, the Leading Markets Index, which uses single-family housing permits, employment and home prices to measure proximity to a normal economic and housing market, rose to .93 in the third quarter of 2015. A value of 1.0 means the market is back to normal. The level was .89 a year ago.



Tom Hougnon

snow removal bill because they have tenants now. In general, the spend is up, and the industry is in a better place than it was three or four years ago.”

Despite all the positive feelings about the industry and the economy—and some bright spots, like a dip in fuel prices—there are challenges. For example, many costs are increasing, an election year brings uncertainty and, of course, there are concerns about the labor market.

“Our biggest issue is finding great people,” Ziehler says. “We work really hard at having a great place to work, but just making sure you have enough people and they’re there every day is very difficult.”

Reliable, a \$32 million company, expects to grow about 12-15 percent next year. Some growth will be organic, but Hougnon says acquisitions are also on the table.

“It’s a great time to buy companies right now,” he says, noting there appears to be a crop of middle-aged owner-operators who are looking for exit strategies.

With acquisitions often come great employees, he says. “I think that’s an important area to look at, and I think it’s going to help people grow over the next couple years.”

Additional reporting by Dillon Stewart.

PLAYING POLITICS

With less than 12 months to go until the 2016 presidential election, there will be many issues important to the landscape industry bantered about—minimum wage, immigration, taxes and more. Unfortunately, there’s little chance the government will act on those issues during the election year or the year following, regardless of whom moves into the White House.

“Any fixes or changes to immigration or environmental regulations or interest rates are unlikely,” says LM Editorial Advisory Board member Kevin Kehoe. “That is probably good news. Right now dysfunctional politics dominates everything. This is a drag and will continue to be a drag on growth as consumer confidence will continue to decline.”

Bureaucratic uncertainty is a concern for Andrew Ziehler.

“What I worry about is that our government isn’t exactly making it easier for a small business to operate or to get bigger,” he says. “There are some policies put in place that just seem to hamper growth.”

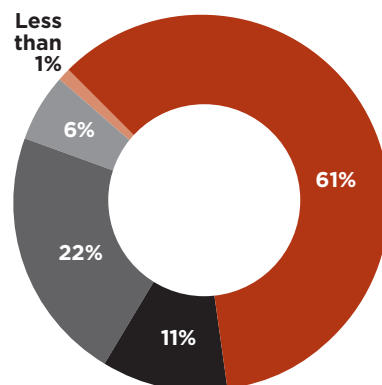
Ziehler is concerned about proposed mandates for wage hikes and unfavorable tax provisions, such as the Section 179 tax deduction on equipment and software being reduced to \$25,000 from \$500,000.

“Some of that stuff really helps fuel growth,” he says. “To me, if you make it easy for small businesses to grow, then you’re going to help the economy.”

He’s also concerned about reaching the 50-employee level and the requirements that kick in under the Affordable Care Act.

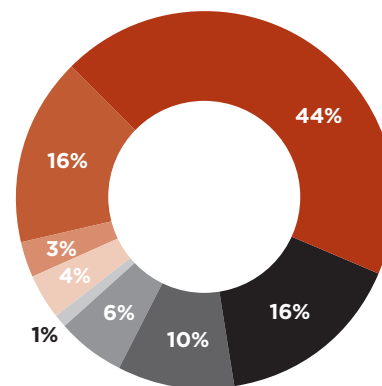
“We’re trying to look at how we plan for our growth to optimize it,” he says. “I don’t want to hit the threshold of having 50 employees until we’re ready to go way past it. We’re trying to forecast out a few years ahead: What do we have to do to make sure we’re ahead of the curve?”

BY THE NUMBERS



Customer mix

- Single-family residential
- Multifamily residential
- Commercial/industrial
- Government/institutional
- Other

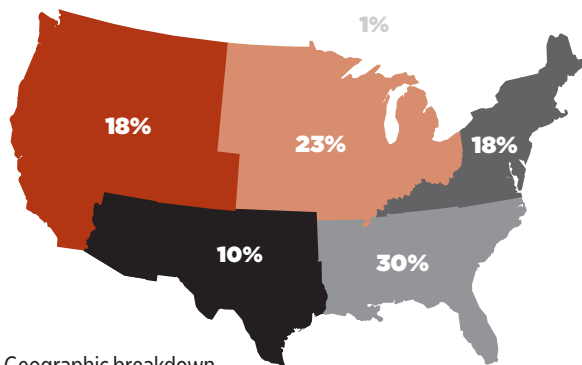


Service mix

- Full-service landscape contractor (maintenance, lawn care, design/build and irrigation)
- Landscape maintenance contractor (mowing, trimming, etc.)
- Landscape design/build contractor (design, installation)
- Chemical lawn care company (excluding mowing)
- Irrigation contractor
- Tree and shrub care company
- Landscape architect
- Other

22

AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS IN BUSINESS



Geographic breakdown

- Midwest (OH, IN, IL, MI, WI, MN, MO, IA, ND, SD, NE, KS)
- West (AK, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY)
- Southeast (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, WV)
- Southwest (AZ, NM, OK, TX)
- Northeast (CT, DE, ME, MD, MA, NJ, NH, NY, PA, RI, VT, D.C.)
- Canada/other

Annual revenue change 2014-2015 – anticipated

+16% Total

Mowing+Landscape Maintenance
+11%

Design/Build+Installation
+15%

Turf+Ornamental Care
+7%

Irrigation+Water Management
+8%

Annual revenue change 2013-2014 – reported

+16% Total

Mowing+Landscape Maintenance
+12%

Design/Build+Installation
+13%

Turf+Ornamental Care
+6%

Irrigation+Water Management
+8%

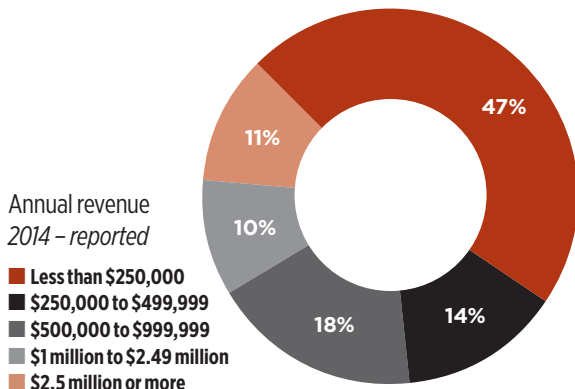
How does your expected 2015 revenue compare to what you budgeted for the year?

We won't make our revenue goal.
16%

We'll just meet our revenue goal.
35%

We'll beat our revenue goal.
35%

What budget? We don't have one.
14%

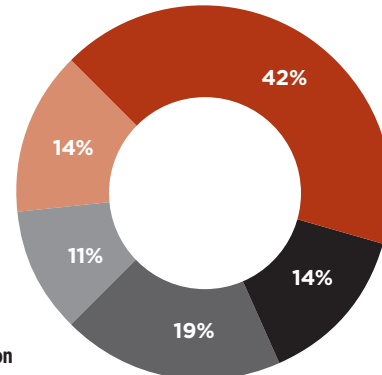


Annual revenue 2014 – reported

- Less than \$250,000
- \$250,000 to \$499,999
- \$500,000 to \$999,999
- \$1 million to \$2.49 million
- \$2.5 million or more

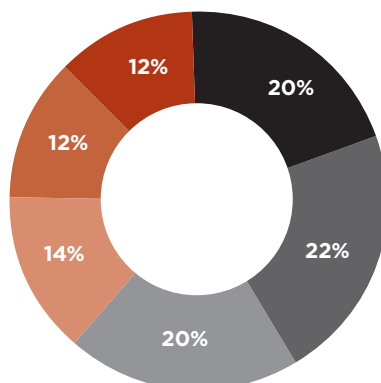
Annual revenue 2015 – anticipated

- Less than \$250,000
- \$250,000 to \$499,999
- \$500,000 to \$999,999
- \$1 million to \$2.49 million
- \$2.5 million or more



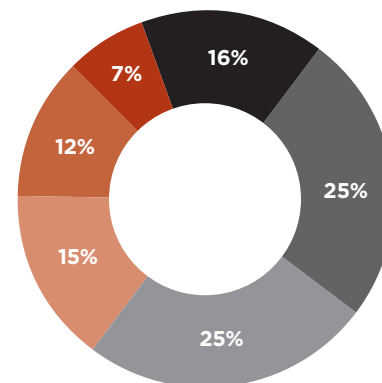
Profits 2014 – reported

- No profit
- 1% to 4.9%
- 5% to 9.9%
- 10% to 14.9%
- 15% to 19.9%
- 20% or more



Profits 2015 – anticipated

- No profit
- 1% to 4.9%
- 5% to 9.9%
- 10% to 14.9%
- 15% to 19.9%
- 20% or more



[LABOR REPORT]

NO SILVER BULLET

For most landscape companies, hiring and retaining workers is their top growth challenge. BY MARISA PALMIERI

What one word would you use to describe your company's No. 1 obstacle to growth in 2016?"

People. Manpower. Help. Employees. Personnel. Workers. No matter how respondents worded it, some form of the word "labor" was the top answer given to our open-ended Industry Pulse question about challenges heading into next year. More than 40 percent of respondents gave some variation of this answer. No other response came close.

It's no surprise, with the federal unemployment rate at 5 percent in October. It's the lowest level since April 2008 and half the peak of 10 percent during the Great Recession.

"As the economy improves, our labor force gets tougher to find," says Tom Hougnon, president and CEO of Reliable Property Services. The company, which is based in Minnesota and has operations in Iowa and Wisconsin, competes for workers with the rebounding construction industry, the booming oil fields of North Dakota and new warehouses.

"All of the sudden the Amazon warehouses are popping up, and that's 1,500 people making \$12-\$18 per hour," he says. "Those are (similar to) our people, and they're able to work inside 12 months of the year."

Reliable, which does about \$32 million in annual revenue, plans for 12-15 percent growth per year. At that level, it has to add six crews per year for the landscape side of its business.

"Where are we going to find those six crews?" he says. "As the labor gets tighter, we may look at subcontracting some work to alleviate the pressure of finding more people."

Other contractors also wonder where workers will come from and are seeking new strategies.

"It's a challenge, and it's never going to change," says Chris Joyce, president of Joyce Landscaping in Marstons Mills, Mass. The state has an unemployment rate just below the national level.

Joyce Landscaping's plan of attack is trying to get people from other industries. The result is a longer, costlier train-

ing process, but it's worth it, Joyce says. The company has had some success recruiting from the hospitality industry, which often has undesirable hours for people with families. His toughest positions to fill are production managers and skilled design/build workers.

"My average mason is 55 years old, and it's scary," he says. "I'd rather get someone who has no experience with a good attitude and willingness to learn than someone who's been in the industry for a long time and is bringing a bad attitude."

In some regions, contractors find the labor situation is less competitive.

For Steve Biernacki at WaterQuest Landscaping in New Mexico, which has a 6.8 percent unemployment rate, the overall economy and demand for labor aren't as strong as other parts of the country. He says his region is slower to get into and out of recessions.

"We don't have too much of a problem with the labor market," he says, adding he benefits from operating in a year-round market. "It's a pretty steady base for us, and we keep our employees a little longer than other companies do. We're a family company, and we portray that to the employees."

Pat Morstad, who operates in a second-home market in Minnesota's lakes region, calls his region "fairly recession-proof." Add to that his controlled, debt-free approach to growth, and he's not sweating the labor issue.

"A lot of the guys I talk to in the industry have problems getting employees," he says. "I feel blessed that we don't have that issue."

Continued on page 48

WAGE REPORT: HOURLY

	<5 years experience	% change over last year	>5 years experience	% change over last year
Mower operator	\$11.57	+2%	\$14.07	+2%
Construction worker	\$13.20	+3%	\$16.83	+2%
Lawn care technician	\$13.77	0%	\$16.87	+2%
Irrigation technician	\$13.86	-3%	\$18.95	+3%



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Solutions for the Growing World

Continued from page 46

His company is about 95 percent residential design/build and has a primarily Hispanic team. As the company has grown from one crew to three over the last year, he's incentivized his employees to recruit others with a \$100 initial bonus and another \$300 if the hire makes it through the season.

Additionally, he says promoting from within has been a good strategy: "Our three foremen have all been people we've moved up, and we've just been extremely fortunate."



Pat Morstad

H-2B UPDATE

Biernacki and Morstad are lucky not to worry about labor woes like many of their peers do. The landscape companies stressing the most, perhaps, are those who participated in the federal government's ever-unstable H-2B guest-worker program this spring. Many workers

came late or not at all in 2015, due to untimely agency and judicial actions.

The landscaping and groundskeeping industries are the largest users of the program.

"It's really important to the industry," says Andrew Ziehler, president of Ziehler Lawn & Tree Care near Dayton, Ohio. His company does not use the program, although it did at one time. "When all the big maintenance companies don't get their H-2B workers, they're pulling workers who could work for you. So just because you don't use it, you have to make sure you're advocating for positive changes to the program because it's going to affect you in a roundabout way."

With little prospect for a comprehensive immigration reform bill passing anytime soon, both the Senate and the House are considering H-2B fixes.

The SEASON Act, introduced in the House in November, provides expedited processing of H-2B applications and puts the program entirely in the hands of the Department of Homeland Security. The Department of

Continued on page 50



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Continued from page 48

Labor has no role in the H-2B program under the bill. It also exempts returning workers from counting against the 66,000 visa cap.

A similar bill, the Save Our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act of 2015, was introduced in the Senate in October.

The bills are slightly different, but both bills would take care of H-2B employers' top concerns, said Tom Delaney, director of government affairs for the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP), in a legislative alert last month.

"Both bills would exempt returning workers from the 66,000 annual cap, streamline the H-2B process, provide for a fair wage formula, allow for the use of private wage surveys and address the problems stemming from the new H-2B regulations," he says. The NALP encourages members and H-2B users to appeal to their senators and representatives to support the bills.

Whether your company uses H-2B or not, Ziehler notes the labor issue is going to be the determining factor in any company's ability to grow.

WAGE REPORT: SALARY

	Current Salary	% Change Year to Year
Crew foreman/team leader	\$33,696	-1%
Salesperson	\$47,263	-1%
Equipment mechanic	\$34,898	-3%
Landscape designer	\$47,961	+1%
Landscape architect	\$59,100	+4%
Account manager	\$41,944	-10%
Supervisor	\$39,011	-7%
Operations manager	\$53,119	-2%
Office manager	\$40,469	+2%
Owner/president	\$78,531	-2%
Branch manager	\$64,882	-7%

"We have to put the same effort into recruitment and hiring and employee engagement that we put into trying to sell a new customer," he says. "I don't think there's going to be a silver bullet." 

Additional reporting by Dillon Stewart.



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[COSTS REPORT]

IN CHECK

Lower fuel prices help companies keep costs under control. BY MARISA PALMIERI

Most is quiet on the expenses front for landscape professionals. Although industry members expect an overall operating cost increase of 11 percent—on par with what they reported for last year—they seem to be at ease thanks to fuel price relief.

“I bought gas today for \$1.95,” says Steve Biernacki, general manager of WaterQuest Landscaping in Albuquerque, N.M. “It makes a big difference.”

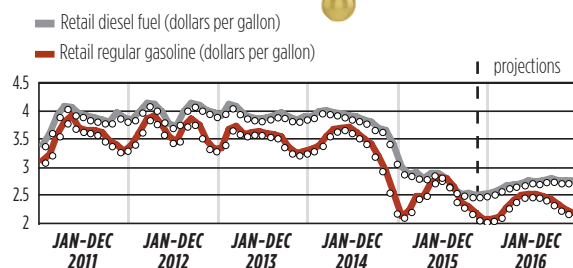
U.S. regular gasoline retail prices declined to an average of \$2.29 per gallon in October, down 31 cents from the third quarter average. The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) expects monthly average gasoline prices to continue declining. EIA projects regular gasoline retail prices to average \$2.33 per gallon in 2016. The diesel fuel retail price, which averaged \$3.83 per gallon in 2014, is projected to average \$2.72 per gallon for 2015 and \$2.70 per gallon in 2016.

Other costs have increased somewhat, such as concrete, but nothing is too out of the ordinary, Biernacki says. “I don’t really see anything that has gone up significantly,” he says.

At Joyce Landscaping in Marstons Mills, Mass., “expenses are up across the board”—except fuel. “If you look at our profit and loss statement, the one thing that’s

GOING DOWN

U.S. Diesel Fuel and Gasoline Prices



SOURCE: SHORT-TERM ENERGY OUTLOOK NOVEMBER 2015

OPERATING COST OUTLOOK

Average % change in costs

	Reported 2011-2012	Reported 2012-2013	Reported 2013-2014	Projected 2014-2015
TOTAL	+10%	+10%	+11%	+11%
<i>Fuel</i>	+14%	+11%	+7%	+3%
<i>Labor</i>	+10%	+9%	+10%	+10%
<i>Equipment</i>	+7%	+9%	+11%	+9%
<i>Insurance</i>	+14%	+10%	+11%	+9%

been consistently cheaper has been gas,” says President Chris Joyce. In fact, the \$11.5 million company is projecting a \$60,000 fuel savings from 2014 to 2015.

Health insurance is up 3 percent for Joyce after changing carriers, liability is up due to growth, as is workers’ comp.

“The one that I’m most concerned about is the future of health insurance,” he says, noting the company has gone to a high deductible plan and is looking at self-insurance. “It’s a challenge for our employees; it’s a challenge for our country right now.”

Additional reporting by Dillon Stewart.



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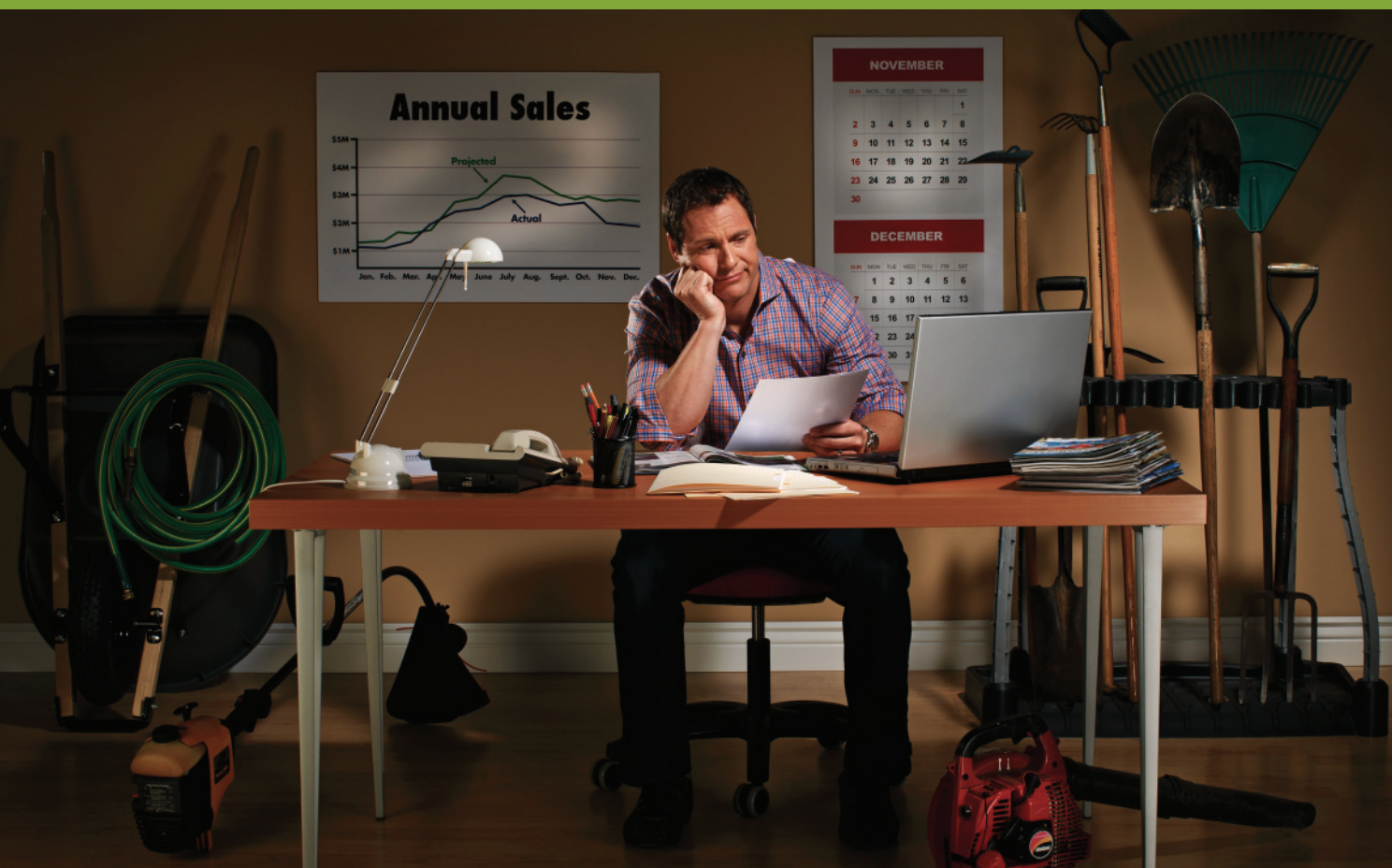
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[CUSTOMER REPORT]

SPENDING AGAIN

Consumer confidence indicators are good, although the election year brings uncertainty.

BY MARISA PALMIERI

Despite some concern about the impending election year affecting consumer confidence, most landscape industry members say their customers had no problem spending money in 2015, and they expect the same in 2016.

Derek Blumberg, for example, says politics is one area of uncertainty for him. He's the owner of Quality Seasons, a \$2 million full-service residential landscape company based in Lakeville, Minn.

"I'm fairly concerned, but I don't go to sleep at night worrying about it," he says.

The 2016 presidential election could change things, but no matter the outcome, Blumberg says he plans to do a price increase in 2016 because he won't do one in 2017.

"We don't want to raise prices the spring after an election," he says. "There can be a lot of emotions going on."

CONSUMER MARKET

Speaking of emotions, the latest Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index data show consumers

were more confident this October—with a reading of 99.1 (compared to a baseline of 100 in 1985) than they have been any of the past few years at this time. The October readings were 94.5 in 2014, 71.2 in 2013 (due to the government shutdown) and 72.2 in 2012.

A similar indicator, the University of Michigan Index of Consumer Sentiment, also showed improvement at 93.1 for its early November reading—a level higher than any year since 2004. The report noted consumers held the most favorable inflation-adjusted income expectations since 2007 and buying plans for large discretionary purchases improved.

Continued on page 56



COMMERCIAL + RESIDENTIAL SERVICE PRICING

AVERAGE PRICES REPORTED

2014

2015

% CHANGE

	Commercial	Residential	Commercial	Residential	Commercial	Residential
Maintenance price/visit	\$195	\$53	\$203	\$57	+4%	+8%
Design/build price/job	\$20,420	\$11,148	\$23,007	\$12,891	+11%	+16%
Lawn care treatment price/visit	\$125	\$69	\$132	\$79	+1%	+15%
Irrigation maintenance price/hour	\$65	\$60	\$71	\$65	+10%	+8%

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Continued from page 54

COMMERCIAL MARKET

On the commercial side of the market, some data show confidence is waning, but landscape companies report a strong year on this side of the business.

The Conference Board's quarterly Measure of CEO Confidence came in at 48 for the third quarter, down from 58 in the second quarter. A reading of more than 50 points reflects more positive than negative responses. Likewise, the National Federation of Independent Business Index of Small Business Optimism remained at a below-average reading of 96.1. (The 42-year average is 98.)

On the bright side is the Building Owners & Managers Association International's 2015 Experience Exchange Report, an annual office sector benchmarking study, which showed increases in income and expense categories for privately-owned U.S. office buildings. Namely, the "roads and grounds" expense category increased 8.1 percent, from 25 cents per square foot in 2013 to 27 cents per square foot in 2014.

“We don't want to raise prices the spring after an election. There can be a lot of emotions going on.”

—DEREK BLUMBERG



“We've seen since 2007 on up, people weren't putting as much money into landscaping,” said Tom Hounon, president and CEO of Reliable Property Services, a \$32 million commercial landscape and snow firm with operations in three states. “Now, in some cases, they have to, whether it's a safety issue with overgrown trees and shrubs or just old sign beds that need to be updated. We're seeing more and more customers putting money back into their landscape, which obviously is a positive for us.”

Additional reporting by Dillon Stewart.



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FACT: The Sectional's unique drop-and-go technology allows your operator to set the pusher down and start plowing. Floating side plates, poly-suspended mold boards and Slip Hitch™ connection allows the plow to stay level and flat to the ground everytime!

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SNOW + ICE GUIDE

Snow schism

SIMA's new Glossary of Terms highlights a rift between the snow industry's two associations. BY DILLON STEWART

When a 52-year-old woman in Passaic, N.J., slipped and fell in her employer's parking lot in 2011, the snow management company responsible for the property found itself in an unfortunate, financially-damaging situation. Last month, a jury awarded the woman \$2.25 million, according to NJ.com, finding Greg Tanzer Sprinklers & Outdoor Design 30 percent responsible for the fall.

Protecting contractors in slip-and-fall cases is a top priority for the Snow and Ice Management Association (SIMA) and the Accredited Snow Contractors Association (ASCA). However, they don't always agree on the best way to do it.

In September, SIMA released its 19-page Glossary of Terms. It defines 114 terms used in the procuring, selling, planning, implementing and legal defense of professional snow and ice management services in North America.

"Our goal is to create a simple definition that can bring clarity to the industry," says Brian Birch, COO of SIMA. "When someone gets an RFP for snow services, it's often very difficult for a contractor to understand what level of service, meaning the outcome of the service, is being sought."

The Glossary defines contractual and legal terms, operations and service terms, estimating and fee structure terms, weather terms, equipment and technical terms, snow and ice management certification and training terms, and more.

Mike Mason, vice president of the LawnPro, has seen cases where "snow removal" is viewed by insurers and facility managers as hauling all snow off-site, while the contractor views it as snow plowing.

The Louisville, Ky.-based company does about \$500,000 per year in snow management.

"The benefit is having everybody speak the same language, whether that's internally in your staff or externally with the client,"

Mason says. "It's going to take some time to get that terminology globally accepted, but I think it can remove some ambiguity on expectations."

Kevin Gilbride, executive director of ASCA, is critical of SIMA publishing the Glossary—an industry standards document—without accreditation from the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), a nonprofit, standards-creating organization.

ASCA's industry standards document, "System Requirements for Snow and Ice Management Services," was published in January 2014 after ANSI's two-and-a-half-year vetting process. It covers a glossary of terms, education and training requirements, pre-season site inspection requirements, in-event documentation requirements, post-event process requirements and weather service requirements. The process included a public review of the document and a vote by a "balanced consensus body." It also includes requirements for considering objections and recirculating any objections to the voting body so it can respond, reaffirm or change its vote.

"The ANSI process lends credibility to a document because it allows for openness and participation by all the affected interests with due process," says James Thompson, recording secretary of the executive standards council for ANSI.

Specifically, Gilbride questioned the lack of public comment on SIMA's Glossary.

While ANSI promotes one standards document per industry, there



Brian Birch

SNOW+ICE GUIDE

are some cases where two overlapping documents are approved in the same industry. SIMA considered an ANSI accreditation, Birch says, but decided not to pursue it, viewing the process as an added cost without added value. For SIMA, it was imperative to deliver the document for free, rather than making it a revenue-generating mechanism. As of Nov. 9, SIMA's Glossary had been downloaded 728 times. ASCA's document comes free with a \$400-yearly membership fee; nonmembers must join the organization to access it.

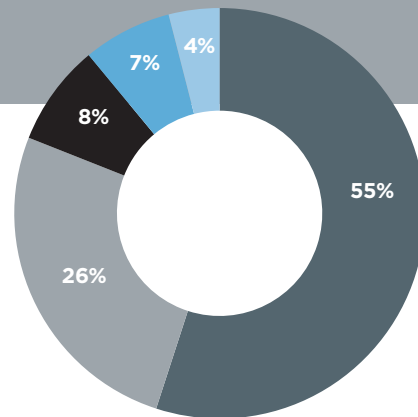
"We wanted to deliver this at no fee to the industry," Birch says. "If we really want folks to adopt this, we can't put it behind a fee or a membership firewall, which a lot of associations do."

SIMA's process entailed more than 30 professionals from the snow

management industry and other related industries, including insurers and facility managers, working together to compile and review the Glossary. As a "living document," SIMA says it's reviewed quarterly by the board, which considers any recommended changes, additions or deletions. Among others, the term "zero tolerance," a point of contention for Gilbride, is currently being reviewed.

"The process we've gone through is as transparent and as clear as any standards-creating body out there," says Birch, who managed the review process. "It's actually much more intense than what ANSI requires."

SIMA included facility management professionals in the creation and review process, which its members said they wanted. If the goal is common ground across



728 TOTAL DOWNLOADS

Breakdown of top five professions downloading SIMA's Glossary of Terms

- **Snow contracting: directly provide snow services**
- **Facilities/property management**
- **Other**
- **Management company: facilitate/manages snow services**
- **Snow industry supplier**


Note: Data as of Nov. 9. "Other" includes government entities, colleges/universities, public schools and others. SOURCE: SIMA

the industry, facility management professionals must be involved and their opinions must be considered, Birch says.

"We don't feel that we can create standards or best practices to try to dictate to the audience we're trying to work with," he says. "We want to engage them and collaborate with them."

A silver lining exists in the Glossary dispute, however. Gilbride says it is opening up lines of communication between ASCA and SIMA. While still in "initial stages" and nothing has been agreed to, Gilbride says both sides have decided it's best for the industry for them to work together.

With each organization strong in different areas, Gilbride says, a united or friendly dialogue could be good for the industry.

"As a nonprofit, SIMA has done a very nice job educating contractors on core values, how to run and grow their smaller businesses into medium or large-sized businesses. They have a successful trade show," Gilbride says. "As a for-profit association, the ASCA is able to be much more nimble and address bigger picture issues and at times turn on a dime when needed to address those issues such as standards and legislative change." 



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BY PHIL HARWOOD

The author is president and CEO of Pro-Motion Consulting. Reach him at phil@mypmcteam.com.

Learning to love snow

There's one thing I know for sure about snow—people either love it or consider it a four-letter word, never to be spoken aloud. A friendly server mentioned to me in passing that there was “precipitation not in the form of a liquid” falling on her way to work that morning. She was talking about snow and couldn't bring herself to use the word.

Even people in the snow business often detest the white stuff. Just thinking about it makes their blood pressure rise. I completely understand where they're coming from. There are unique pressures with snow that not everyone is cut out for. But the same could be said about being a dentist or a pilot. There are challenges but also many rewards.

My goal is to help snow professionals fully embrace the snow season, even if they would prefer to have nothing to do with it.

WHY WE DO IT

I'd like to start with the “why.” The snow business comes with a built-in mission statement: to provide a safe environment for society during winter. For those with a servant's heart, this mission is a powerful driver of personal satisfaction every night. No amount of cold air, wet toes or sleep deprivation will detract from the mission.

Some snow professionals are less motivated by serving others. They love the sense of accomplishment, seeing a freshly plowed lot and cleared sidewalks. Before leaving the property to go to the next site, they slowly drive the property and admire

their work. They often wonder how it can be possible that they're getting paid to do something so rewarding.


Still others love the still of the night. As they drive down quiet, lonely roads, they're amazed by the natural beauty of a fresh snowfall. The crunching sound of their tires or boots on the snow brings back childhood memories. Being able to drive without traffic in normally congested areas is an unusual thrill. Soon, the roads will be jammed, and the thrill will be gone. But for now, there's something magical in the air.

My point is many people find meaning, purpose and enjoyment in the snow business. Perhaps you could join those of us who are in this camp by taking a new perspective.

There are more practical ways to learn to love snow. Snow events are much more enjoyable when things run smoothly. Some of you have never witnessed a smooth snow event, so this is a foreign concept. A smooth snow event is possible only with the development of a systematic snow system where every aspect is well designed and flawlessly executed.

Many of the people who love snow tell me their company's snow division is the most process-driven and reliable aspect of their overall business. It's those who haven't made sufficient investments in their snow businesses who don't love snow. Frankly, I wouldn't either if I were in their shoes.

Finally, when you're learning to love snow, it's important to be rested, hydrated, well nourished and dry. Good snow professionals don't mess around. They're diligent about getting sleep when they can, drinking lots of water during snow events, fueling their bodies with the right stuff and being properly dressed with layers, waterproof clothing and a second set of clothes, just in case. There's nothing more miserable than being wet, cold, hungry and tired. A bit of planning will save the day.

So, what about you? Do you know someone who doesn't (yet) love snow? I have a feeling that with the right perspective, a good system and proper personal care he or she could learn to love snow. Do you agree? 





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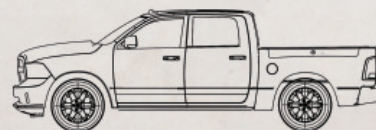
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↑ COMPACT-DUTY SECTIONAL SNO-PUSHER

COMPANY: Arctic Snow & Ice Products

URL: SectionalSnoPusher.com

The Compact-Duty Sectional Sno-Pusher attaches to small tractors, skid-steers and wheel loaders for clearing lots, sidewalks and drive-ways. Features include a sectional moldboard with 24-in.-wide spring-loaded trip-edge sections, bolt-on mechanical side panels and the Slip-Hitch system.

SB648 PROFESSIONAL SNOW BLOWER

COMPANY: Steiner

URL: SteinerTurf.com

Constructed of cast iron and heavy-gauge steel, the SB648 Professional Snow Blower is equipped with an 18-in. four-blade impeller, a sawtooth auger and 237-degree chute rotation. Its 48-in.-wide clearing path moves snow up to 27 in. deep. A two-year parts and labor warranty is standard.



MVP 3 V-PLOW

COMPANY: Western Products

URL: WesternPlows.com

Available in 14-gauge stainless steel, the Western MVP 3 V-plow features a flared blade design, UltraLock double-acting cylinders, eight vertical ribs, an enhanced center hinge, larger center hinge pin, bigger lift ram, power bar and an improved T-Frame design. Blade widths range between 7.5- and 9-ft. powder coated steel and polyester options available.



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SNOW+ICE GUIDE PRODUCTS



↑ HD2 STRAIGHT BLADE SNOW PLOW

COMPANY: Fisher Engineering

URL: FisherPlows.com

The Fisher HD2 straight blade snowplow is constructed of powder coated steel. A standard 1/2-in. steel cutting edge (3/8-in. on the 7.5-ft. model) can be replaced with optional cutting edges, including rubber, poly, 5/8-in. steel and carbide. The plow has a 29-in. blade height and is available in four sizes ranging from 7.5 ft. to 9 ft.

SPDR-7-UV SPREADER

COMPANY: Bobcat Co.

URL: Bobcat.com

The SPDR-7-UV sand and salt spreader attachment is designed to mount in the cargo box of a Bobcat model year 2015 3400, 3600 or 3650 utility vehicle. It's powered by a 12-v DC drive motor and can distribute material from the spinner wheel in a range of 5 ft. to 38 ft.



→ HSS SNOW BLOWER SERIES

COMPANY: Honda Power Equipment

URL: PowerEquipment.Honda.com

Designed to replace the HS Series, these 10 models feature lightweight GX engines; a pulley size optimized for top speed of the impeller; and an impeller wing positioned at 90 degrees for increased efficiency, Honda said. Other features include fingertip steering control, joystick electric chute control and a hydrostatic transmission. A three-year warranty is standard.

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CASE STUDY: ADD-ON BIZ



BONUS WOES

Put an end to the annual question
“Who should get a bonus?” with
Phil Harwood’s advice.



PAGE 68

Solve year-end bonus problems



BY PHIL HARWOOD

The author is president and CEO of Pro-Motion Consulting. Reach him at phil@mypmcteam.com.

The year-end bonus is a staple at many companies. Unfortunately, what's meant to be a positive thing often turns into a negative experience.

Year-end bonuses are typically meant to reward people for their efforts and provide motivation going forward. Instead, unmet expectations and an attitude of entitlement often result in disappointment, hurt feelings and even employee turnover—not exactly the intended outcomes.

The problem is the typical year-end bonus fails to adhere to tried-and-true best practices for incentive compensation. In fact, the problem starts when the year-end bonus is not viewed as incentive compensation but as a generous gift from a caring owner or management team. Bonuses are incentive compensation. Period.

All incentive compensation should be tied to results and performance, not random acts of kindness. If the company does well, bonuses increase and vice versa. If individual performance is good, bonus amounts are higher and vice versa. There needs to be a link or bonuses will appear random, or even worse, distributed with favoritism or a “what did you do for me lately?” mentality.

When companies correlate year-end bonuses with results and performance, there should be no surprises, since results and performance should be well-known throughout the year. Even if it's discussed only quarterly with a high-level update, employees deserve to know how the company is doing overall and how they're doing individually. Again, there should be no surprises.

Another consideration is the timing of year-end bonuses. If distributed just prior to Christmas, as many bonuses are, they're even more likely to be expected. I highly recommend moving the year-end bonus to another time of year. Just because the calendar year ends Dec. 31 doesn't mean bonuses need to be handed out during this season. There's some wisdom in waiting until after the books are closed and taxes are completed to get a more accurate read on bonus calculations.

WHO GETS A BONUS?

Who should be involved in the year-end bonus program? Many companies choose to involve management only, while others include all full-time, year-round staff. Others include all personnel. Tied to this decision is the question of how much is too little before it's demotivating or even insulting. For example, a year-end bonus of \$500 may be motivational to a lower-level person in the company, but \$28.50 may be more of an insult. It's important to run through some scenarios to see how the math plays out when attempting to make this decision about who to include and who not to include.

The amount and allocation of the year-end bonus pool are additional considerations. Some level of profitability should determine the bonus pool with approval by the senior management team. If the company has met or exceeded its goals, the bonus pool may be filled according to a predetermined formula. However,




WEB EXTRA

Visit the Web Extras section at LandscapeManagement.net for Harwood's bonus program Excel template.

if the company has not met its goals, bonuses should be a moot point.

Regarding allocation, managers deserve a bigger share of the pool, on a pro-rata basis, than those they manage. An easy way to determine allocations is to use an adjusted weighted-average method. Using this method, allocations are fair and easily justified, if necessary. Variances for individual performance may be made quickly and accurately. See Web Extra for Excel template.

Finally, year-end bonuses are much more powerful if delivered in front of the recipient's peers. The first management bonus I ever received was given to me at a large managers' meeting in front of my fellow managers. While I don't recall the amount of the bonus, I will never forget the sense of pride and accomplishment I felt walking up to collect the sealed envelope and shake the hand of senior managers who were present. Talk about a powerful impact!

As the year comes to a close, now is a good time to reconsider and make improvements to your year-end bonus program. Best wishes for a wonderful Christmas season and a successful 2016. 

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¹2014 Employer Health Benefits Survey, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, September 10, 2014. ²One Day PaySM is available for most properly documented, individual claims submitted online through Aflac SmartClaim[®] by 3 PM ET. Aflac SmartClaim[®] not available on the following: Short Term Disability (excluding Accident and Sickness Riders), Life, Vision, Dental, Medicare Supplement, Long Term Care/Home Health Care, Aflac Plus Rider and Group policies. Individual Company Statistic, 2015. ³Eastbridge Consulting Group, U.S. Worksite/Voluntary Sales Report. Carrier Results for 2002-2014. Avon, CT. Coverage is underwritten by American Family Life Assurance Company of Columbus. In New York, coverage is underwritten by American Family Life Assurance Company of New York.

Pricing for risk

The profit you earn on each of your services is driven by a few factors: the marketplace, how it's priced and sold, how efficiently it's produced and how much overhead you must recover. However, the profit you earn should ultimately reflect the risk associated with each service. The higher the risk, the higher the profit you should aim for.

It's with this thought that you should begin your budgeting process. Start with the profit you want to earn on each service and work backward, developing a plan to hit your profit goals.

In the past, I would guide my clients when budgeting to aim—at a minimum—for 10 percent overall profit (after basic salary and depreciation.) However, the risk in the landscape industry has increased over the years (people risk, weather risk, government risk, etc.). Therefore, the return on your risk should increase.

If you drill down by division, you can develop better budgets and strategies to earn higher returns in 2016.

DIVISION BY DIVISION

For example, maintenance aims for a minimum 10 percent net profit. The risk is lower in maintenance because it's more predictable and relatively stable year to year; plus, this side of your company is easier to sell when you want to exit the business. The maintenance business is predictable,

so you have the greatest opportunity to gain efficiency. Throw the adage "you don't make money on maintenance" out the window.

Caveat: If you're trying to corner the market in your area, in any service, the market forces may start to corner you. The more you can serve a niche, the more likely you are to get your rates.

In design/build and enhancements, aim for a minimum 15-20 percent net profit. The risk is much higher in design/build; plus, this type of business is much more difficult to sell because there is no recurring revenue. This means you, as a business owner, need be able to extract some of the profits (value) every year and put them into an outside investment. Depending on your market area and type of work, you should price it for 15 percent profit and 20 percent net profit if you're working on higher risk projects, with more variations and disciplines involved. Some of my clients earn even more. There are so many factors that influence the final profit of a design/build job; therefore, the more you can streamline your design/build operations, processes and material choices, the more likely you are to achieve more consistent profits. Engaging your crews with focused incentives to increase weekly production will greatly help, as well.

For example, one contractor I work with who does half bid/build and half design/build found that



BY JEFFREY SCOTT


The author is owner of Jeffrey Scott Consulting, which helps landscape companies grow and maximize profits. Reach him at jeff@jeffreyscott.biz.

he could make more money in bid/build because of the consistent, streamlined nature of the work. The lesson: Remove the variations of your design/build work and create a more predictable bottom line.

With snow services, aim for 25 percent net profit at a minimum. The risk in snow is even greater; you are providing an emergency service for your clients. There is weather risk, people burnout risk, performance risk and equipment risk. And snow plowing has hidden equipment costs that can affect your year-end profit. Moreover, one out of every few years may be a dud, so it's triply important you make good profits in the good winters. Some contractors I work with make substantially more net profit than 25 percent and others do far worse. Depending on where you stand, it may be time to rethink your approach to snow.

BUDGETING FOR ROI

Some business owners believe the market sets the price and controls the profit. This may be true for order-taking and low-bid work. But seasoned business owners realize they must earn a proper ROI to stay in business long term and make it worthwhile. To do so, start your budgeting with a profit in mind and work backward. If you don't plan to make good money, then after risk takes its toll, you will be disappointed with what remains.

Final thought: I recently spent the day with Mike Bogan, CEO of LandCare. He observed companies in their first 10 years of business seem to be most profitable. If your business is older, slower and lacking profit, it may be time to reinvigorate it with a fresh, new strategy. 



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Before (top) and after a forestry mulching job.

CASE STUDY: ADD-ON BIZ

Into the woods

Forestry mulching proves to be a beneficial offering for Visual Edge—and its clients.

BY CASEY PAYTON

After posting a sign for “bush hogging,” Andrew Jenkins, president of Visual Edge, was flooded with calls. The inquiries were about clearing large, wooded areas rather than the simple overgrowth he had in mind. Instead of turning work down, he found a way to create a profitable new service.

It all began when Jenkins wanted to find additional uses for his front-end loader. After putting up the bush hogging sign, figuring he could keep the loader busy by renting an attachment, he never expected so many calls about large jobs requiring even bigger equipment. Jenkins had no idea how big the market was in his area for forestry mulching, which he describes as “selective clearing in wooded areas.”

“Forestry mulching is a very cost effective way to clear overgrown brush and prevent invasive species in wooded areas,” Jenkins says, noting it’s a replacement for other land-clearing methods, such as bulldozing and burning. It also eliminates the expense of transporting and disposing of debris. “It can keep ticks away and, therefore, prevent the spread of Lyme disease.”

One perk of forestry mulching as an add-on service is it can be done 12 months of the year. Visual Edge completes many of these jobs during summer and winter, its slower times.

The service is performed by one laborer with a forestry mulcher attached to a 95-hp skid-steer, which Jenkins rents because most of the jobs are too large for his loader. Even with a rental cost of \$800 per day, it’s been profitable, Jenkins says.

“I have about \$250 in costs above the \$800, for labor and gas, but I charge \$2,500 per day,” Jenkins says. “The longer you rent it, the cheaper it is, so I’ll often try to book several jobs to maximize that profit.”

The attachment is simple to use, but practice was important. And safety is imperative when working with a “six-foot wide chipper on steroids.”

“You need to make sure you have a really good operator handling this,” he says. “It’s a matter of pushing the attachment forward and dragging it back over and over again, knocking down brush and chipping it up. But it’s powerful. People compare the sound to a plane taking off. And it throws chunks of tree up to 60 yards, so the area has to be completely clear when work is going on.”


At first, pricing the service was the company’s biggest challenge. Customers often wanted the company to clear thick woods, which Jenkins couldn’t even get into to evaluate. He decided to be honest with them and say he didn’t know how many days it would take, but he’d offer a day rate and assure them the company would work as efficiently as possible.

“Clients were more understanding than I anticipated,” Jenkins says. “That’s largely because we work off of referrals and there was trust there to begin with.”

Jenkins has been marketing the service heavily to wineries and farmers, to whom adding usable space is incredibly valuable. But he says anyone with overgrowth might be interested in the service. In addition



to his “bush hogging” sign, Jenkins has marketed the service with a post on LinkedIn and a YouTube video, which garnered nearly 700 views in three and a half months (check it out at buff.ly/1kAiciO).

“I could see this being a repeat service for clients every three to five years,” Jenkins says. 

Payton is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.

BUSINESS BREAKDOWN

COMPANY: Visual Edge

HEADQUARTERS: Aldie, Va.

SERVICE: Forestry mulching

ANNUAL REVENUE: \$750,000

EMPLOYEES: 6

SERVICE MIX: 30% maintenance; 30% design/build; 15% forestry mulching/bush hogging; 20% snow; 5% other

CUSTOMER MIX: 95% commercial

WHY? Initially, to maximize the use of a new front-end loader.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: Estimating and pricing jobs. Visual Edge recommends using a day rate.

BEST TIP: When working with powerful equipment like this, safety is imperative.

PHOTOS: VISUAL EDGE

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services and the products you use. Keep up-to-date on policy and regulations running the gamut from private and public pesticide property bans to specific restrictions on sales, use and display of fertilizers and pesticides. RISE is a national trade association of pesticide and fertilizer suppliers serving as a resource to help you keep these products in your toolbox and you out of the woods.

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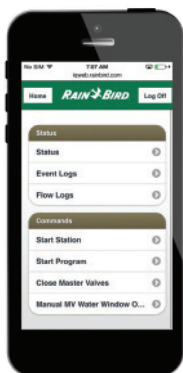
IRRIGATION PRODUCTS

IRRIGREEN GENIUS IRRIGATION SYSTEM

COMPANY: IrriGreen

URL: IrriGreen.com

The IrriGreen Genius Irrigation System uses digital technology and a multistream nozzle design adapted from commercial inkjet printers. The system sprays water in precise patterns, similar to the way inkjet printers spray ink in controlled patterns on a page. IrriGreen installs with one head in the middle of each zone and no lateral lines. IrriGreen reduces water use for lawn irrigation by up to 50 percent and cuts contractor installation time by up to 70 percent, according to the company.



IQ-CLOUD V. 3.0

COMPANY: Rain Bird

URL: RainBird.com

Irrigation professionals can now manage Rain Bird's IQ Platform systems on the go with their smartphones and tablets using IQ-Cloud v. 3.0. IQ-Cloud access can be shared with authorized maintenance personnel to alert them of problems in the field. There are no recurring annual fees to use the software.



WEATHER-TRAK ET PRO3

COMPANY:

Hydro Point

URL: HydroPoint.com/etpro3

This commercial-grade smart controller, available from 12 to 96 stations, uses a real-time, cloud-based platform. The company says it's designed to deliver maximum water savings and increase operational efficiency and it's EPA WaterSense and contractor approved. The central control provides data and visibility for a single-site or an entire portfolio.



STK-6V SYNTHETIC TURF SYSTEM

COMPANY: Hunter Industries

URL: HunterIndustries.com

Hunter's synthetic turf irrigation system is designed for cleaning, cooling and flushing synthetic turf sports fields. The STK-6V includes a new 3-in. galvanized ductile iron manifold assembly with heavy-duty grooved fittings for ease of servicing. The vault also includes a drain valve designed for easier servicing and winterization. The Hunter ST System's core features include heavy-duty manifold assembly; low-pressure loss and slow-opening valves; and gear-driven, long-range, standard-speed and high-speed rotors.



OCTA BUBBLER

COMPANY: Jain Irrigation Systems

URL: Jains.com

Built with non-corrosive plastic material to be UV and chemical resistant, this eight-outlet self-cleaning, pressure-compensating bubbler provides a pressure compensating range of 1.5 to 4 kg/sq. cm. It can be supplied as an assembly package, including a 1/2-in. stake, 6 mm vinyl tube of 1 m length and emitter holding stake. The company says the product is ideal for converting sprinkler systems to low flow and irrigation requiring longer run times.



T5 RAPIDSET SERIES

COMPANY: The Toro Co.

URL: Toro.com

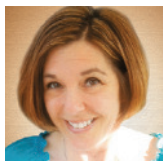
The T5 RapidSet Rotor line was expanded to include stainless steel riser and nozzle base options, ideal for sandy soils and high-traffic areas. According to Toro, sandy soils are abrasive and can cause scoring of a plastic riser, which can lead to leaks at the wiper seal or an inability for the riser to fully retract. In areas with heavy foot traffic, like parks and greenways, the stainless steel riser can help to reduce the occurrence of damage and reduce the need for repeated replacement over time, the company says. Available in the spring, the T5 RapidSet Stainless Steel Rotor includes the "No Tools" RapidSet adjustment feature, a 5-in. pop-up height and Airfoil Technology nozzles.



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RESOURCES

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SafetyWatch list of hazards

The list of hazards in this photo includes, but is not limited to:

- Lack of hearing protection;
- Lack of eye protection; and
- Improper equipment positioning.

What did we miss? We invite you—as employers and workers in the landscape industry—to share your expertise. Email your responses to LM Editor Marisa Palmieri (mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net). We'll publish your responses with the online version of this story.



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BACKSTORY

INTERVIEW BY MARISA PALMIERI



Rush with wife, Erin, and children Aidan, 10, and Addison, 7. "We're a busy family, like most. Three out of the four of us are black belts in taekwondo."

"My stepdad was Vince Patterozzi, the head groundskeeper for the Cleveland Browns and eventually the Baltimore Ravens. I worked with him when I was 12 or 13 at the Browns facility. I helped paint, picked up trash and mowed the front areas of the property. I couldn't have been more prepared for this industry."



"I moved my family back to Columbus, Ohio, in 2010. I commuted to Texas weekly for two and a half years for my job at Native Land Design."



Miles Rush

**PARTNER/BRANCH MANAGER
WEED-PRO
LEWIS CENTER, OHIO**

EDUCATION

Berea High School
Berea, Ohio
Class of 1997

Heidelberg University
1997-1998

Ohio State University
Bachelor's of Science
Turfgrass Management
1999-2002
Class of 2011

WORK EXPERIENCE

Various stints from 1992-1999
Grounds Crew
Cleveland Browns/
Baltimore Ravens

2002-2004
Area Manager
TruGreen LandCare
Austin, Texas

2004-2006
Branch Manager
TruGreen LandCare
Houston

2006-2007
Branch Manager
TruGreen LandCare
Austin, Texas

2007-2013
Vice President of Operations
Native Land Design
Austin, Texas

2013-present
Branch Manager/Partner
Weed-Pro



Rush was one class shy of graduating when he accepted a job with TruGreen LandCare. He got his degree in 2011 when OSU allowed his transfer credits from Heidelberg to meet graduation requirements.

"I ended up at OSU under the pretense that I would get my turfgrass degree and work in the NFL."



"I went to a career fair to practice interviewing. I met a group there from TruGreen that I enjoyed talking with. Next, I went to Texas and interviewed. I really liked the people and Austin was incredible, so I talked my wife into 'taking an adventure.'"

"I met (Weed-Pro owner) Rob (Palmer) through a peer group. His passion for our people and the care we have for the customer: It's not just a business; it's a way of life. I knew it was right for me."

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