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THE EFFICIENCY ISSUE: 3 CASE STUDIES + WASTE-SAVING TIPS



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Masters of efficiency

Three companies
optimize their
operations with
simple steps and
extensive measures.

Rob Reindl, president
of Oasis Turf & Tree,
Cincinnati

January 2015
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Originally from Scotland, Robert Clinkenbeard came to the U.S. in 1999 with only two bags (page 52).



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ON THE COVER: PHOTO © SCOTT FOREMAN, CULTIVATOR CONTENT LABS

Get the specifics of a crape myrtle trimming service. (page 46).





NEW VIDEO ON LANDSCAPEMANAGEMENT.NET



➔ Tune in to consultant Jeffrey Scott's latest video to understand how to get the right people in the right positions, supported by the right processes. Watch all episodes of "Growing your business with Jeffrey Scott" at LandscapeManagement.net/video.

WEB PICK

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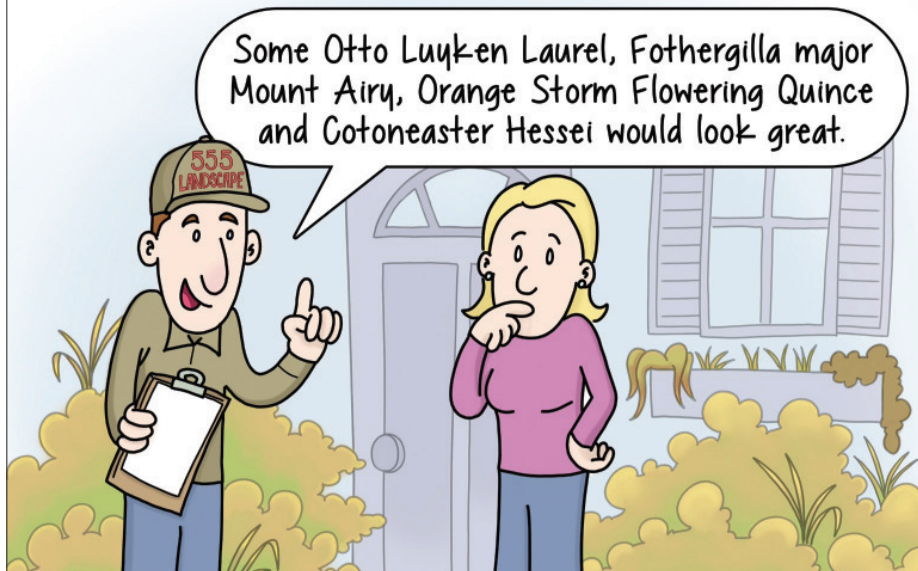
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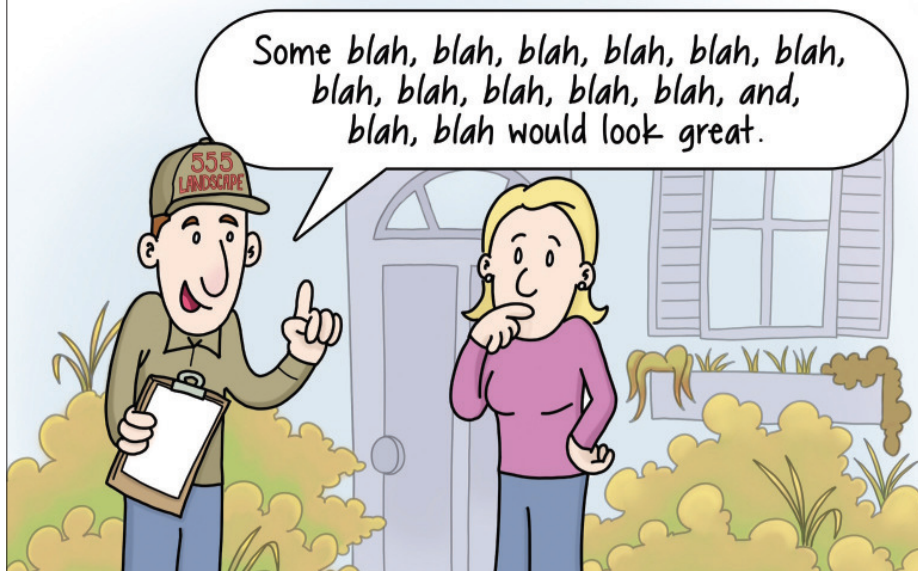
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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI
EDITOR

Contact Marisa at 216/706-3764 or
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Efficiency journey

Sofa beds. Visits to the dentist. Michael Scott on “The Office.” This is my list of “uncomfortable things.” Here’s another: Changing a long-held company process or implementing a new one.

We all know change is difficult. This can be particularly true when it comes to becoming more efficient as an organization, says green industry consultant Jim Paluch, president of JP Horizons. Why? Because efficiency is a mindset. It’s not a solitary act. As Paluch says, “Like success, efficiency is a journey and not a destination.”

As I was working on this issue, which focuses on efficiency, I was amazed by how the three companies we feature in the cover story make it look so natural to design new programs, processes and equipment to run smoother operations. All along, though, I thought: “It’s not natural. It can’t be easy.”

And that’s why I got in touch with Paluch to confirm my hunch. He founded the Working Smarter Training Challenge, a 52-week lean management education program for landscape companies, more than eight years ago. He’s seen countless companies through the program. Although the firms we feature in this issue don’t follow lean practices, per se, their efficiency-focused mindsets are similar. Here’s some of what Paluch had to say.

On whether most landscape companies are efficient today... “You may hear one owner claim how efficient his company is, but you know from his bottom line his company is far from it. ... That said, I do feel that over the past several years there have

been some breakthroughs in technology, software, equipment and education that have helped many landscape companies improve efficiencies.”

On the top area he’s seen most companies get more efficient... “Most companies initially go after the ‘low-hanging fruit,’ which is often found in the morning start-up with the crews. This is a great place to start because it allows the entire team to see the positive results that can come from a few simple changes.”

On the No. 1 hurdle to becoming more efficient... “Sustaining the improvements that are made. ... Companies get over this hurdle when they realize that every process still has room for improvement and the consistent pursuit of perfection, even though they will never achieve it, is a culture that will help sustain all the improvements made.”

On the attitude it takes to become more efficient... “We challenge leaders to become ‘comfortable in the discomfort.’ Change is always uncomfortable, but developing an attitude and passion for personal growth where every employee is open to taking risks, trying new things, failing or succeeding and is willing to learn from the experience will improve efficiencies. It also will grow future leaders and create unlimited opportunities for the company.”

Have you fixed one wasteful thing in your business or otherwise overhauled your operations to be more efficient? Let me know (mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net). We’d love to write about it in a future issue of *LM*. ☺



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Complete the sentence: "Landscape and lawn care companies striving to be more efficient should..."

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WEB EXTRA

See more great advice and complete answers from our Editorial Advisory Board in the Web Extras section at LandscapeManagement.net.

"...limit their service offerings and develop simple performance metrics."

"...be willing to look at changing the way they do every aspect of their business, even if that's the way they've always done it."

"...decide on at least one measure of efficiency most relevant to their business and track these metrics religiously to benefit from gained knowledge, transparency and enhanced results."

"...take a look at their morning rollout/afternoon preparation for the next day and cut out their non-value added, unproductive time."

"...manage their labor and cash flow."

"...develop standard operating procedures for everything they do."



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BIG PICTURE

TIMELESS ELEGANCE

LOCATION Glencoe, Ill.

COMPANY Mariani
Landscape, Lake Bluff, Ill.

THE DETAILS The homeowners of this lakefront residence discovered the house in a dilapidated state. Vines covered the windows, and the grounds were overgrown from years of neglect. Believed to have been built in the 1920s, the house was then uninhabitable. In 2013, Mariani Landscape earned a National Landscape Awards of Excellence Grand Award from the Professional Landcare Network for this project.

In conjunction with the renovation and expansion of the residence, the landscape architect collaborated with the interior designer and building architect to achieve balance with three elements—the home, gardens and pool area.

The intent was to create a calming landscape that evokes a sense of time and place, while incorporating the new functional requirements of the residence. This included the gravel driveway and court, bluff stabilization, new pool area, the adjoining dining terraces and the front tennis court.

PHOTO A custom wall clock bedecks the rear of the house, along with a bespoke bamboo awning. Clouded boxwood line the foundation, while morning glory vines creep up the arbor support posts.

See additional photos and learn more online at LandscapeManagement.net/BigPicture.

PHOTO: MARIANI LANDSCAPE

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RECOMMENDER

ISSUE BRIEF

STEP BY STEP

NEW STUFF

SAFETYWATCH

FUEL AHEAD



Since implementing an end-of-day flowchart to facilitate how crews wrap up and prepare for the next day, Peninsula, Ohio-based Suncrest Gardens has saved about \$30,000 to \$35,000 per year for the last two years.

"Every dollar counts," says Kolin Atkinson, systems director for the full-service firm with a garden center that runs about 20 three-men crews. "We look at those small gains as little wins."

Posted at the shop in English and Spanish, the five steps of the flowchart are:

1. On the way back to the facility, call the field supervisor or account manager for instructions to prepare for the next day.
2. Unload tools and equipment.
3. Fuel up the trucks.
4. Load the trucks for the next day.
5. Review the assignments to be completely prepared for the next day's work.

It varies for how long each team goes through those five steps, depending on their routes and projects for the day ahead, Atkinson says. "It eliminates commotion and some action from our staff," he adds.

"We're always looking at ways to make ourselves more efficient and eliminate waste the customer's not willing to pay for."

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



JOHN DEERE

RECOMMENDER

Irrigation controllers

Which do you use and why?

Contractor controller preferences vary based on the application.



ERIK BELTRAN

PRESIDENT, TEXAS GREEN GARDENS CORP.
SPRING, TEXAS

"I prefer the Rain Bird ESP-Modular Series controllers. They're an easy, simple and economic option. They bring me peace of mind because they're efficient, reliable, high quality and have a great cost-benefit. My only choice for the last 15 years."



CHRIS HUSBAND

PRESIDENT AND CO-OWNER
LIQUID TECHNOLOGIES
GLENDALE, ARIZ.

"As a water manager whose business is based on technology, I strongly recommend other water managers and contractors think scalability before bells and whistles when choosing a system. Water conservation is based on the profitability of us, which means we need to be able to remotely manage hundreds of controllers. Not dozens of fancy systems. Also, there's not a single system for every application. I prefer ET Water, Tucor, Hunter and Calsense. Why? I save water and these systems assist me. Plus, I'm profitable."

ISSUE >>> BRIEF



BY SABEENA HICKMAN

The author is CEO of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET).

BEE HEALTH AND YOUR BUSINESS

You've no doubt heard about beekeepers in the U.S. and Europe experiencing bee colony die-offs. It's somewhat of a mystery why this is happening; although, scientific consensus is emerging that the Varroa mite, in association with a range of viruses, is a significant factor in these losses.

However, much of the blame for the loss of managed bee colonies has been attributed to the use of neonicotinoids. Antipesticide activists have pressured big box stores to stop selling plants that have been treated with neonics.

The activists aren't the only ones focusing on neonicotinoids. Recently, House Democrats sent a letter to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) asking for tighter restrictions on these products. Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga., recently introduced pollinator legislation (H.R. 5447) to require the EPA to expedite the approval of pesticide products to control the Varroa mite and other pests that impact bee health and to report to Congress on its efforts. It also would require the U.S. Department of Agriculture to report on the factors that threaten the health of managed bees, including pests, beekeeper practices, nutritional needs and more.

You can help by letting your congressperson know you support this legislation. Also, write to Lowes (customer care@lowes.com) to ask them to continue to sell plants that have been treated using EPA-approved products.

Access a prewritten letter supporting H.R. 5447 in PLANET's legislative action center at landcarenetwork.org.



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STEP BY STEP

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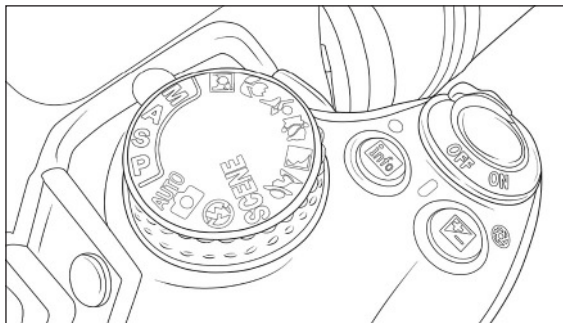
The key to taking effective landscape lighting photos is to start with a good camera, such as a digital single-lens reflex (DSLR) camera.

Next, learn how to manually set the aperture, shutter speed, color temperature and ISO. You'll also need a tripod (ideally with a bubble level); either a time release in the camera or a remote shutter release; and some basic photo-editing software skills.

- Manually adjust your camera to the following settings: ISO set to the lowest number (usually 100); aperture set for maximum clarity (between 5.6 and 16); color temperature set to the color temperature of the lights on the project (check the specs); and shutter speed set to maximum time (usually 30 seconds).
- When shooting, the shadowed areas should have some detail, like your eye sees. To achieve this, consider bracketing, or taking the same shot using different shutter speeds or apertures (f-stops). Learn how to read the camera's internal meter, and take the first shot at the exposure the meter indicates as the correct exposure. Take the second shot by adjusting your shutter speed (preferable) or your f-stop (less preferable) so the meter reads +1.5 stops. Take the third shot at -1.5 stops. Your goals for the three shots are: Shot 1). Exposed so lit areas look nice; Shot 2). Exposed so shadowed areas show some detail; Shot 3). Exposed so areas that are too bright (such as directly under path lights or hot spots on walls). Ideally, your first shot will look great without any correction, but quite often the first shot has black shadows and white hot spots. That's why you bracket.
- To use the bracketed shots, create a file in a program such as Photoshop and layer all three shots so they're superimposed. Then block out the underexposed and overexposed areas to produce the final image. 📷

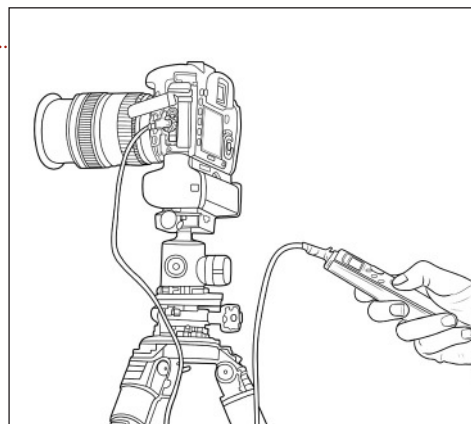
STEP 1

Ignore the automatic nighttime setting on your DSLR camera and learn how to manually set the aperture, shutter speed, color temperature and ISO.



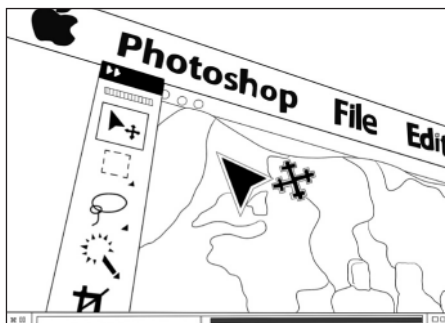
STEP 2

Set up your camera on a tripod (ideally with a bubble level) and either a time release in the camera or a remote shutter release. Even touching the shutter button can create enough movement to create blurred results. Take photos about an hour after sunset.



STEP 3

Learn bracketing so you can take multiple shots to layer in a photo editing software to create a final image.



SOURCE: Steve Parrott, Volt Lighting



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NEW STUFF



1. HIGHLIFT 15B POWERVAC COLLECTOR

COMPANY: The Grasshopper Co.

URL: GrasshopperMower.com

The new collection system, with a 15-cubic-foot capacity hopper, features variable emptying heights up to 72 in. high and 34 in. behind the power unit. The deck-driven vac picks up debris without the need for an auxiliary engine. It can be easily removed in minutes without tools.



2. SALTDogg SPREADER STANDS

COMPANY: Buyers Products

URL: BuyersProducts.com

These six new stands fit 10-ft. to 15-ft. full-size hydraulic SaltDogg spreaders and are designed to accommodate spreaders with prewet tanks. The spreader stands come with built-in rollers on the rear and sides of the unit. They're made out of solid structural steel in either black powder-coated or hot-dipped galvanized finishes and can withstand weights from 1,038 pounds to 1,138 pounds.

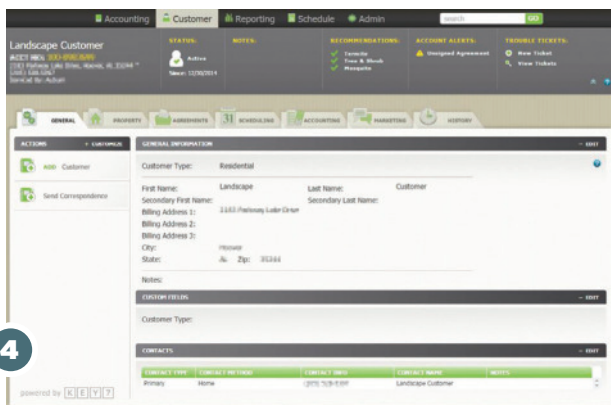


3. LOCK WRAPS

COMPANY: Lockstraps

URL: Lockstraps.com

These new neoprene covers keep ice and snow out of the Lockstraps locking equipment tie-down straps. The covers are held together with Velcro. Lock Wraps are sold in packs of two.



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. 7 SOFTWARE

COMPANY: Key Seven Software

URL: key7software.com

7 software is a digital tool for managing customer relationships and other aspects of a company, from sales to production, in the pest and lawn care industries. It can be customized to handle additional services.

5. 2800 PSI PRESSURE WASHER

COMPANY: Ariens

URL: AriensCo.com

This model, which joins the company's 3000 PSI and 3300 PSI versions, features a 21-in. stainless steel wand, a brass axial cam pump and a 208cc Ariens AX engine. Ariens pressure washers are supported by a one-year commercial warranty.

6. STAND-ON SPREADER SPRAYER

COMPANY: Exmark

URL: Exmark.com

This machine's Lean-to-Steer controls gives operators the ability to steer and control forward or reverse speed with one hand, freeing the other hand to operate the controls or spot spray with the wand. Two induction nozzles inside the 20-gal. tank provide spray mixture agitation. The machine is capable of carrying 175 lbs. of material in the hopper and up to 50 lbs. of bagged material on top of the tank.

SAFETYWATCH

➔ This photo was staged to show several safety hazards or dangerous work habits. How many can you identify? Flip to page 51 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 LM do not endorse unsafe behaviors demonstrated during photo staging.



PHOTO: LAURA WATILLO BLAKE



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-Bob Martin, Estimator, Turfscape, Inc.

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PUMP TO 'PANE

Walk through the steps to take and the questions to ask before converting your mower fleet to propane.

➤ PAGE 30

TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

Money in mosquitos

Adding a mosquito-control service proves to be a business booster for Memphis, Tenn.-based Southern Lawn & Pest. BY JONATHAN KATZ

GOT THE ITCH

Southern Lawn & Pest in Memphis, Tenn., diversified by adding a Mosquito Joe franchise in 2013.



The Great Recession nearly brought Steve Clark's lawn mowers to a halt. At the time, he owned a Memphis, Tenn., commercial lawn maintenance business called Southern Lawn Care. The business, which he started in 2005, grew quickly. But by 2010 revenue had dwindled.

Clark had relied too heavily on a few large, commercial clients. Early on, he saw the need to diversify his offerings, but he didn't act quickly enough.

"I realized that we needed to offer weed control and fertilization as part of our service mix because we were leaving a window open for other companies to come in and build relationships with our customers," Clark says.

Clark has since changed the name of his company to Southern Lawn & Pest and

launched a Mosquito Joe franchise as a subsidiary in 2013. The addition of the mosquito-control services opened Clark's business to a new customer base and provided him with invaluable marketing resources.

MAKING A COMEBACK

As of press time, Clark expected revenue to reach \$315,000 in 2014 with about a third of that from Mosquito Joe. It's a considerable jump from his low point when revenue plummeted to \$69,000 in 2010. It was \$280,000 in 2008.

That experience taught Clark the importance of developing multiple revenue streams and the value of marketing support.

Until 2013, Clark, now 32, was living two lives. During the day he was an agriculture

Continued on page 20



PHOTO: MOSQUITO JOE / SOUTHERN LAWN & PEST

NEWSFEED



MASSEY HIRES

Massey Services refined its employee roster, promoting Maurice "Moe" Jenkins to regional



manager for the Florida Southeast region and promoting Jonathan Goetz to regional manager of the Atlanta region.

TRUGREEN DONATES

TruGreen donated more than \$125,000 to local and national charities through its Lawn Stars program, which, per quarter, recognizes 21 TruGreen branches



by making a \$2,000 donation to their chosen charities.

SPRING-GREEN GROWS

Jason Vahle, owner of Green Thumb Lawn-care N' Landscape in St. Charles, Mo., joined

Spring-Green Lawn Care as a franchisee.

SHIPP JOINS CSI

Control Solutions (CSI), the parent company of Quali-Pro, hired Matt Shipp as its new VP of marketing.





Quali-Pro® products are the combination of quality, innovation, proven formulations and excellent customer service. Quali-Pro offers turf professionals the green industry's widest array of active ingredients. As one of the 40 global brands that make up ADAMA, Quali-Pro, by Control Solutions, is proud to represent the company's global approach to innovation, product development and the strictest standards of environmental protection and quality control. Together, Quali-Pro, CSI and ADAMA offers lawn care professionals and golf course superintendents in the United States and around the world unique and proprietary formulations, backed by university research and the full support of our sales and technical leaders. The result? The products – and performance – you expect.



ADAMA

QUALI-PRO

TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

Continued from page 18

and biology teacher at a local high school, while he managed Southern Lawn in the evenings and on the weekends. His days started at 4 a.m. and ended around 10 p.m.

The teaching job helped Clark endure his toughest year as a businessman in 2009. Clark had lost his two largest commercial clients, which nearly sunk the business. In February 2009, Clark sold his mowing division and focused on marketing his lawn care services to the residential market. He spent the next two years working to pay off debts he owed on his maintenance equipment.

His business is now 95 percent residential and 5 percent commercial. In 2013, he added perimeter pest control services and changed the name of his business to Southern Lawn & Pest. The pest control service accounts for approximately 3 percent of the company's revenue.

“Time is something I don't have a lot of. Anything I can bring to Southern Lawn and Pest from

Mosquito Joe is an advantage.”

—STEVE CLARK



The growth of the business allowed Clark to finally leave his teaching job in 2013 to focus full time on the lawn care and the pest control businesses.

LIGHT BULB

Last summer, an outing at an outdoor concert sparked Clark's interest in controller mosquitoes. He noticed the pests weren't as ravenous as usual. He learned that someone had treated the lawn for mosquitoes. The proverbial light bulb went off and Clark began researching mosquito control as a business opportunity. He learned about Mosquito Joe from his father, who showed him

a *Kiplinger* magazine article about a Mosquito Joe franchisee. Mosquito Joe franchises treat yards with barrier spray pyrethroid insecticides. Clark chose the franchise path because the start-up costs were affordable.

“After running the numbers to create new marketing materials and begin branding the business for mosquito control, I could see that it was going to be cheaper for me to buy a franchise,” Clark says.

Clark paid approximately \$20,000 in franchise fees to get his Mosquito Joe business started. But he estimates it would have cost him approximately \$44,000 to market the business if he started his own mosquito-control service.

Mosquito Joe's corporate office provides franchisees with free use of its direct-mail program, which includes a direct-mail list, during the first year. The company also provided Clark with training materials for his technicians and budgeting software. Clark mailed postcards to about 30,000 households in his territory. The postcard provides information on the company's service along with an introductory offer for a free mosquito-control application. He also uses Mosquito Joe's online pay-per-click campaign, but so far, direct mail and referrals have yielded the best results. Clark offers his Mosquito Joe customers \$25 off from their service fee for referrals.

Clark's Mosquito

Joe business logged \$110,000 worth of business in the first year, \$95,000 after discounts.

Clark estimates that he would have likely generated no more than \$10,000 in mosquito control business without the marketing help. He based the estimate on growth figures from his lawn care business. His direct mail efforts for Southern Lawn only generated 40 to 50 new customers in the last year. With Mosquito Joe's direct-mail program, Clark can reach more potential customers because the direct-mail service sends three or more postcards to each address over a wider geographic area, he says.

Clark expects his primary business to benefit from the addition of Mosquito Joe. For example, the franchise has favorable pricing contracts with many chemical suppliers, so Clark can leverage that relationship to gain pricing advantages for Southern Lawn. He also expects the two businesses to feed off of each other for new customers. By the end of 2014, he expects to convert about 50 Mosquito Joe customers into lawn care clients as well.

“I'm a small businessman, and time is something I don't have a lot of,” Clark says. “Anything I can bring to Southern Lawn from Mosquito Joe is an advantage.”

Katz is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

↑ ADDING FOCUS

After selling its mowing division to focus on turf care and pest control, the company became Southern Lawn & Pest in 2013.



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IRRIGATION+WATER MANAGEMENT

On the water front

An award-winning educator weighs in on water conservation.

BY BETH GERACI

Michael Dukes, Ph.D., P.E., CID, is an irrigation specialist and professor in the University of Florida's Agricultural and Biological Engineering Department. He's also director of the Center for Landscape Conservation and Ecology, which strives to protect Florida's natural resources through responsible landscape management. Widely published, Dukes' research centers on water management and quality.

In October, Dukes' efforts to create efficient irrigation solutions that protect the environment earned him the Irrigation Association's (IA's) 2014 Excellence in Education Award. We caught up with him in November, shortly before he accepted his award at the Irrigation Show & Education Conference in Phoenix. He shared with *LM* his views on some of today's most relevant water conservation issues.

Q: HOW MUCH DOES THE PUBLIC UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER CONSERVATION NATIONALLY?

A: I think the public generally understands water conservation when they are affected by it. That is, when they don't have enough water, the importance hits home. Due to the regional nature of water shortages, some populations are more cognizant of water scarcity than others. Those affected by the drought in California right now would be a good example.

HIGH HONORS

Michael Dukes (right) receives the Irrigation Association Excellence in Education Award at the 2014 Irrigation Show & Education Conference from J.R. Bergantino.

Q: HOW MUCH HAS THE PUBLIC'S UNDERSTANDING OF WATER CONSERVATION GROWN OVER THE LAST DECADE?

A: Despite the fact that I believe the public's understanding of water conservation could be higher, I believe the awareness has increased substantially in the last decade. But more importantly, public agencies, manufacturing, codes and standards have come a long way in the last 10 years to essentially embed water conservation into our lifestyle.

A good example is the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's WaterSense program that has created labels for water-efficient products, ranging from toilets and showerheads to weather-based irrigation controllers and more. If not already mainstream, these products are becoming so, such that they will be the new norm—and conservation seamless—in our everyday life.

Q: WHAT ABOUT MEMBERS OF THE GREEN INDUSTRY? AS A WHOLE, HOW MANY WOULD YOU SAY UNDERSTAND WATER CONSERVATION?

A: The green industry is very aware of conservation, and at the manufacturer and industry level there has been diligent work for the last decade to implement water-conserving devices and programs.

A great example of a decade-plus of work is the IA Smart Water Application Technologies (IA-SWAT) effort that

brought together the irrigation industry, public agencies and water purveyors to find solutions to the increased water demand attributed to irrigated landscapes.

Though this group has been very successful in building open lines of communication between interested parties and encouraging development of water-conserving technologies, there is still more work to be done. At the ground level—the level of individual builders and irrigation contractors—I believe work is still needed to get these audiences trained in the latest advances in water-conserving technologies and how to properly apply them.

Q: HOW SHOULD CONTRACTORS BE TRAINED IN SUCH ADVANCES?

A: By doing things like North Carolina is doing, for example. Within the last five years, the state implemented mandatory licensing for irrigation contractors. The concept has already picked up momentum, but the industry is shy on requiring these things that on the surface seem to be barriers. However, once the industry learns more about them, they usually get on board with mandatory requirements.

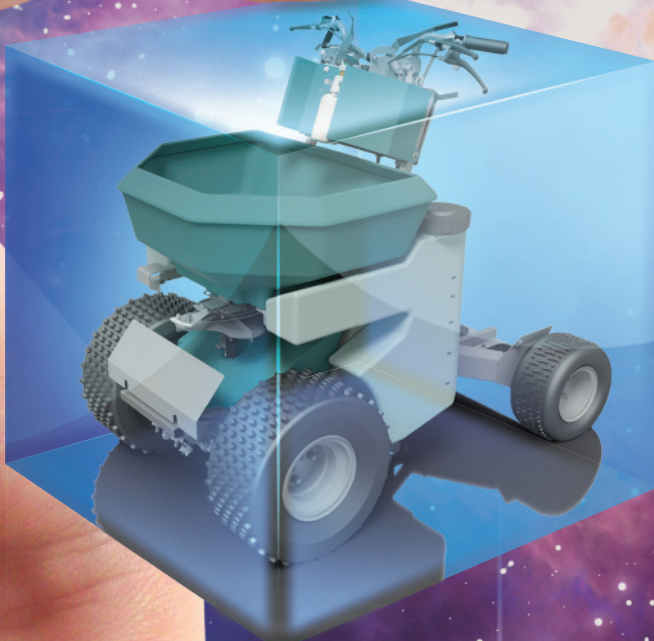
Q: PER YOUR OBSERVATIONS OF INDUSTRY MEMBERS, WHAT'S THE NO. 1 MISSED OPPORTUNITY TO SAVE WATER?

A: The No. 1 missed opportunity, though it may not be the No. 1 water

Continued on page 24



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Continued from page 22

saver, is regular maintenance. Things like broken heads and leaking main lines are easy to spot even for the nonexpert. Simply walking an irrigation system at least once a year and repairing these types of things is really an easy win.

Q: WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR INDUSTRY MEMBERS TO BETTER SELL SMART IRRIGATION AND WATER MANAGEMENT TO THEIR CLIENTS?

A: For industry members to sell the technology or management services to their clients, I think it's about the payback, convenience or features. If they can show a device pays for itself in a year or two, then that's usually a win. Or if a device offers the end user desired convenience, quick payback may not be as essential. For example, a smart controller with a remote manager that has cloud access and flow monitoring may be a logical choice. Those are expensive things, but they offer a lot of convenience.

Q: ARE STUDENTS INTERESTED IN MAKING LANDSCAPES MORE WATER-EFFICIENT, TOO?

A: There is some interest from students in landscapes, but the primary driver for students seems to be conservation and efficiency. They're more interested in the environmental angle versus the horticultural angle. But when they get into it, they come to understand it's one thing. Those ideas can be applied to landscapes as well as agriculture. Irrigation of plants is irrigation of plants, whether for food or aesthetics. 

Geraci is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

NEWSFEED

SURVEY SAYS

A recent report by the U.S. Geological Survey shows water use in the U.S. reached its lowest recorded level in nearly 45 years. For some perspective, water use per billions of gallons per day reduced by 13 percent since 2005.



new headquarters in Mission Viejo, Calif., tripling its warehouse capacity.

MUNRO RECOGNITIONS

Munro Pump Co. welcomed Kevin Johnson as its new national sales manager. The company also was recognized at the 2014 Irrigation Show, where its Universal PRO Pump Enclosure was named best new specialty product.



UNDERHILL EXPANDS

Underhill International opened



DESIGN/BUILD+INSTALLATION

What you need to know

A comprehensive look at the Tier 4 standards and how they affect landscape equipment owners and operators. BY SARAH PFLEDDERER

You purchase a piece of compact construction equipment, one manufactured after 2008.

Seated in the cab for the first time, you can have piece of mind knowing that officials say it ultimately plays into the prevention of 12,000 premature deaths, 8,900 hospitalization and 15,000 heart attacks each year by 2030.

But given that's 15 years away, what you notice most, operating the machine in 2015, is what you're sitting on in your back pocket—a slimmer wallet.

These facts and figures surround the Tier 4 standards, a government-mandated reduction in emissions from nonroad diesel engines that comes to fruition in 2015.

There are three parties involved with the regulations as they relate to the landscape industry: 1). Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which instated the standards; 2). equipment and engine manufacturers, charged with meeting the standards; and 3). you, the end user, who will—or may already—deal most with the new technology.

Here, we take a look at the standards from all three viewpoints to answer the question, “How does this affect landscape contractors?”

THE GIST, THE IMPETUS

Established by the EPA as part of the Clean Air Act, Tier 4 regulations were put in place to reduce emission of particulate matter (PM) and oxides of nitrogen (NOx), primarily in nonroad diesel engines.

Simply put, in diesel engine exhaust PM is the black smoke or soot. NOx, also found in exhaust, contributes to smog, which poses lasting environmental and health hazards.

With that, the end goal for Tier 4 is to decrease diesel engine emissions by more than 90 percent for health benefits—health benefits that could amount to \$80 billion annually once all older engines are replaced, according to the “Clean Air Non-diesel Rule,” published by the EPA Office of Transportation and Air Quality (OTAQ) in May 2004.

Under the Tier 4 standards, EPA categorizes nonroad diesel equipment into five power ranges—0-25 hp, 25-75 hp,

Continued on page 26

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—DAYNA WAGNER, GENERAL MANAGER, FIT TURF

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—MICHAEL ROGERS, PRESIDENT, KATHLEEN'S LAWN & ORNAMENTAL PEST CONTROL

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DESIGN/BUILD+INSTALLATION

Continued from page 24

75-175 hp, 175-750 hp and more than 750 hp. The standards have staggered into effect for each category from 2008 to 2015 (see table), meaning manufacturers were barred from producing non-Tier 4 equipment and only selling equipment approved by the EPA as Tier 4-compliant.

There is no federal requirement for equipment owners to upgrade their units to Tier 4-compliant machines nor does the EPA have plans to put a rule in place, says Christie St. Clair in the office of public affairs at the EPA, OTAQ. In addition, manufacturers may still sell pre-Tier 4 units and replacement parts until their inventory is out.

St. Clair explains the No. 1 restriction to equipment owners is they may not disable emission controls on certified engines or equipment.

“Things have proceeded according to plan,” she says. “Once we adopt standards, manufacturers find optimal

ways to meet standards. EPA has no significant role in that design process.”

There’s an expense, though, that comes with manufacturers having the creative freedoms to engineer products as they see fit—for manufacturers and end users.

And EPA recognizes that.

In fact, in 2004, it anticipated price increases for engines, equipment and fuel by 20 percent, 3 percent and 7 per-

cent, respectively, under the standards.

“It’s going to vary depending on the application and what solutions the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) has taken as far as solutions,” says Jeff Wilke, product manager for diesel products, North America at Kohler Engines. “Things aren’t quite the same as they were previously. There’s a bit more componentry.”

Continued on page 28



TIER 4 AND THE GREEN INDUSTRY

For some perspective on how drastically Tier 4 affected the green industry, here’s a table highlighting how large of a market share landscape-related OEMs held in 2000, plus the landscaping equipment affected.

Power range	Year standards applied	% of nonroad equipment market share in 2000	Top landscape construction equipment manufacturers (per % market share)	Landscaping equipment affected
0-25 hp (0-19 kW)	2008	18%	Ingersoll-Rand (12 %); John Deere (10 %); Kubota (5 %)	commercial mowers, skid-steers, lawn and garden tractors, utility vehicles, excavators, commercial turf equipment, tractor/loader/backhoes, trenchers, irrigation sets, wheel loaders/bulldozers
25-75 hp (19-56 kW)	2013	38%	Ingersoll-Rand (17%); Case New Holland (10%); John Deere (7%); Kubota (6%)	skid-steers, commercial mowers, excavators, utility vehicles, pavers, commercial turf equipment, tractor/load/backhoes, surfacing equipment
75-175 (56-130 kW)	2012-2013	28%	Case New Holland (15%); John Deere (14%), Caterpillar (8%)	tractors/loader/backhoes, skid-steers, excavators, wheel loaders/bulldozers, commercial turf equipment
175-750 hp (130-560 kW)	2011-2013	15%	John Deere (27%); Caterpillar (13%); Komatsu (5%)	wheel loaders/bulldozers, excavators, forest equipment, chippers/grinders
>750 hp (>560kW)	2011-2015	1%	n/a	n/a

SOURCE: EPA OTAQ

Tick-Tock, Tick-Tock **CHA-CHING.**

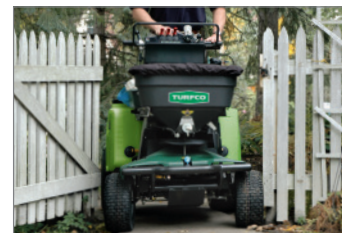


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Continued from page 26

THE MANUFACTURERS' CHALLENGE

There are two common solutions for reducing NOx and PM emissions in diesel engines, Wilke says. Both involve after-treatment devices—removing diesel particulate filters (DPFs) and/or introducing selective catalytic reduction (SCR) to an engine unit.

Kohler Engines has taken the route of nixing DPFs.

“We started with a brand new engine design from the ground up,” Wilke says.

A DPF, he explains, consumes fuel to burn off PM. Eliminating that offers “proven fuel savings, better fuel economy, better throttle response and more torque for a similar size engine.” Plus, there’s less maintenance on an engine if there’s no DPF to be serviced.

Thus far, Kohler has engineered engines up to 75 hp. As it continues to grow its engine division, tapping into more than 75 hp, Wilke says it likely will approach those units with SCR, an additional catalyst in the exhaust that involves an injection of urea.

To further reduce PM, Tier 4 engines can use only ultra low sulfur fuel (ULSF), too, the only highway diesel fuel available in the U.S.

As Greg Knott puts it, sulfur can “poison aftertreatment systems.” Using ULSF means engines must have “sophisticated catalytic converters,” says the director of industry affairs at the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI).

How all this translates to OEMs, they “want to know what technology

will be used, how exhaust temperatures will be impacted and how much it will cost,” Knott says.

Take Caterpillar, for instance. The manufacturer has sold nearly 200,000 Tier 4 products, says Jeromy Myers, marketing consultant for Tier 4 migration at Caterpillar.

“Caterpillar recognized early on that one technology solution would not fit every application,” he says. The OEM focused on how the engine changes would affect equipment operators’ day-to-day activities.

“The only change our customers should experience is the need to refill the Diesel Exhaust Fluid tank every time they refuel their machine,” Myers says, adding Caterpillar also has recorded lower owning and operating costs for its Tier 4 equipment compared to previous generations.

For other OEMs, curbing consumer costs on Tier 4 equipment has been a challenge.

But it’s not without reason that some are making end users pay for the changes, Knott says.

STIFFER STANDARDS POSSIBLE

Simply put, “The engines are getting better,” Knott says. “The technology coming out now can make some pretty big improvements in efficiency and performance over a similar engine with mechanical fuel injection.”

He adds that having Tier 4 equipment could give contractors an edge in bidding processes if prospects take emissions into consideration.

And in some locations, they may even be required to have such equipment.

In California, for instance, manufacturers must certify products with the California Air Resources Board in addition to being certified with the EPA. Any state and local government may regulate the use of and operation of engines and equipment without EPA’s consent, St. Clair says.


Wilke expects larger cities and other states to have a heavier hand in local regulations moving forward, especially as talk of “Tier 5 is on the distant horizon.”

St. Clair somewhat cleared the air on that possibility, though.

“The European Union is exploring the equivalent of Tier 5 standards for nonroad diesel equipment,” she says. “There are no current plans for EPA to pursue such standards.”

Still, Wilke says manufacturers are preparing for the prospect of stiffer standards by changing the perception of horsepower.

The reality, he says, is many equipment owners view horsepower as power. Manufacturers need to prove smaller horsepower products can deliver adequate torque. If not, we could see a turn to alternative solutions for diesel engines, Wilke says.

“Diesel engine use is already limited in outdoor power equipment,” Knott adds. “It will be interesting to see how many engines and applications move to gasoline due to the costs related to the regulations.” 

WEB EXTRA

Visit LandscapeManagement.net to view a table listing the top-selling nonroad diesel equipment affected by Tier 4, plus find more facts and figures on the anticipated health benefits of the standards.

NEWSPEED

WALL LIGHTS

FX Lumi-naire rolled out the MO wall light, a larger version of its



PO wall fixture. The MO has the same faceplate design as the PO but with LED capacity.

LANDOPT LICENSING

Silvis Group, located in Mount Pleasant, Pa., renewed its LandOpt license agreement for a six-year term.

NEW EXCAVATORS

Hitachi released its next generation of wheeled excavators—the Dash-5.



Comprising two units, the ZX190W-5 and ZX230W-5, the

machines are Tier 4 compliant.

DALLAS SUPPLIER

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Navigating propane conversions

Your ears are perked to a propane conversion, so now what? Refer to this walk-through on how to go about transitioning your fleet.

BY SARAH PFLEDDERER

STEP 1 CONSIDER COST

Know:

- It costs around \$1,500 per mower to convert a gas unit to propane, including the cost of the fuel system components and installation.
- The time to convert a machine is around five to eight hours, including the engine conversion and adding cylinder- and component-mounting brackets.
- There's a 25 percent to 30 percent cost benefit to powering mowers with propane over gas.

STEP 4 CONTACT YOUR EQUIPMENT DEALER

Questions to ask:

- "What brands do you carry that offer propane-powered equipment and how extensive are the warranties under those brands?"
- "What Environmental Protection Agency-certified propane conversion kits are available?"
- "What conversion kits are available with cylinder- and component-mounting brackets that are compatible with my fleet?"
- "Do you conduct conversions on site?"

STEP 2 EVALUATE YOUR FLEET

Consider:

- Do you have mowers with more than 250 hours of use that have not had an engine replacement in that time? If so, veer toward purchasing or trading in for a new propane-powered mower versus converting the used unit—carbon deposit build-up on the engine's internal components may be affecting engine performance.
- Is your fleet all the same brand or do you have a smorgasbord? If it's made up of different brands, you might have to purchase a different conversion kit for each brand.

STEP 5 SCOPE OUT CONVERSION REBATES

Heads up:

- The Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) extended its doubled propane mower incentives to March, offering \$2,000 per mower and \$1,000 per conversion.
- Identify your state propane marketing association for information on state-level incentives.

STEP 3 LOCATE YOUR NEAREST PROPANE RETAILER

Discuss:

- What are your refueling options (such as a seasonal contract, eligibility for an on-site fueling station or a cylinder exchange program)? Some propane retailers urge on-site tanks for companies using 5,000 gallons of fuel or more annually.

STEP 6 COMPLETE THE CONVERSION

PROPANE POINTS OF VIEW

“Ultimately, the decision to convert comes down to the willingness of the operator to try something other than the status quo, but it’s hard to ignore an opportunity that can lower fuel costs by 30 percent while reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 15 percent and carbon monoxide emissions by more than 40 percent.”

—JEREMY WISHART, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT FOR PERC

“I see no downside in switching to propane. It’s cheaper. It’s cleaner. Your mowers are going to run longer. There’s no byproduct of combustion. The only downside is you have to retrain your people to mow farther away from your truck and end near the truck (because full tanks of propane are heavy to haul across a lawn).”

—STEVE FERGUSON, OWNER OF U.S. LAWN, HAMPTON ROADS, VA.

Sources: Steve Ferguson, owner of U.S. Lawns, Hampton Roads, Va.; Jeremy Wishart, deputy director of business development for PERC; Exmark white paper, “Transitioning mower fleets to propane.”

NEWSFEED

BEHOLD BRIGHTVIEW

The Brickman Group and ValleyCrest Landscape Cos. unveiled their new name as BrightView, though the company won’t use the new name and logo in operations until mid-2015. Brickman and ValleyCrest merged in June, forming a \$2 billion firm with 22,000 employees.

BOBCAT UTVs

Bobcat released its 3400 and 3400XL UTVs with two engine options—a 40 hp gas or a 24 hp diesel engine.



TORO GIVES

The Toro Co. bestowed grants to four nonprofits—Wonder Workshop Children’s Museum, Unity Charter School, Growing Solutions and Irmo Arbor Day Commission—as part of its “Green Spaces Make Great Places” program. It also gifted a Toro Z Master Professional 6000 Series zero-turn mower to Mark Pfeifer, a grounds foreman for Hyles-Anderson College, as part of a mower giveaway at GIE+EXPO to commemorate Toro’s 100th anniversary.

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Masters of efficiency

Three companies optimize their operations with simple steps and extensive measures. **BY MARISA PALMIERI**

DRIVING EFFICIENCY

Oasis Turf & Tree

CINCINNATI

2014 REVENUE: \$3.2 million (+22% over 2013)

EFFICIENCY CRED: Three or four technicians will produce more than \$300,000 in revenue this year (working nine months).

At Oasis Turf & Tree in Cincinnati most of the company's efficiency measures are found on the road—namely, in its fleet of 19 Freightliner Sprinter vans with customizations designed in-house. In fact, Oasis was recognized for the vehicles late last year when it won the 2014 “(Up) fit for Success” contest, sponsored by *Inc.* magazine and Mercedes-Benz Sprinter. The company also made the *Inc.* 5,000 list of fastest-growing companies last year for its 107 percent growth and 2013 revenue of \$2.6 million.

For Oasis, being more efficient means the ability to use higher quality products, says Rob Reindl, president. His company spends more—double, in some cases, he's been told—on its inputs compared to other lawn care companies.

“To be able to do that, we need to make it up in efficiency if we're going to be cost competitive,” he says. “It's all about, ‘What's the right price for the service so you can be profitable and continue to make an investment in your growth?’”



Rob Reindl,
president of
Oasis Turf &
Tree, Cincinnati

A primary investment is its fleet of Freightliner Sprinter 3500 Cargo Vans, which Reindl has favored since 2006 when he first began using them.

He went with the vans after phasing out mowing services in 2004 because they were fuel efficient, enclosed with a high roof, you could ride a spreader-sprayer into them and, importantly, they're customizable.

Key features of the Oasis vans include a folding ramp in the back; custom hooks, shelves and cubbies; a product tank designed in-house that slides in and out for easy repairs and cleaning; an aluminum tank frame that doubles as a waist-high shelf for fertilizer bags and a custom mixing system that limits chemical exposure.

Reindl points out that seemingly little details add up to big savings.

For example, Oasis uses an aluminum, spring-assisted manual ramp. Some companies have a hydraulic ramp that takes 30 seconds to lower and raise at each



"You don't want your guys doing any loading at the beginning of the day. Our technicians have always said: 'How you get out on that first job really sets the pace for the day. The sooner I get to my first job, the better it seems to go.'"

—ROB REINDL, OASIS TURF & TREE

stop, for a total of one minute. That may not seem like much time, until Reindl explains, "A minute at each stop, times 25 to 30 stops, is an extra half hour added onto each technician's day."

Eliminating difficult tasks like hauling bags of fertilizer saves time and prevents worker fatigue. With Oasis' setup, technicians load fertilizer bags onto the top of their tank frames with a forklift. Then, when they're on their routes, they pick up the bags at waist height and turn around 2 feet behind them to pour them into the hopper. "There's almost no movement with the bags," Reindl says.

The vehicle also includes a mixing system that keeps the water tank separate from the concentrated chemical. A chemical injector called a Dosatron—commonly used by farmers and car wash facilities—dispenses the chemical into the sprayer tank as it's filled with water.

"There's very little exposure to chemicals and there's no mixing," Reindl says.

He came up with most of the ideas himself, searched for equipment and pieces/parts and then worked with a fabricator to execute the designs.

Not surprisingly, the vans don't come cheap. One vehicle itself costs about \$45,000. With the fabrication, wrap, plus other work done in-house, the total comes in around \$60,000.

For Reindl, it pays off in the company's revenue per hour, which is about \$190. The company has three or four technicians who will produce more than \$300,000 in revenue this year, working nine months.

Reindl has shown other operators his van design and some have adopted his innovations.

"I've also had other friends who've looked at our vans and said 'That's an incredible waste of money,'" he says. "There's more than one way to skin a cat. We choose to spend more money on product and provide a superior service."

2-PRONGED APPROACH

Crystal Greens Landscape

CLACKAMAS, ORE.

2014 REVENUE: \$11 million (+120% over 2013)

EFFICIENCY CRED: The company improved the amount of time crews spend on-site from 22%-30% to 70%-75%. Its sights are set on 85%.

Crystal Greens Landscape has implemented a host of efficiency-promoting changes over the last four years. Some were by choice and some were by necessity, as the 100 percent commercial maintenance firm ballooned from \$2.5 million in 2011 annual revenue to \$11 million in 2014. Aside from one acquisition last year, the growth has been organic for the firm founded in 1990 by CEO Pat Murphy.

"It took 21 years for us to reach \$2.5 million in revenue and just four to grow from \$2.5 million to \$11 million," says Sales Manager Jason Sutton. "There are a lot of moving parts in accomplishing that kind of growth, but one of the major themes has been efficiency."

The bulk of the gains have come in two areas, he says, helping the company achieve 12 percent profitability.

1 Improving client communications

The leadership team at Crystal Greens, which started in residential maintenance but transitioned to all commercial work by 2000, realized over the last few years that the real difference makers for its property manager clients are response time and proactive communication. It's not how the grass is mowed or trees are pruned. With that in mind, the company restructured to make account managers its "heroes."

"They work for our customers directly, and we want everything else in our company to support them," Sutton says.

For example, supervisors are trained to record and communicate problems, such as dead plant material or landscape damage, to the account manager directly. To do so, supervisors are equipped with smartphones

or tablets to take photos/videos of the concerns. Account managers then relay the solution via written proposal to the clients in a timely manner.

The company has created additional expectations to promote account manager/client interaction, such as requiring monthly client calls that are customer-based (and not landscape-based).

"Account managers in our industry historically have had a production approach," Sutton says. "They say, 'OK, there are no problems, so why do I need to talk with a property manager? But we've tried to stress relationship building.'"

It's all part of an effort to expand relationships beyond company founder Murphy. "He's as relational as they get, but at some point, he can only manage so many accounts," Sutton says. Before, the firm had account managers, but only on a production level. Since implementing these changes, Crystal Greens has received good client feedback and has seen referrals rise.

2 Eliminating nonproduction hours

Nothing's worse than paying people for time that's not billable, and one major change at Crystal Greens has been to keep that to a minimum. Tactics have included decreasing time spent at the shop and improving routing and density.

At the shop, crews are on the clock at 6:30 a.m. and expected to be on the road by 6:45 a.m. To make this happen, equipment is cleaned and prepped at the end of the work day by a team of three shop workers. They work second shift to assist the company's three mechanics with servicing equipment, fueling trucks/equipment, sharpening blades and organizing the shop.

Getting a pre-7 a.m. start also has reduced travel time, as crews avoid both a.m. and p.m. rush hours. Adding a few

Continued on page 36



"We purchased a fuel truck for our facilities. If a four-man crew stops at a gas station for 15 minutes, that's one hour of labor cost not spent on properties. With 60 trucks, the cost can add up very quickly."

—JASON SUTTON, CRYSTAL GREENS



Crystal Greens Landscape changed several processes to focus on proactive communication, which its commercial clients value.

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Continued from page 34

satellite locations also has reduced travel time since there's less distance between the accounts and home base. "We've been able to offer customers more value regarding actual time on-site, doing more detail work and/or offering more competitive pricing," Sutton says.

Another helpful organizational measure has been splitting the shop

between the renovation and maintenance divisions.

"The idea is to take ownership over the equipment rather than saying 'I can grab whatever I need and go,'" he says. "We track it, so the guys with the least amount of breaks and accidents are rewarded with the newest trucks and equipment." In turn, the equipment lasts longer and looks better on-site.

BUILDING A SOLUTION

The Loving Group

CHARLOTTE, N.C.

2014 REVENUE: \$16 million
(+60% over 2013)

EFFICIENCY CRED: The company produces about \$167,000 in revenue per employee.

For The Loving Group (TLG), focusing on efficiency provides structure for growth. "The quicker you grow, the quicker you get off track if you don't have really defined processes from an efficiency standpoint," says President Mike Haynes.

He knows a thing or two about growth. He started young, mowing neighbors' lawns, and then grew his company aggressively after graduating high school in 2004. He began working for national homebuilders in 2009, and the company has surged since then, thanks in part to finding ways to operate optimally.

TLG posted revenue of \$4.4 million in 2011, grew to just less than \$10 million in 2013 and topped \$16 million last year. Haynes is confident the company will grow another 30 percent to 35 percent in 2015, thanks to its internal structure and CloudScape, a software application developed specifically for TLG. The custom program handles inventory and field operations, including scheduling and issuing purchase orders. Combined with the company's helpdesk, CloudScape is a powerful efficiency tool for TLG.

Haynes was inspired to create a helpdesk about five years ago after seeing it work so well at a company TLG uses for its IT services.

"You were able to get quick responses from people whose job was defined as serving the customer immediately upon contact," Haynes says. TLG started with one helpdesk staff member and is now up to five people, who are divided among three roles: scheduling expeditor,

Continued on page 38



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Continued from page 36

senior scheduling expeditor and scheduling manager.

Having staff dedicated to customer service, scheduling and ordering frees up field managers to focus on overseeing crews, execution and quality.

Before, field managers scheduled and ordered their own jobs and materials in addition to handling crews, quality and customer relations.

"We were making mistakes," Haynes says. "We need our field staff managing the field and our office staff managing the office."

Now, everything goes through the helpdesk to ensure it's correctly ordered, scheduled and documented via CloudScape.

When it comes to the application, it's evolved and now has 10 different status levels for every job, so the team can track progress. Haynes estimates CloudScape, which replaced a dry erase board system, has cost \$100,000 over about six years.

The Loving Group team members go over the firm's schedule during a daily status meeting.



"Some studies in the builder/landscape industry estimate only 80 percent of billable work is invoiced. We used to allow field staff to take requests on the fly, knowing we were gambling with completed work being properly documented and invoiced. Now, I'm confident 100 percent of our work is invoiced due to the structured process we've adopted." —MIKE HAYNES, THE LOVING GROUP

The program also includes a mobile app for clients to submit work requests and a mobile app for crews. One feature is a site inspection module that's used every time a crew

shows up to a job. Questions include, "Is there damage to the site?" and "Has grading been completed properly?" The crews' notes are automatically emailed to their field managers to ensure challenges are quickly communicated and properly documented. Crews also take "after" photos before departing jobs. These snapshots are archived on work orders within the application and have saved the company untold dollars by being able to show, for example, what a sod installation looked like the day it was completed.

"We've found the blame game has gone down once customers understand there's a level of documentation on our end, which we believe is a win-win," Haynes says.

Another useful tool is an automated email that goes to the builder's superintendent at 7 a.m. on the day the landscape project is scheduled. It prevents crews and materials from showing up at a site that's not ready, which is wasteful for everyone involved.

"The more efficiently we operate, the more reliable we are and the better partner our customers perceive us to be," Haynes says. "We really believe the profitability and growth—all of that—comes from one thing: serving our customers." 📧

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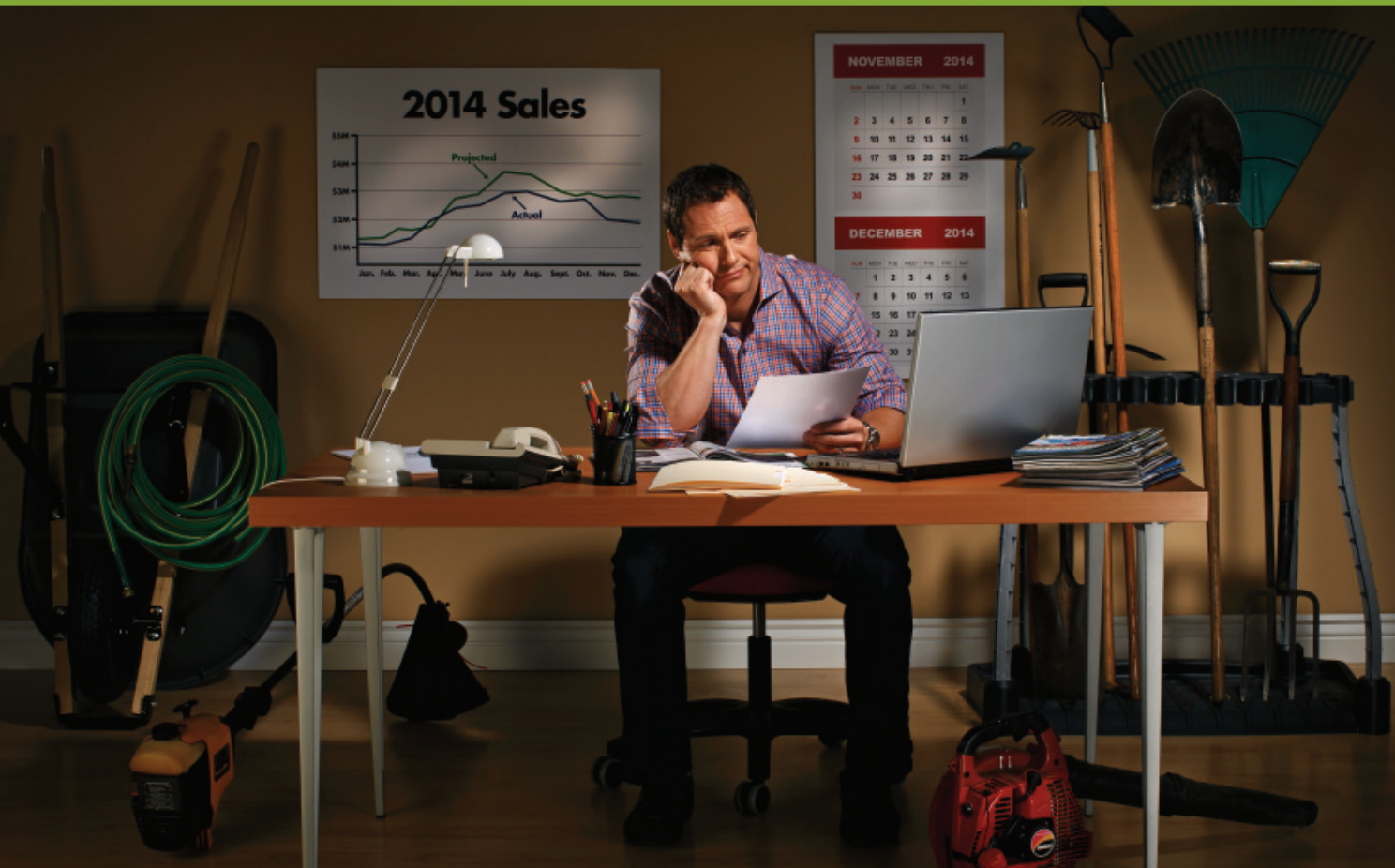
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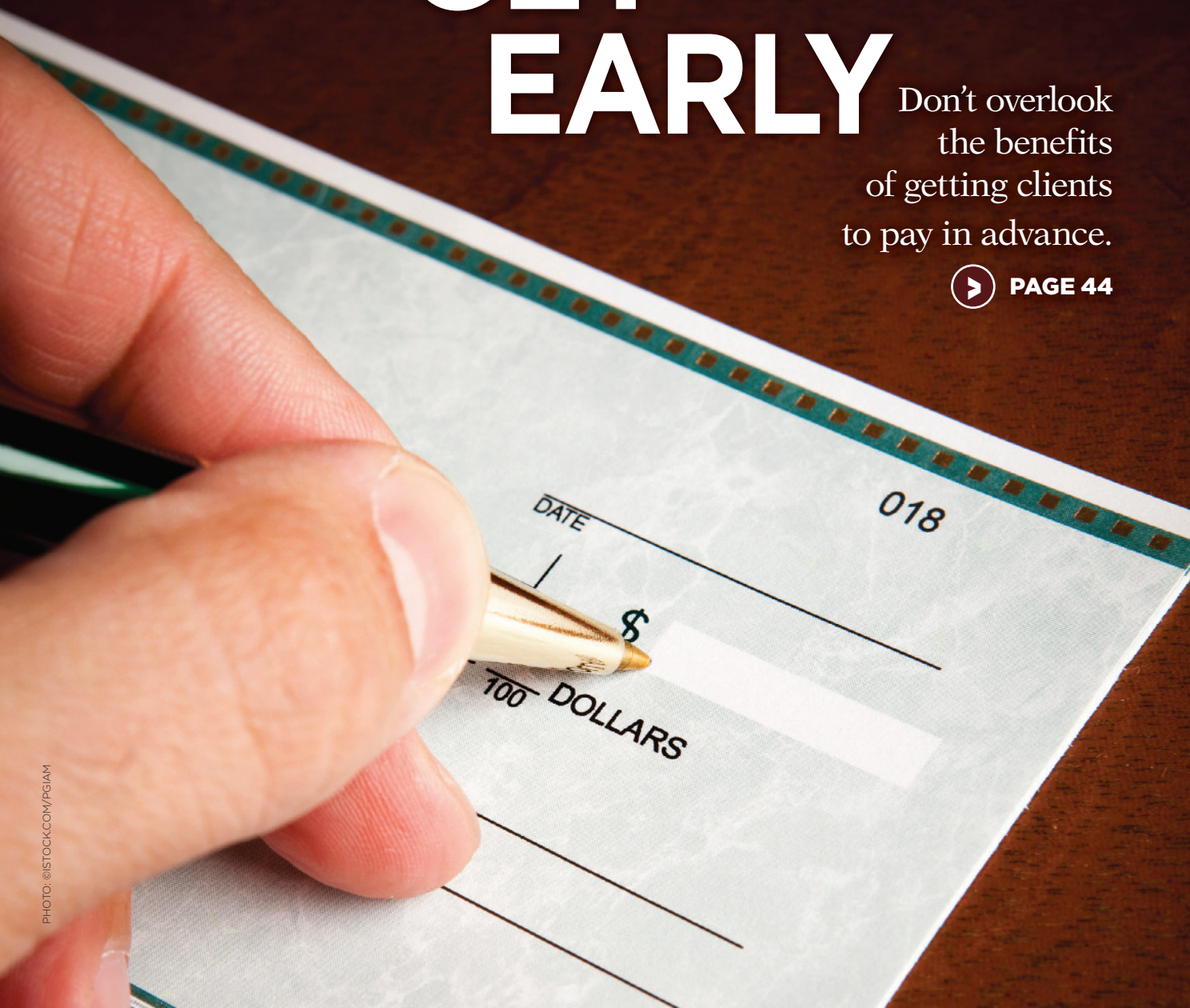
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GET 'EM IN EARLY

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the benefits
of getting clients
to pay in advance.



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BUSINESS BASICS: PEOPLE

If you don't know...



BY MEL KLEIMAN

The author is the founder of Humetrics. He helps companies build high-quality, frontline, hourly workforces. Reach him at mkleiman@humetrics.com.

If you were asked to come up with a list of the top 10 reasons excellent employees should want to work for you, could you do it? Would the first five reasons come easily and then you'd have to dig a little, or are all 10 self-evident?

I've found most business owners and managers can come up with a list of at least five without much difficulty, but it's a real challenge to come up with a list of the top 10 reasons why great people should want to work for them.

If you're wondering the purpose of this exercise, it's twofold:

1. If you don't know why great people should want to work for you, how will great people know they should apply?

2. It will help you create an irresistible recruiting message that will attract the quality employees you need to prosper and grow your business.

Research sheds light on the reason coming up with this list is a struggle. It comes down to a major disconnect between what workers want and what managers and owners think they want. Just look at the discrepancies (see lists below).

Because these studies presented a list of choices and asked respondents to rank them from most to least important, these broad-brush results won't help you write your list. But,



happily, there's a simple, no-cost way to find out why great people should want to work for you. Just ask all the good people working for you now these simple questions:

- Why did you come to work for us?
- Why do you stay?
- What would cause you to leave?

Whenever I conduct an employee-recruiting presentation, I always ask the participants to conduct this survey once they're back on the job because the results will give them the ammunition they need to attract and recruit the best. The following is an excerpt from one participant's follow-up email: "I asked my current team members why they enjoy working for me. Here's the list:

- I care about my employees.
- I help them in any way that I can.
- I provide a very comfortable environment.
- I'm a wonderful boss (their words, not mine, blush).
- We work hard and we have fun!

- We work Monday through Friday (not weekends).
- We get to meet really cool customers.
- I provide what they need to be successful.
- I tell them exactly what I need them to do.
- I tell them when I need them to improve without beating them up."

If I were this manager, my next "Help wanted" ads and posts would have headlines like: *Looking for a wonderful boss?;*

Want to join a team that likes to work hard and have fun?; and *Never work weekends again.*

Bonus! Send Mel your list (mkleiman@humetrics.com), and he'll send you a complimentary copy of his whitepaper, "Recruiting with Craigslist."

Another participant gave each employee a questionnaire. Here's a sampling of the most frequently cited answers:

Why did you come to work here?

- Environment/atmosphere.
- Location is close to home.
- Good pay.

Why do you stay?

- Staff/owner/manager/clients.
- Schedule/hours.
- Environment/atmosphere.

What would make you leave?

- Hostile work environment.
- Schedule/work hours changed.
- Better opportunity/pay.

My takeaway would be to concentrate recruiting efforts within a 5- to 10-mile radius of the business' location and use headlines like: *Work the hours you want;* or *Great shop, great clientele, great manager.*

So, what are you waiting for? Do your own survey and use the results to craft a dynamite recruiting message.

Workers want:	Managers think workers want:
1. Full appreciation for work done	1. Good wages
2. Feeling "in" on things	2. Job security
3. Sympathetic help with personal problems	3. Promotion/growth opportunities
4. Job security	4. Good working conditions
5. Good wages	5. Interesting work
6. Interesting work	6. Personal loyalty to workers
7. Promotion/growth opportunities	7. Tactful discipline
8. Personal loyalty to workers	8. Full appreciation for work done
9. Good working conditions	9. Sympathetic help with personal problems
10. Tactful discipline	10. Feeling "in" on things

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Minneapolis, MN	Feb 9-10	Salt Lake City, UT	Feb 23-24
Toronto, ON	Feb 9-10	Raleigh, NC	Feb 26-27
Halifax, NS	Feb 12-13	Jacksonville, FL	Mar 10-11
St. Louis, MO	Feb 12-13	Miami, FL	Mar 12-13
Lansing, MI	Feb 16-17		



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LET'S GROW

Motivating customers to prepay



BY CHRISTOPHER NOON

The author is CEO of Noon Turf Care in Marlborough, Mass., and owner of Green Light Consulting Services. Reach him at cnoon@greenlcs.com.

Owning and managing a seasonal business has its challenges. Even the most profitable and thriving business can be out of business if it doesn't properly manage cash flow.

In other words, if there's not gas in the tank, the engine's not running. I experienced this first hand with my company, Noon Turf Care. A few years ago we had a late start to our season when an early spring snowstorm hit, and we were shut down for more than a week. Needless to say, the money still went out to cover wages, vendors and early spring marketing expenses, but there was no revenue being billed and thus no money coming in. We had to scramble to tighten up cash flow by extending our credit line.

I vividly remember a few sleepless nights before our weekly payroll was due. As I look back on it today, it was a pretty frightening experience but one that allowed me to learn a valuable lesson: Cash is king, and cash flow is one of the key fundamentals to finance.

The lawn care segment is fortunate to have a couple of the large first movers in the industry, during its inception, pioneer the prepay concept. When I entered the industry, I was in awe of some of the larger lawn care companies with hundreds of thousands (and in some cases, millions) of dollars sitting in their bank accounts, as their customers took advantage of their discounted seasonal lawn care program price. Their customers would send a check in November for services that would be performed as many as 14 months later.

In essence, savvy lawn care companies leverage their large customer bases as banks to provide working capital for the following season.

Say what you want about the large, national company that dominates the lawn care industry—it's done a phenomenal job training consumers to pay in advance, thus making it possible for large and small lawn care companies to survive in a seasonal business. Many lawn care consumers are trained and conditioned to promptly pay their lawn care bill for the entire season when they receive their prepayment program and letter in the mail to receive savings of up to 10 percent. My company projects 40 percent of our clients to prepay this winter, which equates to nearly \$3.2 million.

PREPAY BENEFITS

The benefits of incentivizing customers to pay in advance for your services in the fall and early winter months for the following season are:

- 1.** Creating cash flow for winter and early spring operating expenses.
- 2.** Higher client retention. Locking them in early significantly decreases the likelihood of them cancelling throughout the course of the following season or them being taken by a competitor.
- 3.** A decrease in administrative expenses as employees spend less time on billing calls and questions, which may mean reducing your administrative head count.
- 4.** A decrease in receivables.
- 5.** A large decrease in client bad debt write-off, as it's always a better conversation with a customer when their money is in your account versus theirs.

So how do we get our customers to prepay for our services? This is the challenging part and one that requires your company and team members to be disciplined and consistent. Techniques include creating

an effective prepay letter and mailing schedule.

When you create your prepay letter, include a description of services, general timing of when services will be performed, program pricing, supplemental services and the total amount saved by prepaying. For those with seasonal businesses, I recommend sending out two or three prepay letters starting in November and ending in late February. To condition clients to prepay, be consistent about when and how you mail the notices every year. I recommend stating in bold print what the offer is and the date the discount ends. Fleeting discounted rates add urgency to your prepay letters and ultimately create a consistent call to action. For example:

Letter 1: Mailed in early November with a prepay discount of 10 percent. Expires Dec. 1.

Letter 2: Mailed in early December with a prepay discount of 7 percent. Expires Jan. 1.

Letter 3: Mailed in early January with a prepay discount of 5 percent. Expires March 1. (You can afford to have an extended expiration date since it's your last letter of the year.)

Other persuasive techniques to communicate the benefits of prepaying include offering an exemption from annual price increases, scarcity and exclusivity ("sign up now to get a slot on our route"), going green (eliminating the need for paper statements) and alleviating time and hassle by making just one payment.

For more on these techniques and to learn about the tools we use to collect prepayments, see the online version of this article at LandscapeManagement.net/motivating-customers-to-prepay. 



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CASE STUDY: ADD-ON BIZ

Specialty trimming

Crape myrtle pruning helps trees bloom and profits grow at Thompson Landscape. BY CASEY PAYTON



In the 1990s, customers repeatedly asked Thompson Landscape to add crape myrtle trimming to their yearly landscape maintenance contracts, so the Plano, Texas-based company decided to name and market it as its own service. Doing so has been a differentiator for the firm.

Many other landscape companies likely offer crape myrtle pruning, too, acknowledges Chad Romines, a manager at Thompson Landscape, which is a 100 percent residential landscape maintenance company. After all, the crape myrtle is a popular ornamental tree in Texas. But Romines says he hasn't seen any other companies advertise this specialty trimming as its own service. Crape myrtle trimming is the only tree work the company conducts.

Some clients have tried tackling crape myrtle trimming on their own, but it can be frustrating, Romines says. This tree poses some challenges. For example, improper pruning may cause them to bloom earlier and for a shorter amount of time.

The trimming service is offered a la carte; the specifics depend on the tree and the property, Romines says.

When it comes to pricing, many factors such as the size and age of the tree come into play, Romines says. The cost for pruning ranges from \$35 for the bare minimum to more than \$350 for a property that has more than one or complicated crape myrtles. It's rarely ever more than a one-man job.

The company has five 20-year-plus employees who are qualified and experienced in crape myrtle pruning. They were trained in-house by the company's owner, who taught himself about the trees when clients first began asking him to offer this service.

With some education and training, others could offer this or a similar service, Romines says. Equipment needed may include a ladder, hand pruners to clip small branches (less than 1-in. thick), loppers to cut medium-size branches (around 1 inch) and pole pruners to cut branches more than 1.5 inches in diameter.

Because the best time to trim the crape myrtle is the dormant season, the service has been a nice cash generator during January and February when Thompson Landscape isn't driving much revenue. However, given it's a small service and only an annual job on each property, Romines says it accounts for only 1 percent of the firm's overall revenue.

"Still, it's something that keeps our customers happy and a way to stay in touch with them in the off season," Romines adds. "The client demand and nature of horticulture and plants in Texas are very complex, so keeping up with those demands is important. It's also helped us to be more of a one-stop shop, which we find most of our clients are looking for these days."

Besides denoting crape myrtle trimming as a stand-alone service on

its website, Romines says the company markets it by offering a no-obligation estimate to all properties that have the trees each year.

"We use our existing and potential client data to generate those estimates each year, and most of our clients do take us up on it," Romines says. "It's a nice little extra service that saves them time and makes them feel better that it's being done right."

Crape myrtles are a popular tree in Texas, where Thompson Landscape is located.

Payton is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.

BUSINESS BREAKDOWN

COMPANY: Thompson Landscape

LOCATION: Plano, Texas

SERVICE: Crape myrtle trimming

ANNUAL REVENUE: Not disclosed

WHY? Simply put: Client demand

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: "There are varying philosophies on how to trim the crape myrtle, and every year we get at least one client that is surprised or upset over the way we trim," says Chad Romines, manager. "The best way to overcome this is to educate them upfront."

BEST TIP: Trimming can be made easier if you put advanced thought into where you plant your crape myrtles, Romines says. "Bear in mind that they need sun to really thrive and that they can get very large. Trimming is one way to control the growth."



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PREEMERGENT HERBICIDES



SPECTICLE G

COMPANY: Bayer CropScience

URL: BackedByBayer.com

Specticle G provides up to six months of broad-spectrum, preemergent weed control at low-use rates. It can be applied to mulched areas and around ornamentals. The herbicide protects against more than 90 broadleaf and grassy weeds and annual

sedges. It requires up to 40 times less active ingredient than current standards, according to the company.

TUPERSAN HERBICIDE WETTABLE POWDER

COMPANY: PBI-Gordon Corp.

URL: pbigordon.com

Tupersan preemergent herbicide controls smooth and large crabgrass, as well as foxtail and barnyard-grass without injuring most germinating cool-season grasses, according to PBI-Gordon. It may be used at the time of seeding, on newly seeded areas and on established turf. It can be applied through broadcast treatments, hydro-seeding applications and chemigation.



ECHELON

COMPANY: FMC Professional Solutions

URL: FMProSolutions.com

With two active ingredients, Echelon controls weeds from the foliage down and from the roots up, with long-lasting residual for preemergent crabgrass control. It also provides pre- and early postemergent control of goosegrass. It's available as a sprayable application or as a dry application on fertilizer for most cool- and warm-season grasses.



TENACITY

COMPANY: Syngenta Turf & Landscape

URL: TenacityHerbicide.com

Tenacity protects cool-season turf, including newly seeded turf, from 46 weeds, such as crabgrass, ground ivy, clover and nimblewill. The herbicide can be used when overseeding, converting bare areas to turf or when removing broadleaf and grassy weeds. Once applied, it translocates throughout the weed and terminates growth within two to three weeks.



DEFENDOR

COMPANY: Dow AgroSciences

URL: DowAgro.com

Defendor specialty herbicide provides early-season control to prevent dandelion bloom. It also provides postemergent control of clover, chickweed and other annual and perennial broadleaf weeds. Defendor is available in a Value Pak that contains Dimension 2EW specialty herbicide, to be tank-mixed for crabgrass and broadleaf weed control.



FERTILIZERS

Ornamine™

ORNAMINE

COMPANY: Spring Valley

URL: SpringValleyUSA.com

Ornamine is a granular fertilizer combined with pre-emergent weed control for use in ornamentals. Its active ingredient controls 30 different weeds, preventing the germination of the weed seeds. According to the company, two applications during the season eliminate the need for manual weed pulling or spot spraying.

DURATION CR

COMPANY: Koch Agronomic Services

URL: KASTurf.com

Duration controlled-release (CR) fertilizer continually feeds turf for up to 180 days per application. With fewer applications, nitrogen use is reduced by up to 40 percent—because plants take up more nitrogen, less is lost to leaching and volatilization.



HOLGANIX GRANULAR WITH STEADY GROW

COMPANY: Holganix

URL: Holganix.com

Holganix Granular with Steady Grow adds microbial life back to the soil, so grass can uptake water and nutrients more efficiently at lower input rates, according to the company. Reduced nitrogen requirements result in less surge growth and ultimately less clippings and mowings. Holganix Granular can be used as a soil restorative and to help meet stricter regulatory levels.



SEGMENTAL RETAINING WALL SYSTEMS



BALTIMORE

COMPANY: Techo-Bloc

URL: Techo-Bloc.com

Baltimore is ideal for multilevel pavilions. It can be used for vertical features such as planters, pillars, water and fire features. The double-sided wall is available in four colors and two sizes—90 mm and 180 mm.



ARTISANA/BRISA/MATIZ WALL SYSTEMS

COMPANY: Anchor Wall Systems

URL: AnchorWall.com

Three new wall systems are made with proprietary Sculpsit technology: Artisana (pictured) has a classic, hand-worked stone appearance. Brisa offers the look of split limestone, while Matiz features a quarried limestone look. Featuring variegated colors, the systems are ideal for curves, terraces, steps, columns and raised patios.



RETAINING WALL BLOCKS

COMPANY: EP Henry

URL: EPHenry.com

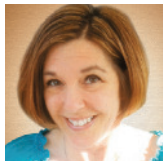
EP Henry retaining wall blocks, offered in a number of shapes, colors and styles, restrain soil and deep slopes. Wall systems, such as the Mesa Retaining Wall pictured here in Harvest Blend, cover a variety of uses, such as gardening walls and retaining fences.



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SafetyWatch hazard list

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

- Lack of hearing protection.
- Lack of eye protection.
- Mowing improperly on a slope (up and down vs. side to side), especially near water.

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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Robert Clinkenbeard

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TEMPE, ARIZ.**

"My wife and I have five kids, including a set of twins who are less than a year old. That keeps me busy."

"My dad used to be a Presbyterian minister. He had older ladies in his congregations who needed help in their gardens, so I used to do that to make some extra money."

"At that point, I got fed up with the red tape and politics. It was a lot of cost cutting. I just wanted to have a change. That's when I decided to move to the U.S. in May of 1999."

"I used to play a lot of rugby in the past, and now I do triathlons and Ironmans. It keeps me out of trouble."

"I'm incoming president for the Arizona chapter of the Entrepreneurs' Organization. I like to work with other entrepreneurs and give back to other businesses. I get up at 4 a.m. to juggle all my stuff."

"I got my college degree in physical education and horticulture. I wasn't sure if I wanted to pursue sports."

"My parents had a vacation house in Phoenix. I wasn't sure what would be the best state for me to move to, so I thought I'd come here first and find my feet. I arrived with two suitcases."

"Great people. Great company. I learned a lot from them and met my business partner John Garigen there."

EDUCATION

Forrester High School and Currie High School
Edinburgh, Scotland
Class of 1988

Scottish Agricultural College
(formerly West of Scotland
Agricultural College)
Auchincruive, Ayr, Scotland
Class of 1992

WORK EXPERIENCE

1988-1992

Garden center worker,
nurseryman
Riccarton Nurseries
Edinburgh, Scotland

1992-1994

Senior client manager
West Lothian Council
Linlithgow, Scotland

1994-1999

Grounds manager,
landscape contracts manager
East Kilbride Development Corp./
South Lanarkshire Council
East Kilbride/Hamilton, Scotland

1999-2001

Account manager
Environmental Care
(now ValleyCrest)
Phoenix

2001-present

Co-owner
Integrated Landscape Management
Tempe, Ariz.



WORDS OF WISDOM "Take care of your clients. They're the ones who pay your bills." • "Make sure you take care of your employees, in terms of paying them well, benefits and regular company events. They're one of your biggest assets." • "Don't necessarily limit yourself to hiring people with landscape or horticulture experience or qualifications."



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