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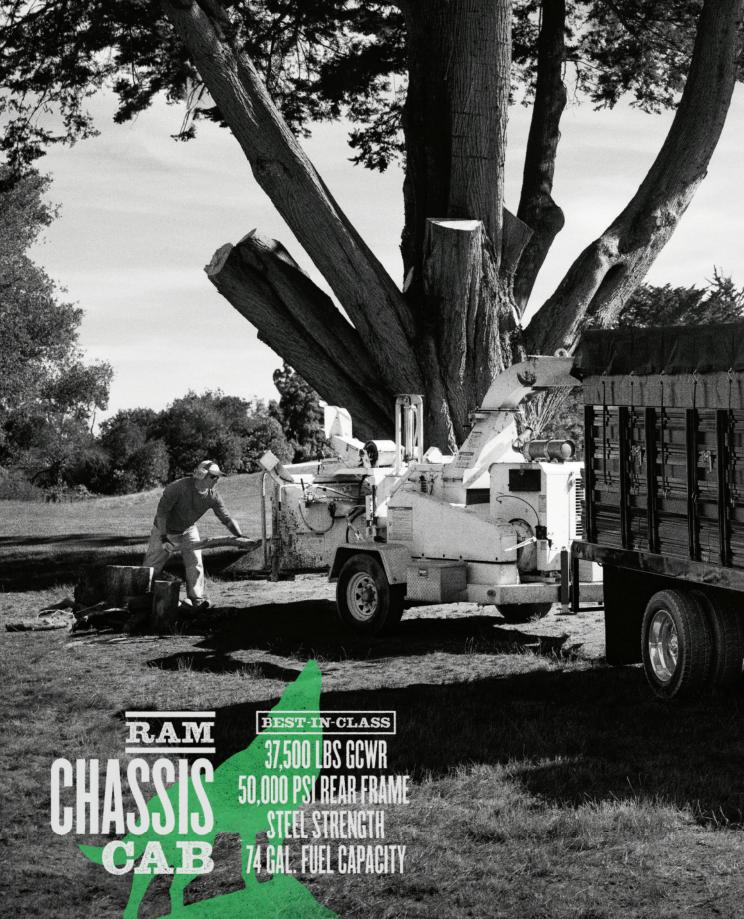
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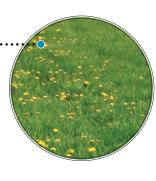
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ON THE COVER: PHOTO BY LAURA WATILO BLAKE



With the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) rebranding next month, we look at its history. (page 80).

THE PROVERBIAL "BIG STICK."



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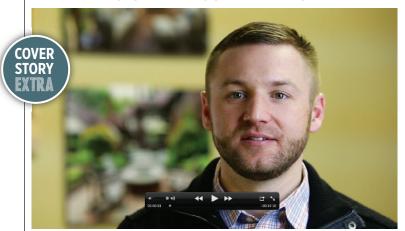
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WEB RESOURCES WORTH SHARING



NEW VIDEO ON LANDSCAPEMANAGEMENT.NET



→ Head to LandscapeManagement.net/video to see Bill Dysert, owner of Exscape Designs, elaborate on points from the cover story. He discusses forming partnerships with builders, how he was able to pull himself away from his business to focus on strategy and his approach to bringing in passionate employees.

Slack

Quit switching between apps with Slack. The platform streamlines team communication by putting all the mobile business services you already use (think Dropbox, MailChimp, Roll Call and a roster of others) in one place—and accessible to your entire team, if you so choose. iOS, Android: Free to \$12.50 per user/month (depending on the plan)



DON'T MISS THE DEADLINE!



It's that time of year again... we're collecting information for the *LM*150, our list of the largest companies in the green industry, ranked by annual revenue. Apply at **buff.ly/1EaAcpC** by April 1 to see if your firm makes the cut.

FACEBOOK FEEDBACK

Our inaugural SafetyWatch story created some buzz on social media. Here's what one Facebook follower said about the problems with this pic:

"Mowing downhill toward a body of water (you) could lose control and go into the drink. (There's also) no safety glasses or hearing protection!"





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MARISA PALMIERI

Contact Marisa at 216/706-3764 or mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net

To the point



For example, someone doesn't "pass away." He or she dies. Workers aren't "downsized." They're fired. The company doesn't sell a "business solution." It manufactures software. Euphemisms are dangerous because they distort the message. By trying to be creative or put a positive spin on something, you confuse people. Instead, you should get right to the point.

Because of my preference for directness. I like the new name for the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). which it announced late last month and will begin using in April. I think the choice, the National Association of Landscape Professionals, is a serviceable, straightforward selection.

I'm sure there are critics, especially those who feel their corner of the industry isn't explicitly listed as part of the name. But I don't think the public distinguishes "lawn care," "maintenance," or "design/build" from one another. Plus, all these specialties do fall under "landscape," which Webster defines as "to make changes to improve the appearance of (an area of land)." Of course, there are other options, such as "green industry," but that choice may be confusing, too. "Landscape" is the most practical way to make the point.

I can't tell you how many times I've talked with LM readers who've given me a blank stare when I asked if they were PLANET members. "You know. PLANET? It's the national association of landscape and lawn care professionals?" I'm sure those of you who are members have had to explain PLANET

Hopefully, the name change will ensure the consumer media starts getting it right. There have been many times I've cringed upon seeing an industry-related news story citing data from the Professional Landscape Network—which does not exist. It's the Professional Landcare Network. But who could blame them? "Landcare," a blend of "landscape" and "lawn care," isn't a term anyone uses. The local reporters who got it wrong were probably either confused or just trying not to use a euphemism.

Or how about when someone tells me, "We're ALCA members," referencing the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, which hasn't been around for a decade. It merged with the Professional Lawn Care Association of America in 2005 to form PLANET.

Of course, the new name is about



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in a similar way.

much more than saving me a 10-second explanation or whether every local gardening reporter has committed the association's name to memory. It's about whether new business owners will find the resources they need when searching for their industry's national trade association. It's about whether the name and logo will resonate with homeowners and property managers when they see them in an email signature. And it's about whether more than just a few thousand companies in this vast industry will finally recognize, join and participate in their national trade association. (9)



MORE ONLINE

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

What leadership advice do you have for younger or newer business owners?

"If you're a PLANET member, take advantage of the free Trailblazer program."

"Surround yourself with some

seasoned professionals

who don't mind giving

Sound advice. I depend

on a great CPA,

attorney, marketing

expert and insurance

professional."

Landscape Professionals

Richard Bare

Arbor-Nomics Turf Norcross, Ga.

Bill Bemus

Bemus Landscape San Clemente, Calif.

Chris Joyce ····

loyce Landscaping Cape Cod, Mass.

----- Adam Linnemann

Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping Waterloo, Ill.

··· Jerry McKay

McKay Landscape Lighting Omaha, Neb.

Greg Winchel

Winchel Irrigation Grandville, Mich.

Industry Consultants

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Newton, N.J.

Jeff Harkness

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Kevin Kehoe ···. 3PG Consulting

Laguna, Calif.

Phil Harwood ro-Motion Consulting

Farmington, Mich.

Frank Ross

3PG Consulting Alpharetta, Ga.

Jeffrey Scott

Jeffrey Scott Inc! Trumbull, Conn.

Jody Shilan

FromDesign2Build.com Upper Saddle River, N.J.

Bruce Wilson

Wilson-Oyler Group Scottsdale, Ariz.

"The biggest lesson you learn as a leader is to show that you make mistakes yourself and you face the same challenges as your team does. It's just a matter of how you solve those problems."

> "Find a mentor—an industry mentor is best but a local, older businessman will work."

"Don't be afraid to ask your people for input—you don't need to know everything.

"Build a t_{eam as} quickly as possible to support Уо<u>и.</u>"



OUR MISSION: Landscape Management shares a comprehensive mix of content designed to stimulate growth and take our readers to their next level.





DETURE PICTURE

SEAMLESS EXPANSION

LOCATION New Hampshire

COMPANY Pellettieri Associates, Warner, N.H.

THE DETAILS When the client purchased an adjacent property, the challenge for Pellettieri Associates was to create a landscape that integrated the newly acquired lot with the original lot. First, the team calculated the area needed for each lot to accommodate an addition to the main house, while meeting the requirements for New Hampshire's **Shoreland Water Quality** Protection Act. A lot line adjustment was granted at the local level, providing the parameters for the design.

Before the main house addition was built, a large platform was built at its exact height and location. From this, the client was able to view mock-ups of the patios, pavilion, boathouse and other site elements. While the effort added a significant amount of time to the project, a time and materials contract provided flexibility necessary for the extra measures.

PHOTO The bell-shaped, main house addition, as viewed from the boathouse, is framed by new hardscape elements and native and ornamental plantings, including dwarf evergreens.

See more photos and learn more about this project, which earned a National Landscape Awards of Excellence Grand Award from the Professional Landcare Network, at Landscape Management.net/BigPicture.



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^{**}Offer ends August 04, 2015. Subject to approved installment credit with John Deere Financial. Up to a 10% down payment may be required. Taxes, freight, setup, and delivery charges could increase monthly payment. Some restrictions apply, so see your dealer for complete details and other financing options. Other special rates and terms may be available. Available at participating dealers.

[†]Less than \$1 a day cost is based upon the upgraded cost of the Tweels and a two year use period of 500 hours per year. MICHELIN® X® TWEEL® is a registered trademark, and MICHELIN® X® TWEEL® TURF® is a trademark, owned by Michelin North America, Inc.

LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY TRENDS, VIEWS AND TIPS

RECOMMENDER

ISSUE BRIEF

STEP BY STEP

NEW STUFF

SAFETYWATCH

KEEPING 157/NBR



onday mornings set the pace for Landscape Lighting Pro of Utah's workweek.

Beginning in 2008, Owner Keith Rosser instated a routine inventory check of all box trucks to reduce—or hopefully nix—any trips back to the shop or to suppliers to retrieve forgotten or unaccounted for service materials.

"Making two trips will never be profitable," Rosser says.
"Not to mention it steals our time from the next job."

Now, he estimates the Monday morning practice has helped the Sandy, Utah-based landscape lighting company gain back two weeks of lost production per year.

The whole process takes about 10 minutes and requires each two-man install crew to reference a simple two-page spreadsheet.

One column has a count of what should be on the truck—anything used on a daily basis like lamps, screws and wire connectors plus items used "once in a blue moon." The other column is blank to be filled in by the technician counting how many items are on the truck. Finally, technicians restock items with what's in the shop inventory.

Nothing is worse than getting to the job site and not having what we need. One big peeve of mine is not only wasting our time, but robbing ourselves of time on the next job.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



Mower engines

Which do you use and why?

Closed-loop electronic fuel injection systems are a trend among manufacturers. Such is the case with Briggs & Stratton Commercial Power's Vanguard 810cc EFI engine, released last year.





MIKE SMITH
PRESIDENT, FOURM
PROPERTY SERVICES
ALLIANCE, OHIO

"We run several models of Kawasaki engines on our Wright Standers, the FH601V has been the model that has lasted the longest. We have mowers that have 4,000-plus hours on them with the original engines. The key to any machine is preventive maintenance and operators that take care of the machines."



JEFF GRIZZLE
OWNER, GRIZZLE
LAWN CARE
SUN CITY CENTER, FLA.

"Kohler gas and Kubota diesel because that's what my Toros have and they haven't let me down. We have a couple Groundsmaster 3500-Ds along with one Reelmaster 3100-D with around 2,000 hours each that have Kubota diesels. All of our Z Masters have Kohler gas engines and run great."



EDWARD PRESSLEY

OWNER, EDWARD & SONS LAWN CARE CHINA GROVE, N.C.

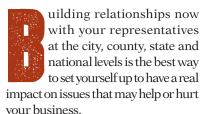
We use both Toro 60-in. 3000 series and Exmark 48-in. walk-behind units. We've used both Kawasaki and Kohler engines in our time of business and prefer Kohler. We believe Kohler is more efficient and the most reliable.



BY SABEENA HICKMAN

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

MEET LEGISLATORS ON THEIR HOME TURF



The best way to make a difference is to make your case directly to the people who make the laws and regulations. As a business owner, it's important to get to know your representatives at all levels of government. Attend community and business meetings, and introduce yourself to them. Let your representatives know about your company and industry. When important issues arise, attend public meetings.

You may think you have to travel to the state capital or to Capitol Hill to meet with your legislators, but they all have local district offices, and they all meet with constituents there. It's often much easier to see them and to get to know their staff when they're in their home districts. Attending fundraisers will get you noticed by staff and legislators. Then, when an important topic arises, you're in a great position to let them know how you feel and how it will impact your business. Legislators listen to their constituents, especially those whose businesses affect the local economy.

After a recent election is a great time to make contact with your new congressmen and senators. Visit PLANET's legislative action center to find a list of legislators by ZIP code. In the center, you also will find prewritten emails you can send them about issues impacting our industry.



golf courses (fairways, aprons, tees, and roughs) and similar turf areas to control clover, dandelion, henbit, plantains, wild onion and many other broadleaf weeds.

A recent study has shown that 2DQ demonstrates faster control of clover at cooler temperatures than the competition.



Innovation you can apply.

Get connected:



STEP BY STEP

How to create an annual bed design

nnual plant beds can add color and appeal to clients' homes and become a new source of revenue for primarily maintenance businesses. But, there's more to creating an eyecatching bed design than just installing plants.

You'll need to understand the space's size, light requirements, existing structures/plants and drainage. Also, talk with clients about their color, style and plant preferences.

- Next, begin preparing the bed's soil. Create a balance of organic soil amendments and native soil.
 Till the soil to blend the two together, and rake to form the desired bed shape. Remember to spec a mulch or rock to give it a clean, complete look.
- When choosing plants, select a variety that have the same light requirements. They should look different but have some underlying similarity, such as color, leaf size or leaf shape. This repetition will give the space a cohesive look. Also, choose plants of varying heights. Remember to include a "pop" or "wow" factor, like plants that attract butterflies or birds. Use colors that complement each other, such as yellows and purples, to make a vibrant statement.
- Install the tallest plants in the back or middle of the bed. Tier the plants forward in height toward the edges of the bed. Unless a plant is a focal point, such as an ornamental tree, include at least three of the same plant in the design, and group all the plants in odd numbers. Plants should be staggered, instead of rowed up, to create a more intriguing design.
- To give the annuals time to establish, and replant the color beds when the season starts to change. For warm season annuals, plant in March, April or early May. You may need to refresh some annual color in July or August. Proper maintenance—such as dead heading, weeding and fertilization—will maximize the performance and longevity of the annuals. ©

Source: Matt Gross, landscape installation manager, Pike Nurseries

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



STEP 1

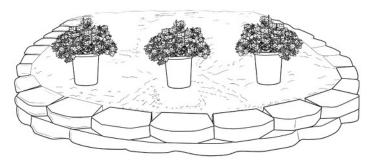
Select various plants with the same light requirements. Choose different sizes and colors that have an underlying similarity.



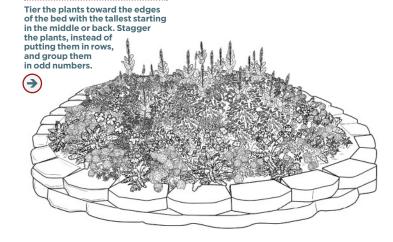
STEP 2

Use at least three of the same plant in the bed, unless one is meant to be a focal point.





STEP 3





NEW STUFF







1. 500S AND 700S UTVS

COMPANY: Exmark Manufacturing **URL:** Exmark.com

Exmark's two side-by-side UTV models, the 500S (pictured) and 700S, feature switch-on-the-fly two- or four-wheel drive and a customizable two-in-one tilting cargo box that quickly transforms from box to flatbed. The UTVs also offer a dual-range automatic transmission. The Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT) design responds to inputs including vehicle speed, load and engine RPM in real time to deliver optimal acceleration and fuel efficiency.

2. JOINT STABILIZING PROTECTOR LINE

COMPANY: Techniseal URL: Techniseal.com

The products in this line, including the JS, JSW and JSS (pictured), are formulated to protect concrete pavers and stop the movement of aggregates (permeable paver joints) or sand (conventional paver joints), according to the manufacturer. They're offered in both natural and wet looks and are available in water- or solvent-based formulations.

3. M-180S SPORTS FIELD SPRINKLER

COMPANY: Underhill International **URL:** Underhill.us

A new addition to the Mirage line of long-throw sprinklers, the M-180S sports field sprinkler features a 177-ft. wide radius and integral electric valve-in-head. It's designed for use on natural and synthetic turf fields and out-of-play areas. Constructed from engineered plastic with stainless steel and brass components, it's adjustable from 30 degrees to 360 degrees. It can irrigate a regulation football, soccer or hockey field with six heads.









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. PRO LANDSCAPE VERSION 21

COMPANY: Drafix Software URL: ProLandscape.com
Version 21 of PRO Landscape contains an array of enhancements, including an expanded image library with new plant material for all climate zones, hardscapes, water features, lighting and more; direct export from CAD to PDF; two new color render modes; and new commands for drawing steps and decks. The software is compatible with Microsoft Windows Vista, Windows 7 and Windows 8. It also will run on a Mac with Windows.

5. ARBOR-OTC ANTIBIOTIC

COMPANY: Arborjet **URL:** arborjet.com

Arbor-OTC is a water-soluble, injectable, systemic antibiotic for the annual suppression of bacterial diseases in non-food-bearing trees and palms. The container comes in a 1 oz. jar, ideal for treating 10 trees or palms at 10-in. diameter at breast height (DBH) in the same day and a 5 oz. container to treat 50 trees or palms at 10-in. DBH. It's not yet registered for use in all states.

6. TR340 AND TV380 CTLS

COMPANY: Case

Construction Equipment

URL: CaseCE.com

The TR340 (pictured) and TV380 compact track loaders (CTLs) are Tier 4 Final and outfitted with selective catalytic reduction (SCR) technology. There are no diesel particulate filters (DPFs) to maintain or replace. The new radial-lift TR340 weighs 10,000 pounds with a rated operating capacity (ROC) of 3,400 pounds. The vertical-lift TV380 weighs 10,550 pounds, providing an ROC of 3,800 pounds.



↑ This photo was staged to show several safety hazards or dangerous work habits. How many can you identify? Flip to page 79 for a list of potential hazards.

Visit LandscapeMangement.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 practice or condone the unsafe methods demonstrated during photo staging.

SAFETYWATCHER SAYS...

I'd like to add that hard hats are very important, especially while looking down on a mower, exposing the head to tree limbs. There are no gardeners in town that wear hard hats. My employees don't like to wear them, but I told them that as long as I pay the workers' comp bill my people will have to wear them.

RONNY NAVARRO

President Ronnys Inc., Los Banos, Calif.





IDEAS AND STRATEGIES TO KEEP YOUR DIVISIONS IN THE BLACK

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ORNAMENTAL CARE

MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

DESIGN/BUILD+INSTALLATION

IRRIGATION+
WATER MANAGEMENT



TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

WITH AND WITHOUT

A look at untreated turf vs. turf treated with Dow Defendor specialty herbicide.



Killer trends

Combination products continue to be the future of turf herbicides.

BY LAUREN DOWDLE

hen it comes to turf herbicide product selection, lawn care a pplicators have noticed some changes—and it's not just limited to lack of new active ingredients.

There have been fewer products coming to the market in the past five to 10 years, says Rodney St. John, Ph.D., agronomist for Ryan Lawn & Tree. The \$27-million company, located in Overland Park, Kan., provides lawn care, seeding, tree and shrub care, irrigation and perimeter pest control for predominantly residential clients.

"There has not been a new mode of action introduced into the lawn care market since HPPD inhibitors (4-Hydroxyphenylpyruvate dioxygenase) were introduced about seven years ago," says Dean Mosdell, Ph.D., field technical manager, Syngenta Turf & Landscape. Still, Mosdell says there are new products introduced to the turf market from agriculture with older modes of action, and there are more combinations of active ingredients to fill weed control gaps.

TURF TRENDS

The herbicide market has slowed down in the past few years in part because of the damage caused by DuPont's Imprelis herbicide, experts say. First used in fall 2010, Imprelis—with the active ingredient aminocyclopyrachlor—was taken off

the market in August 2011 when the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a stop-sale order. The herbicide caused injury to some species of trees, including Norway spruces and white pines.

While manufacturers aren't releasing as many new active ingredients,

there have been other trends catching professionals' attention.

"Combinations have been the biggest trend, and current developments have been all postemergent," says Ken Hutto, FMC Corp.'s technical services manager for herbicides and fungicides.

Continued on page 24



NEWSFEEL

SCOTTS RECONSIDERS

Weeks after Scotts LawnService acquired Marysville, Ohio-based Action Pest Control, the



company is slowing its plans to further grow its pest control division.

Columbus Business First reports.

A NEW INITIATIVE

The Professional Landcare Network partnered with Environmental Science, a division of Bayer CropScience, to launch a multiyear initiative, "FutureScape," with the goal of shaping the future of the lawn care industry.

SWSS HONOREE

The Southern Weed

bestowed its highest award, the SWSS Fellow Award, to Bobby Walls, Ph.D., product develop-

Science Society (SWSS)

ment manager for FMC Professional Solutions.





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TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

PERENNIAL PROBLEM

Dallisgrass is a hard-tocontrol perennial weed that operators would like a solution for and manufacturers have their eyes on.



Continued from page 22

These combinations are taking the place of releasing new molecules, says Dan Loughner, product technology specialist, Dow AgroSciences. "Companies are taking product-specific herbicides to combine with other herbicides to broaden the spectrum," Loughner says. "They're trying to cover as many of the important weeds as possible with these combinations."

One driving force for these trends is the loss of monosodium methyl arsenate (MSMA) for residential and commercial properties. "Many combination products were introduced to address the need for postemergent grass control after the loss of MSMA," Mosdell says.

The focus on postemergent combinations can be traced back to agriculture. Continued on page 26



HELP! LANDSCAPE **PROFESSIONALS** We are actively seeking service our innovative that effectively control mosquitoes and other annoying insects.





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TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

Continued from page 24

"It has to do with the molecules that are being discovered from the crop side of the business," Mosdell adds. "There's also a lot more regulatory hurdles from the EPA, and it's becoming more expensive to introduce new molecules into the market."

PRODUCT RELEASES

With MSMA off the market, Tommy Cowett, agronomist at GrowinGreen, has been testing different herbicides on his properties. The company, located in Kernersville, N.C., has \$2.2 million in annual revenue with 19 full-time employees. It serves residential, commercial and athletic field clients with lawn care, tree and shrub, aquatic weed control and vegetation management services.

New products Cowett is excited about are Tenacity from Syngenta, Last Call from Nufarm and Pylex from BASF Corp. Cowett also uses Holganix in conjunction with herbicides to get better control, he says.

"Most new products seem to focus on specific and difficult-to-control weeds or combine postemergent mono and dicot herbicides as a convenience to the applicator," Mosdell says. More contractors also are beginning to use low-volume, ride-on spreaders to apply herbicides, Hutto adds.

"The biggest thing with those systems is making sure you're getting adequate coverage because those machines and ride-ons put out such low volumes, depending on the active ingredients," he says.

WISH LISTS

There are still some weeds giving operators a difficult time, and the pros say they would like manufacturers to come out with new formulas to help treat them.

"I'd like to have greater tools to remove warm-season grasses from cool-season grasses," St. John says.

On Cowett's wish list are herbicides that selectively take roughstalk bluegrass and dallisgrass out of fescue. "Those are two perennial weeds that can really make a lawn unsightly and hard to maintain," he says.

These difficult-to-control weeds are also on manufacturers' minds. In fact, Hutto says there's a focus on combining three modes of action to control dallisgrass.

At least in the short term, it appears there will be a continuation of combining active ingredients to meet weed-control needs, Mosdell says. "We have not found a complete solution for the loss of MSMA, such as dallisgrass control in cool-season turf," he says, adding he isn't aware of any new herbicide active ingredients that will come out in

the next two to three years for the lawn care industry.

RESISTANCE WATCHERS

Going forward, herbicide resistance is also something contractors and manufacturers are going to have to address.

"In the future, landscape contractors will have to deal with some resistance issues. like what we've seen on golf courses," says Clint Waltz, Ph.D., turfgrass extension specialist at the University of Georgia. "They've used so many herbicides like triazine because they're less expensive. But, they've built up cross-resistance issues. So, they might have to deal with weeds they might not be able to control any more. Resistance and cross resistance are going to be the next big issues the landscape industry is going to have to deal with."

To help with such issues, Hutto encourages applicators to rotate their modes of action.

"One benefit of multiple active ingredients is it could be a good resistance-management tool, instead of having one mode of action attacking the weed," he says.

Loughner says manufacturers also must consider turf tolerance when working on creating new formulas. "The grass has to have tolerance to those herbicides or it won't work," he says. "Turf tolerance is just as important as weed control when it comes to introducing new molecules in this market." "



Dowdle is an Alabama-based freelance writer.



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MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

Hitting the target

How three firms tackle performance goals for maintenance crews, including establishing standards and recognizing employees for meeting or surpassing their marks. BY SARAH PFLEDDERER

PATH TO SUCCESS

ND Landscape Georgetown, Mass.

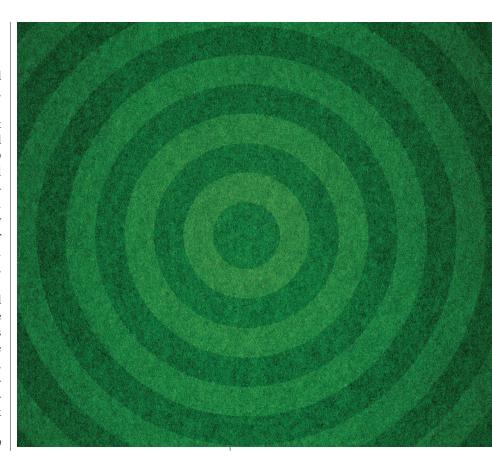
At ND Landscape, it was confirmed with a set of Legos—more specifically, the directions to a set of Legos.

The target was to put a Lego set together as quickly as possible. And the team-building exercise proved ND Landscape's employees performed quicker and more efficiently when referring to the directions versus going rogue.

"It makes so much sense," says Billy Butts, business development manager for commercial maintenance and snow. "Why not give them a formal, written, color-coded set of directions?"

A year later, the company has adopted that same principle in the field in the form of a "path of motion chart" for its six maintenance crews. It's become the foundation for how the \$7 million firm, accruing 50 percent of that annual revenue from maintenance, outlines performance targets for crews and keeps track of whether they're on mark with them.

Continued on page 30



HEADING TO HOUSTON

Dallas-based Southern
Botanical is
expanding to
NICAL Houston.

H-2B HALT

The congressionally mandated H-2B cap has been reached for the first half of fiscal 2015, with 33,000 foreign nationals obtaining H-2B status. All petitions received after Jan. 26 with a requested employment start before April 1 are rejected.

ACQUISITIONS

Morrisville, N.C.-based Yard-Nique acquired Estes Landscape in Sharpsburg, Ga. Tierra Madre merged



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MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

Continued from page 28

"At any time the field operations manager shows up on the job site, he can go to the truck to look at the path of motion and see where crews are on the property," Butts says.

The document provides what tasks each crew members should be doing and where on the property in any given moment of the allotted time for a job. The plan is created from Go iLawn, an online property measurement program, to map out a property and a Gantt chart to indicate how long each piece of equipment should be running and in what particular area of the site. The company is working to create a chart for every site it offers routine services to, Butts says. After that's accomplished, he plans to put in place an incentive program to formally recognize employees for staying on track.

We're in business to make money. Your largest cost on the maintenance side is labor. You have to control that.

-JOHN VALTAKIS

BUDGETED HOURS OR BUST

Reliable Property Services St. Paul, Minn.

As an operations manager at Reliable Property Services, John Valtakis oversees all operations in Minnesota, including 15 mowing crews.

With the majority of Reliable's maintenance accounts being commercial, Valtakis generates "project guides" for every property from a bid template in Microsoft Excel. The guides include budgeted hours for the job. Crews reference those to get a grip on what they need to accomplish in their budgeted hours.

Also, it's Valtakis's job to analyze those hours and communicate to foremen whether their crews are performing on target within the budgeted hours or alarmingly above or below. He also publicizes this by posting reports in the break room every week.

Though Reliable has used the project guides for seven years—the \$27 million firm has been around for eight years—it's only been monetarily incentivizing employees for four years. It does that through scoring their performance in four areas:

- **1.** quality, determined by site inspections;
- **2.** whether they've met budgeted hours;
- **3.** safety, based on workers' comp

claims and accidents; and

4. whether paperwork is turned in on time.

(See sidebar below for more on how to score performance.)

If a crew hits all those scores at the end of the month, the foreman gets a

SCORING PERFORMANCE WITH 'Q3EST'

Bill Arman, head harvester—west coast of The Harvest Group, advises contractors to refer to the acronym Q³EST to define and measure performance targets. Here's what it stands for and how you should use it.

Q: Quantity of work and/or additional assignments, measured by monetary billings or man-hours responsible for;

Q: Quality of work as measured by customers, such as through retention and referrals;

Q: Quality of work as measured by internal quality standards, which must be measured with a quantitative score process, such as by counting the number of dead blossoms on a flower plant;

E: Efficiency, measured by gross margin or actual hours used to perform a job versus the budgeted hours;

S: Safety, measured by number of incidents, accidents or liabilities; and

T: Training and transfer of knowledge—you need foremen who are "willing and capable" of training.

Measure crews or employees in each of these areas on a scale of one to five, Arman says, beginning with measuring safety and then quality work by internal quality standards.

"If you aren't doing quality work, nothing else really matters," Arman says. "You have to do it safely, too."

Foremost, communicate to employees even before they're hired what they'll be scored on and what's expected of them. In addition, reward them accordingly when they surpass their targets, and know recognition "is not always about money," Arman says.

"It's about being feeling important and acknowledged," he says. "The simplest way to do that is use their name when you speak with them. ... Acknowledge they exist, they are a person, they are a part of your team and without them you wouldn't be able to do what you do."



Rill Arman



bonus of \$250 and each crew member receives \$100, Valtakis says.

At the end of the day, it's all about having a good handle on your crews, he adds.

"We're in business to make money," he says. "Your largest cost on the maintenance side is the labor. You have to control that."

KEEP IT CUSTOMER-CENTRIC

Go Green Gardeners Van Nuys, Calif.

At Go Green Gardeners, maintenance crews don't step foot on a new job site before Owner Anne Phillips steps out of the client's home with an ink-splattered piece of paper in hand.

Without "the form," supervisors have no way to communicate to crews what they must accomplish and how within the budgeted hours. It outlines maintenance crews' performance targets for the property based on the customers' expectations—all the way down to what type of equipment to use, such as electric versus gas, and how they like their hedges or shrubs trimmed.

The firm has used this simple method for five years now. Doing about \$250,000 in annual revenue, with 40 percent of that attributable to maintenance, the company typically runs two maintenance crews of about four people each.

In terms of rewarding crews for hitting their marks, Go Green Gardeners is in an unusual situation in that it subcontracts its maintenance work through a nonprofit, giving Phillips no control over wages or bonuses. An added layer to partnering with the nonprofit is that the crews are comprised of developmentally disabled adults, plus two supervisors. This makes incentivizing for a job well done a bit different, too. "We move them up within the crew so they can learn different skill sets," Phillips says. "They can rake, then we train them how to use the mower and the blower and then go on to more detailed pruning or how to repair irrigation systems."



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Quality work and the additions of new skills and services has helped Mullin Landscape Associates surpass expectations.

BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER

hase Mullin swore he would "never mow grass." But today, the president of Mullin Landscape Associates does just that and then some. The \$4.6-million, full-service company in New Orleans has continued to evolve since its beginnings in 2007. While Mullin is humble about his success, he credits his company's growth to embracing diversification as needs changed and by

never settling for anything but the best he and his crews have to offer.

"We are doing things that aren't unique, but we're doing them well," Mullin says. "We are doing things that everyone should be doing but can't."

Despite a background in construction and a love of the outdoors, Mullin's entrance into the landscape industry was slightly unexpected. After Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, Mullin found himself working alongside a family friend who was using her landscape architecture skills to help rebuild the city. After gaining more experience working for a local full-service company, Mullin set out on his own with a Jeep, a trailer borrowed from a friend and 12 weekends of work lined up. Within three months, he was able to invest in a truck and a trailer of

his own and employ a three-man crew. Mullin says he was fortunate with how quickly things ramped up.

"I still wasn't sure landscaping was what I wanted to do for a living," Mullin says. "But I had a client—who is still a client today—who was so impressed that we showed up and did what we said we were going to do. I realized this was something I could do long term."

While he started out doing strictly plant installation and maintenance, Mullin quickly found diversification was going to be key to his company's growth and success. Today, design/build and irrigation comprise 70 percent of his business, and mowing and maintenance make up the remaining services offered to his 80 percent residential and 20 percent commercial clientele.

Continued on page 42

JDL TO BUY SHEMIN

John Deere Landscapes (JDL) reached an agreement to acquire



Shemin Landscape Supply. Terms were not disclosed. The deal came about a month after Shemin unveiled plans to expand in Dallas/ Fort Worth.

EXCAVATOR OPTIONS

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Associate professor, turfgrass weed science
University of Tennessee

Brosnan's research focuses on effective and economical strategies for broadleaf and grassy weed control in various turfgrass systems, including golf courses, athletic fields, and residential landscapes. He serves as an advisor to the Tennessee Turfgrass Association Board of Directors and is actively involved in the Weed Science Society of America, Southern Weed Science Society, and Sports Turf Managers Association.

Business speaker: **Harold A. Enger, CTP, COLP** *Director of Education* Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp.

Enger has worked in the green industry for more than 35 years, with Spring-Green since 1997. He conducts 16 regional professional development seminars for Spring-Green's 77 franchise owners and their employees in 26 states, in addition to counseling new franchise owners on application procedures, diagnosis, calibration and safety. He has been a panelist at the Green Industry Conference and serves on the board of directors for the Illinois Professional Lawn Care Association and is a board member for Project EverGreen.





This webinar is approved for PLANET Landscape Industry Certified recertification at 1 CEU per hour of instruction attended.



Continued from page 32

Adding mowing has helped Mullin Landscape Associates survive economic downturns and weather through tough times.

This diversity also has allowed the firm to become a turnkey solution for all of its clients' outdoor needs—one of Mullin's greatest joys is seeing through a multifaceted project from start to finish. From pools and outdoor kitchens, to pest management and green roofs, there's little his crews can't do. Mullin adds that the New Orleans climate allows for an interesting mix of temperate, tropical plants and unique structural designs to match the city's historical architecture. These bonuses let his designers' creativity shine.

"When people ask what our niche is, I say it's that we can take a project from start to completion, no matter how detailed it is," Mullin says. "Some companies might do the landscape and irrigation, but a fireplace scares them. We can do all that."

BUILDING A STAFF

These added services have increased Mullin's need for high-quality employees. Finding them is one of the company's biggest challenges. Mullin utilizes online and college recruitment services and has hired all his landscape designers from Louisiana State Univer-





sity's top-rated landscape architecture program. In 2014, Mullin placed a renewed emphasis on employee training. He implemented weekly training sessions for all managers, a monthly training course for all production team members and more in-depth training for the whole staff on a quarterly basis. The company encourages ongoing education and reimburses team members for earning additional certifications and licenses, which Mullin says adds value to the employee as well as to the company.

"It's important to hire the right people and trust that they are capable of doing as good of a job, or better, than I could do," Mullin says. "Then you have to develop them, take care of them and make them feel appreciated. They want to see there's a future and that the company is going places."

Implementing systems was another challenge Mullin Landscape Associates had to overcome to get where it is today. From consistent job descriptions to a scripted sales process, the systems ensure each employee does the job he or she is supposed to do the way it's supposed to

be done. Mullin established an executive committee of upper-level managers that meets once a week to ensure systems and processes are flowing and being implemented in predetermined time frames. The company also is working with several industry consultants to assist in systems development, which Mullin says has provided everyone a fresh perspective.

"When I first started out, I would read about systems but couldn't wrap my head around how important they are," Mullin says. "My advice would be to implement them sooner rather than later. It's easier to do as a small company than it is when you get bigger."

But from day one, Mullin's main mantra has been to always do the best work possible. From that first client's early words of encouragement, he has strived to maintain a level of service that he can be proud of and that will keep his customers coming back.

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

PHOTOS: MULLIN LANDSCAPE ASSOCIATES









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IRRIGATION+WATER MANAGEMENT



Sustainability standards faceoff



We compare and contrast how the LEED and Green Globes rating systems for green buildings allocate points for irrigation and water efficiency.

BY SARAH PFLEDDERER

ith the General Services Administration recognizing both the Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) and Green

Globes programs as credible standards for green buildings, we examine the similarities and differences between the rating systems in terms of how points are allocated for landscape irrigation and water efficiency.

But first, let's view the programs from the top down, looking at how their purposes and processes do or don't align.

Both rate the sustainability of a building's design, construction and maintenance on four levels of certification using a point-based system.

Green Globes, instituted in 2004 through the Green Building Initiative, operates on a 1,000-point scale. LEED, introduced through the U.S. Green Building Council in 2000, has a 110-point system. Landscaping- and irrigation-related points more heavily factor into LEED certifications versus Green Globes certifications, LEED allocates 10 percent of its total available points to landscaping and irrigation, whereas Green Globes allocates just 5 percent of its total points. Finally, here are some factors that play into how points are allotted for both systems.

GREEN GLOBES

- at least 25 percent of landscaping must be nonirrigated to begin earning points
- additional points are awarded for attention to nonpotable water (such as through submetering potable systems and seeking out alternate water sources)
- drip irrigation warrants points
- can earn points for water efficient products (such as those that are WaterSense-labeled and tested under the Smart Water Application **Technologies protocols)**
- · points awarded for swing joints or flex pipes for in-ground sprinklers
 - plantings factor into points (such as having drought tolerant plants, vegetation requiring no irrigation and minimal turfgrass)
 - · no prerequisites required

LEED

- points are most heavily allocated to projects that significantly reduce or do not require irrigation
- points are provided for metering water usage
- incorporate and/or favor **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency** (EPA) WaterSense program in some vicinity
 - points may be allocated for regulating rainwater (such as through water harvesting, directed downspouts or cisterns for **Green Globes and rainwater** management for LEED)

- irrigation or landscape water use must be reduced by 50 percent or more to begin earning points
 - · water meter required
 - reduced irrigation amounts determined by WaterSense **Water Budget Tool**
 - must satisfy prerequisites

SOURCES: Irrgation Association,

Search online for "Green Globes and LEED" and you likely will be flooded with scholarly studies and articles comparing these rating systems. Here's the general consensus on the programs based on a few factors.

- 1. Price. Generally, Green Globes is regarded as the less expensive route of certification. Part of this conclusion is due to consultation fees for on-site assessments. Green Globes applicants simply are assigned an assessor, whereas LEED applicants typically must hire a LEED-certified consultant for their assessment and to navigate the application process. In addition, Green Globes charges a flat rate for certification, whereas LEED's prices are based on a project's square footage.
- **2. Ease of use.** Green Globes is often deemed as having the easier application process. In fact, many coin it as the preferred system for "do-it-yourselfers" because the application is mainly conducted online and doesn't entail hiring an assessor or consultant.
- **3. Reputation/credibility.** Generally, LEED is considered to have the upper hand to Green Globes, given it's been around longer and has a track record of more than 50,000 certified projects worldwide. Also, critics have accused Green Globes of "greenwashing" for being financially supported by vinyl, chemical, wood and plastic manufacturers.



JOHN DEERE DEAL

John Deere Green Tech, a technology solutions group under John Deere Landscapes, now is an authorized distributor of Rain Bird Corp.'s Maxicom and Site Control central control products in Florida.

IRRIGATION APP

IrriGreen designed an app for its Genius Irrigation System. Compatible with iOS and Android devices, the Genius Mobile App allows contractors to compute and adjust stream volumes, directions and distances for each sprinkler, among other tasks.



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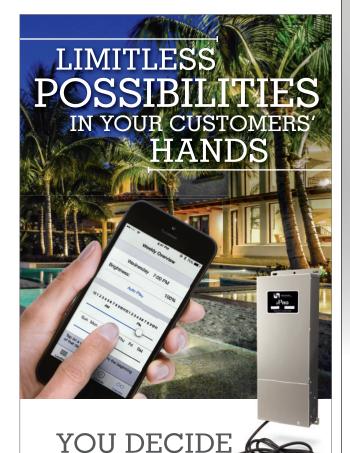


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800-766-8478 www.vistapro.com fter all, one of his first work experiences was helping out at his neighbor's excavating business. Moving dirt seemed like a pretty good way to make a living.

In high school his grades were adequate—good enough to keep his parents and teachers off his arned about Auburn Career Center,

back—but when he learned about Auburn Career Center, a local vocational school, he knew it was the place for him. He entered the landscape horticultural program, which was as close to excavating as you could get.

Dysert worked for local landscape companies and went to college for business, but after a few years he realized he didn't want to wait any longer to get his own gig. So, he founded Exscape Designs in 2004. It wasn't easy, and he worked himself ragged for the next few years, learning along the way.

"I've always considered myself a student of the green industry," says Dysert, 33. He's a member of the Ohio Landscape Association (OLA). He belongs to the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), has participated in its Trailblazer program and attends its annual Green Industry Conference as often as he can. For a few years, he joined a landscape industry peer group.

But his studies extend beyond what the landscape industry has to offer. He watched his parents navigate

their own small businesses: His mom ran a cleaning company, and his dad started a small building firm. He completed a 10-month leadership program offered by a nonprofit in his county. And he's now a member of Entrepreneurs' Organization, a network of business owners with chapters in many cities globally.

BUSINESS BREAKDOWN

COMPANY: Exscape Designs
LOCATION: Chesterland, Ohio,
about 30 miles east of Cleveland
REVENUE: \$2.8 million in 2014;
\$3.3 million projected for 2015
PROFIT CENTERS: 85% design/
build+installation; 9% mowing+
landscape maintenance; 1% turf+
ornamental care; 5% snow+ice
management

CLIENT MIX: 95% residential;

5% commercial

EMPLOYEES: 12 full-time: 10 seasonal

But all the education in the world is nothing without execution. And Dysert has proved that once he's mapped out a plan, he and his team can see it through.

The result has been great growth for Exscape Designs. The company was named the No. 1 Upstart category winner on the 2014 Case Western Reserve University Weatherhead 100 list of the fastest growing companies in Northeast Ohio for its 454 percent growth over five years.

Continued on page 50





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The growth hasn't been without challenges. Thankfully, Dysert has had the self-awareness and support of a strong team to course correct along the way—for the good of the company and his own well-being.

BUILDING A BRAND

One of Exscape's first moments of truth came in 2008. At the time, the company, which had about six employees and was doing about \$500,000 in annual revenue, derived most of its work from bid/build arrangements with a pool of landscape architects and designers with whom Dysert had established relationships. Then the effects of the Great Recession began to set it, work dried up and revenue declined. He realized what he had wasn't really a business. He still had a job, but it was one with many more burdens such as payroll, taxes and risk.

"It quickly became a 5 a.m. to midnight schedule," he says. "I thought, 'If this is what owning a business is all about, I don't know if I want it."

Like many small business owners, something clicked when Dysert read "The E-Myth Revisited" by Michael Gerber. He realized he was still a "technician," as defined by the book. Often, he was still the guy moving dirt. To have

Continued on page 52

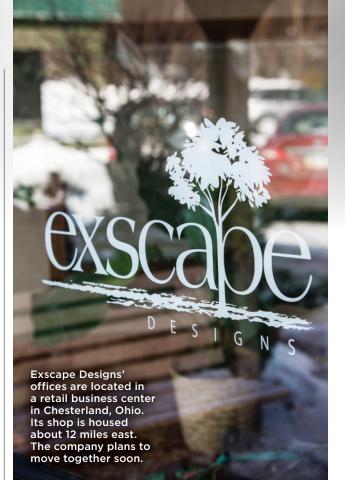


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Continued from page 50

the business—and the life—he really wanted, he'd have to develop into a manager and, eventually, transform into a true entrepreneur who spends his time on strategy, focusing on the future and creating a vision for the business. He made a plan to move down that path, deciding he wasn't going to get there doing bid/build work for designers and architects as the primary source for projects—being at the mercy of their ability to generate leads and sell work.

"It was time to build a brand, and I felt we could compete in the design/build space," Dysert says. He secured a line of credit, purchased some more equipment and, most importantly, mapped out a marketing plan. He worked with a graphic designer at a local printing company to create a logo and some marketing collateral, he used data to determine what clients he'd be most successful working for (see sidebar on page 54) and he began pursuing relation-

ships with home remodelers, builders and architects to generate referrals from this type of client.

Dysert didn't disassociate with the landscape design professionals he previously worked with; in fact, he still worked with some of them, but now he was the one selling the jobs.

FINDING BALANCE

By 2010 it was evident the marketing plan was paying off, Dysert says; plus, the economy was rebounding. Exscape Designs doubled its revenue from 2009 to 2010, hitting \$1 million. The next year the company grew another 30 percent and added a production manager, which allowed Dysert to exit the field to spend more of his time running the business.

There was good news. He and his wife, Kali, welcomed their first child, a daughter. But the 80 to 90 hours he was working per week weren't sustainable. He gained 20

Continued on page 54



"I don't want to feel like my business is running me."



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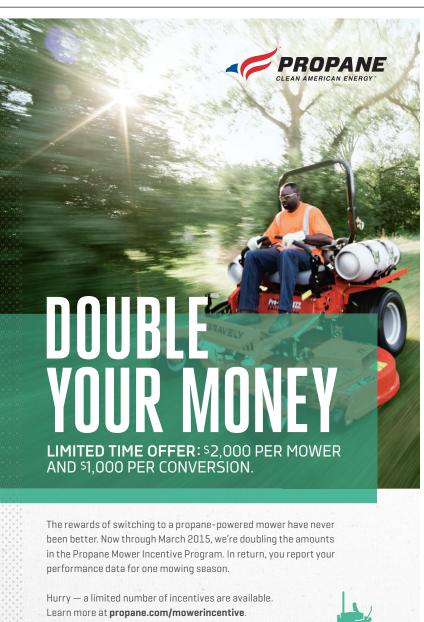
Continued from page 52 pounds and felt depressed with his lack of work/life balance.

"I realized if I didn't make some changes now I could lose everything," Dysert says.

He took up running and cycling to relieve stress, and he even completed a marathon in December 2011. He knew he needed to put wellness first, lead a more balanced life to be the husband, father and leader he wanted to be.

Again, the company grew, reaching \$1.6 million in 2012. He hired a full-time designer/salesperson, freeing him up more to focus on management and strategy. A baby boy joined the Dysert family, and things seemed good.

Continued on page 56





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FINDING ITS SWEET SPOT

When Dysert decided to move away from his company's original bid/build model and become a design/build company, he knew he needed to define his ideal clients so he could market to them effectively.

To do so, he looked at his historical customer information to see where the bulk of the work came from. It's something any business owner can do, either with pen and paper, a spreadsheet or by using QuickBooks, he says.

"You can pretty quickly put together a spreadsheet and understand the profile of the customers you're working for and the referral sources that are feeding you that work," Dysert says.

Beyond just identifying from where the company was getting most of its work, he looked at which jobs were the most profitable and what work he and his team members enjoyed performing the most. For Exscape, high-end residential design/build was the answer.

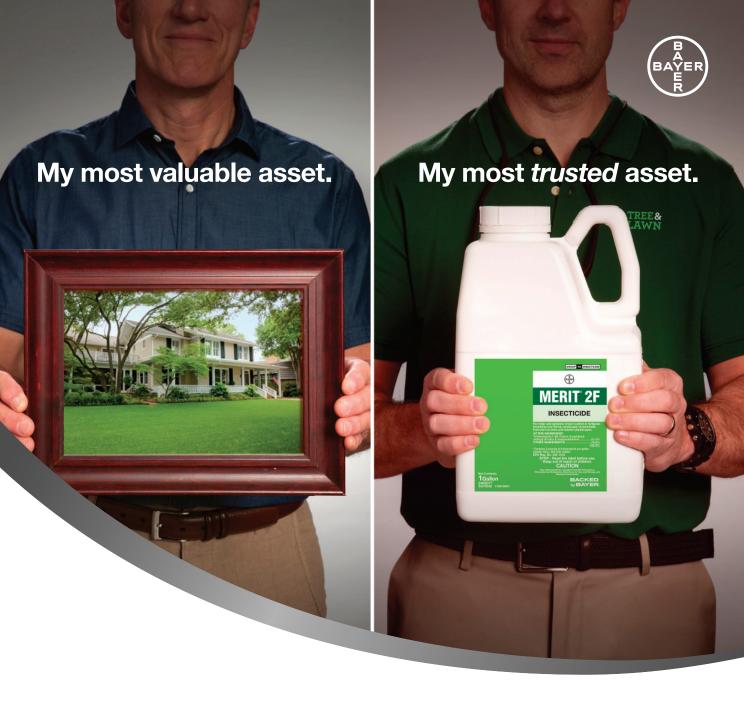
"Although profit is very important and we need to be a profitable business, we want to enjoy the work we're doing because if we're not happy doing the work, (customers) are going to see that, they are going to feel it." And the result, Dysert concludes, will be a less-than-excellent customer experience, which could inhibit referrals.

There are no silver bullets in marketing, he adds, but referrals are about as close as you can get.

"For us, focusing on existing customers and referrals has been best," he says. Exscape doesn't have a formal referral program nor does it offer an incentive for referrals, but Dysert's team does routinely ask clients for them around the time the job comes to a close.

They simply ask, "Do you know of anyone else who could benefit from our services?" And if the client says yes, they follow up with, "Would you be willing to set up an introduction?"

About two-thirds of the company's work comes from referrals; the rest comes from a mix of efforts, such as social media, Houzz, print advertising and the company's website.









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Continued from page 54

The following year brought more growth—another 30-plus percent. Exscape added an administrative assistant, and the company moved out of its home office to an office complex in town to be closer to its customers.

In September, Dysert scheduled a mountain biking getaway to Utah with his father. On day five of a seven-day trip, they received devastating news. His younger sister died unexpectedly. She was 29, and she left behind two children.

"You begin to think about things in a way you didn't before," Dysert says of the impact his sister's death had on him. "You kind of reprioritize your life and the things that are important to you. You begin to lean on people in a way you didn't before. Maybe it's not as important as it was before to get right back to a voice mail or email within an hour. Or maybe you realize you have to rely on team members to add support in that area."

He's grateful for his staff members and how they helped him during his family's difficult time. Many of them stepped up, and he says he hopes sharing this detail helps other owners realize they don't have to wait for a tragedy to strike before allowing their teams to take on more responsibility.

"Delegate and empower the people you hire," Dysert says. "That's why they're there and, ultimately, that's what they want, too—the opportunity to step up and grow."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In 2014 Exscape Designs hit \$2.8 million in annual revenue, added a full-time landscape architect and a director of operations. More importantly, the company executed a plan Dysert created in 2012.

"I cast a vision to 2014 and we hit it almost spot on," he says. The plan encompassed financial benchmarks, but it also outlined the customer, culture and values-based goals for the company. Dysert is working on a new strategic plan for 2015-2017, and there's no reason not to believe the company won't meet his three-year vision to be a \$10 million firm.

Growth will come from a few areas, he says. A natural step is maintenance, which makes up about 15 percent of the company's revenue today. Exscape added the service

Continued on page 58



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- Understanding how to "pre-plan" operations to align with pre-bill scenarios.



- Utilizing advance scheduling to manage away overtime.
- · Making material purchase decisions based solely on customer-provided cash.
- Establishing a line of credit with your own cash instead of borrowing from a bank.

PRESENTER: Steven Bach



Steven Bach is a success coach at LandOpt, a licensor of business systems and processes to more than 30 landscape companies across the U.S. He coaches and mentors Powered by LandOpt Contractors, focusing on training, implementation and adherence to the LandOpt System. With more than 10 years of sales and management experience, Bach utilizes his broad-based knowledge of sales, business trends and best practices to ensure continuous success for the contractors he serves. To learn more, visit www.landopt.com.

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Continued from page 56

five years ago, realizing that by not offering ongoing landscape care it was walking away from a service its customers wanted. The company added a maintenance account manager in 2011 and has let the service grow organically to date. The goal in the short term is to get maintenance to about 30 percent of the company's mix—with a longterm goal of getting it to 50 percent to provide stability.

"We've found it to be very rewarding in terms of longerlasting relationships, more projects that spur from that network and also that reoccurring revenue stream that you don't have to rebuild every year," Dysert says. He has his eye out for other opportunities, too.

But the true test of Exscape's ability to execute will be whether by 2017 the leadership team is running the day-today operations, with Dysert focusing totally on vision and strategy. Achieving that goal would mean he's met Gerber's definition of a true entrepreneur.

MEETINGS WITH PURPOSE

One challenge Exscape Designs faces is having its team split between two locations. The management team is housed in a 1,400-foot office in a business complex in Chesterland, while production is located on a 1-acre lot about 12 miles east in Claridon Township.

The team is used to being apart; it's operated this way for years. Still, Dysert plans to move the entire company together as soon as possible.

In the meantime, to keep the lines of communication open, it has weekly Tuesday morning meetings where the whole team gathers at the production location.

In addition to discussing the schedule and upcoming jobs, the meeting includes company updates, like announcing birthdays, anniversaries and team outings. Additionally, Dysert rotates which member of the leadership team presents at the meeting each week.

"It's good for everyone to get the opportunity to lead in front of the team," he says.

For several years Dysert also hosted quarterly business development meetings with the whole company. These meetings have gone on hiatus for the time being, but he recommends them to others who are developing their culture and looking to gain employee buy-in.

Exscape primarily used them to show team members how they could help "fill the gap" between where the company was at any given time and where Dysert wanted it to be.

"A lot of low-hanging fruit comes out and (team members) feel like they're part of something bigger." he says, explaining how one crew had an idea about how to better organize the shop and another needed a new set of inexpensive tools, unbeknownst to the leadership team. "It's a lot of the little stuff that you lose focus on when you're growing so fast."















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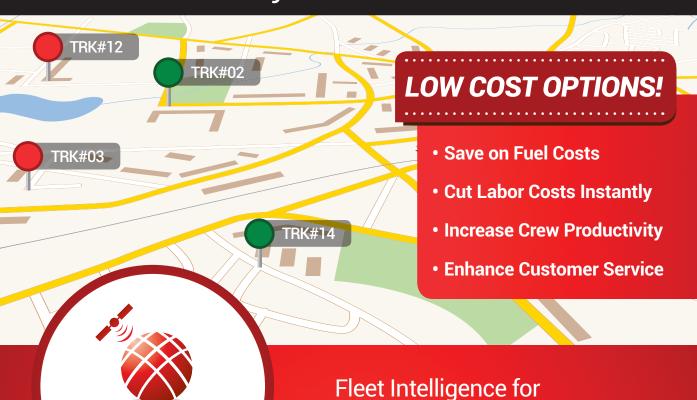
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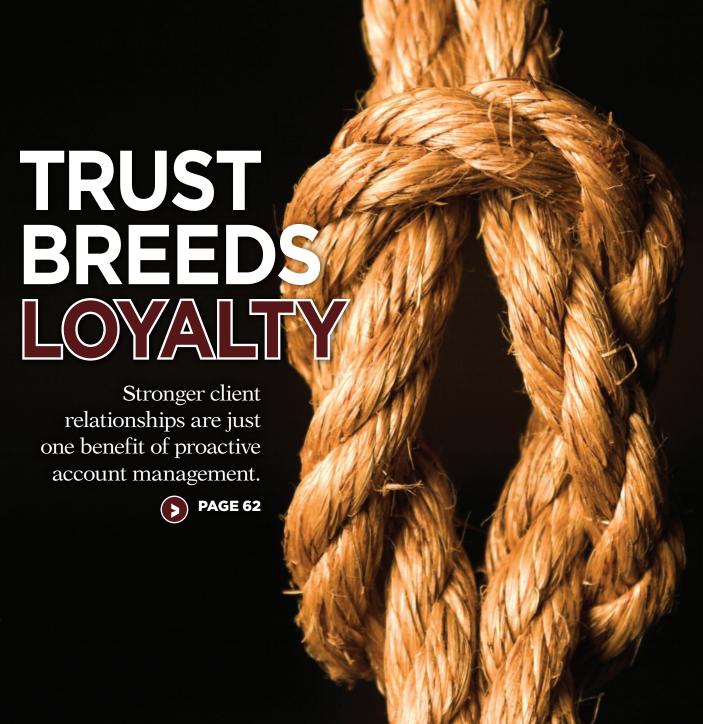
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10 reasons to proactively manage accounts



BY PHIL HARWOOD

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

n many companies account management takes a back seat to sales and operations. These organizations may sell and produce volumes of work, but they miss out on the best part—the ongoing relationship. In doing so, they fail to reap the many benefits that come with great, proactive account management. These include the following.

1. Higher renewal rate. This may be obvious, but it truly is the most important benefit and one that's not given as much credit as it deserves. Even a small increase in your client renewal rate will yield exponentially greater profit due to the associated benefits that come with customer retention. In one example, a 5 percent increase in renewal rate produced a 50 percent increase in profit.

2. Reduced sales staff. One reason profits soar with an increased renewal rate is the reduced need for sales staff or reduced hours devoted to sales activity. Savings are realized when these hours are freed up and redirected toward other activities. What could you do with a couple hundred extra hours a year?

Proactively managing accounts also leads to a smaller marketing budget since there's less of a need to drive new business when renewal rates

3. Reduced marketing budget.

are high. When existing customers are taken care of, they spend more money. There's not a lot of marketing required in this situation.

Please don't misunderstand. Marketing is an essential element to business success. My point is that marketing expenses may be reduced as proactive account management practices are implemented.

4. Increased service scope.

We've all heard it said that people buy from people they like. These same people buy more from people they trust. Of course, trust isn't present in the relationship at the onset; the opposite is true. Therefore, when you earn clients' trust over time, they naturally will buy more from you, increasing the scope of your services and profits.

One benefit of proactively managing accounts is the abundance of work that never goes out to bid.

5. Increased gross margins.

How would your P&L look if you were to increase your gross margin a few points? Do the math. You might be amazed at the impact. Proactive account management, relationship building and trust have a nice effect on pricing pressure—they remove it. Prices may still matter but not as much. The value of the relationship—the trust that's been built up over years—is way more important to the customer than the size of your invoice.

6. Increased portfolio growth.

Opportunities often exist to grow within a customer's portfolio. This is certainly true when working with property managers but is also true when working with manufacturers, retailers, government agencies and more. Portfolio growth occurs naturally and almost effortlessly for the proactive account manager. For everyone else, these opportunities appear as bids.

7. Increased referrals. Only the most satisfied customers make quali-

fied referrals. The marginally satisfied aren't going to go out of their way. And forget about dissatisfied customers. When was the last time you gave a referral? Most likely, it was for someone you know and care about—someone you want to help. Your customers are no different. They are more likely to refer you when there's been an investment in the relationship and they feel taken care of.

8. Increased no-bid work. One benefit of proactively managing accounts is the abundance of work that never goes out to bid. Instead, it's just handed to you on a silver platter. Plenty of examples exist of even large-scale projects handed to the incumbent without a competitive bidding process. Your customers are busy people and there's an expense involved with managing a bid process. If you've established a deep relationship based on trust, these opportunities will rarely go out to bid.

9. Improved terms/conditions.

Another benefit is terms and conditions, which may be relaxed over the years to be more in your favor. This change may occur formally with revised contract language, informally within the context of personal relationships or both. Either way, the proactive account manager benefits from these improved terms and conditions.

10. Personal rewards. Finally, there are personal rewards related to serving customers at a high level, seeing how they benefit and, in turn, seeing benefits flow back into your organization. Proactive account managers who develop deep relationships with customers gain more than profit; they gain personal satisfaction of a job well done.

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Zero-debt growth



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.

an you grow fast and still maintain a zero-debt company? The answer is undeniably *yes*. But it takes time, effort and saved-up capital before your growth will accelerate.

Why do contractors run debt free? They do it for peace of mind, better negotiating terms, stable home life, less money stress, personal philosophical reasons and simply because of habit. Here's a look at some attributes of debt-free companies.

ZERO-DEBT COMPANIES:

- Buy equipment and trucks; used equipment can be better than new.
- Keep owner's income artificially low—at least initially, and it depends on growth.
- See high retained earnings.
- Don't price out of fear. You have to sell to clients who will pay for your overhead, equipment and profit.
 No low-balling.
- Pay accounts payable immediately (in almost all cases). Relationships with vendors are strategic in nature; they become your partner.
- Are transparent with debt philosophy and use of profits. In fact, it's used as a recruiting tool. Good employees who have been burned before will be attracted to your firm.

Should you convert? A company can make the switch, but it has to do three things: unwind its leverage (debt), build up a bankroll of savings and all the while finance its continued growth. This is the triple challenge.

TO GET STARTED:

Fix your accounts receivable issues (get it down to 15 days—30 days for homeowners associations).



2Ensure no maintenance or install contracts are upside down.

3 Set some benchmarks to measure weekly/monthly, for example: accounts payable under 30 days (and later to zero days) and have a bank line of credit only in peak months. Then build up a cash cushion to buy future equipment while you pay off current equipment debt.

4 Don't worry about your mortgage (unless it's variable, in which case you may want to accelerate payments.) Have a plan to pay off your other bank debt ASAP.

EYE ON THE BALL

It takes effort to switch, but it might be worth it depending on your circumstances. To be a successful zerodebt firm you must maintain high profitability and cash flow—this, of course, is good for any company. Aim for 16 percent net-to-owner (after depreciation) and save. The higher your retained earnings, the easier it will be to make the switch.

Zero-debt companies grow slow until they have built up a large head of steam. For example, I'm mentoring a multimillion dollar firm that had 15 years of slow, steady growth; but this year it had a 30 percent-plus jump in profitable growth. It takes time.

Purchasing becomes a balanced, strategic activity. On one hand, zero-debt firms wait until they can prove the need for a new piece of equipment before buying it; on the other, they have the cash to jump at an opportunity when it presents itself.

Naysayers will tell you (rightly) that you can grow faster with leverage—and that's true in theory. Don't just jump on the bandwagon of zero-debt; treat it with the seriousness of a religious conversion. Do it only if you are ready to change habits and only if your values align with this approach.

Is there a type of company best suited for the zero-debt way? No; rather, it's a mindset. Company leaders must be efficient, cash smart, numbers focused, confident in sales, good savers, goal oriented; good negotiators, able to rent, risk averse and transparent with employees.

What if for one year you treated your business as a zero-debt firm? You would shift focus from growth to profits, cash, vendor relationships, employee buy-in, etc. How would you make decisions differently? (



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Staged to se

One landscape company helps clients sell their homes. BY CASEY PAYTON

s Michael Schmechtig observed real estate staging become popular and help sell homes, he got an idea. Buyers get their first impression of

a home before they even get through the door—so why not stage the exterior? He put the idea in motion in 2010, when his company, Schmechtig Landscapes in Mundelein, Ill., added exterior staging to its service roster.

Since launching the service, Schmechtig Landscapes has worked with real estate agents and their clients to stage properties for faster sales.

"If the landscape looks like it was well taken care of, it immediately gives the buyer a good impression of the overall home," Schmechtig says.

Due to the specialized nature of this service, there's not a set pricing structure, Schmechtig says. Clients agree to a staging plan and the projects are then priced based on time and materials. A simple staging that includes new mulch and bed weeding could cost several hundred dollars. A more elaborate staging project including mulch, new plantings and seasonal containers could run closer to \$5,000.

Schmechtig prefers adding color at the front door to boost curb appeal.

"Any time you add color, you're bringing attention to the area and making it a focal point," he says. "So if the seller has a nice entrance way, color helps make a good first impression."

While there's little investment required for a staging service, it requires a good designer. "Exterior staging projects are usually not big budget projects; you need to have



someone who has a good eye for aesthetics," Schmechtig says. "That is, someone who can take an unattractive landscape or neglected yard and quickly—and inexpensively—turn it around."

Most jobs are sold and designed by maintenance account managers or landscape designers. Installations are performed by maintenance enhancement crews or construction crews, depending on the scope of the project.

Marketing the service is a challenge, Schmechtig says. Many homeowners simply don't know this service exists, likely because sellers who require a landscape fix-up aren't the type of homeowners who've had a landscape company caring for their properties. Schmechtig has found routes to reach prospects through introducing the exterior staging service to local real estate agents, interior staging professionals and interior designers, getting on their radars with one-on-one meetings, networking events and office presentations. Schmechtig Landscape also lists the service on its website.

The result has been a handful of projects per year, adding about \$50,000 to the company's annual revenue, plus exposure to clients who may need other services in the future.

The firm also has done exterior staging for parties and events such as graduations and weddings. Unlike staging for a home sale, event

staging is a service Schmechtig Landscapes offers only to existing clients. Buyers of landscape staging services are often looking for quick fixes.

"It all goes back to our mission; we are a full-service landscape company and nurture long-term relationships with our clients," Schmechtig says. "We never want our clients calling someone else to get something done on their property."

Payton is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.

BUSINESS BREAKDOWN

COMPANY: Schmechtig Landscapes

LOCATION: Mundelein, III.

SERVICE: Exterior staging

ANNUAL REVENUE: \$7 million;

\$50,000 from exterior staging

WHY? It rounds out the company's mission to be a one-stop shop for clients.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: "Besides getting the word out that we offer this service and can help, the other big challenge is meeting a particular staging project's extremely fast turnaround during the height of our busy season," says Michael Schmechtig, president of Schmechtig Landscapes. "Some staging projects can come up suddenly with no lead time, so our teams scramble to get it on the schedule, gather all the resources needed and installed by the tight deadline."

BEST TIP: "Everything we do goes back to a basic design philosophy," Schmechtig says. "It's very important you have someone who has a good eye for design."

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COMPANY: FX Luminaire

URL: FXL.com

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DESIGN PRO LED CONTROLLER

COMPANY: Kichler Lighting URL: landscapelighting.com

The Design Pro LED Controller allows contractors to independently control up to six zones with one 300-W unit, eliminating the need for multiple power supplies. It's available in 300-W, 200-W, and 100-W versions and offers 12 independent schedules. The controller is also Z-Wave compatible, allowing for various 120-volt products to be added to the network, like motion sensors, coach lanterns or holiday lighting.

ELEMENTS SERIES

COMPANY: Unique
Lighting Systems
URL: uniquelighting.com
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PRODUCT FOCUS

TREE SERVICE EQUIPMENT





COMPANY: Loftness Manufacturing

URL: Loftness.com

The Carbide Cutter G3 mulching head attachment for skid-steers is available with 51-, 61- and 71-in. cutting widths. All models are offered with a variety of carbide-tipped and heat-treated steel teeth. The mulching heads operate at 1,700 to 2,150 rpm and feature a four-groove banded belt drive with spring-loaded tensioner.



CS300 CORDLESS CHAINSAW



COMPANY: Oregon

URL: OregonCordless.com

Oregon's cordless chainsaw has been re-engineered with 40 percent more power. Equipped with on-tool PowerSharp technology, a 16-in. bar (vs. 14 in. on its predecessor), tool-less tensioning and a brushless motor, the CS300 offers a powerful cutting experience, the company says. It's part of the company's 40V MAX Cordless Tool System.



MT 6500 PROFESSIONAL CHAINSAW



COMPANY: Efco

URL: efcopower.com

The MT 6500 professional chainsaw is powered by the 63cc Efco engine, delivering 4.7 hp. It weighs less than 14 lbs. and has four bar lengths between 16 in and 24 in. It has an automatic, adjustable oil pump and an oil/fuel tank capacity of 15.2 or 27.1 fl. oz. Full production of the unit began early this year and is slated to reach dealers this month.

STUMP CUTTER

COMPANY: Steiner

URL: SteinerTurf.com

The 16-in. diamond cutter head is powered by a power take-off (PTO) belt driven off a right-angle gearbox for reliability. Hardened cutters grind both side-to-side and from the top down.





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PRODUCT FOCUS





COMPANY: Husqvarna URL: Husqvarna.com/us/

Husqvarna is adding to its line of battery-operated products including trimmers, hedge trimmers and chainsaws. Each new product is equipped with a Li-Ion 36-volt battery. The 536 LiXP cordless electric chainsaw for professional users features excellent ergonomics and high chain speed, according to the manufacturer.



CS-490 CHAINSAW



COMPANY: Echo URL: Echo-usa.com

The CS-490 features include a 50.2-cc, two-stroke engine; a dual-post chain brake handle with inertiastyle brake; the Echo G-Force Engine Air Pre-cleaner; an automatic, adjustable clutch-driven oiler; an air filter with tool-less access; a spring-style vibration-reduction system; a reduced-effort starter; and a side-access chain tensioner. It will be available in late spring in 16-in., 18-in, or 20-in, bars.

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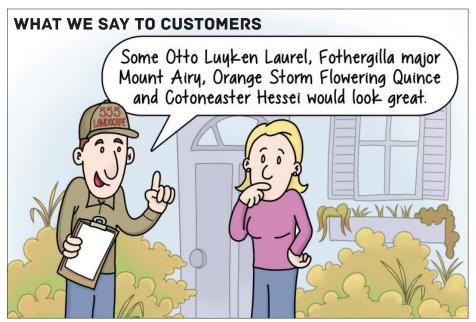


1

325T FORESTMASTER

COMPANY: JCB URL: JCBNA.com

The single-arm PowerBoom of this compact track loader features 20 percent more steel than competitive twin-arm boom designs and protects hydraulic hoses from damage, according to the company. A tilting cab offers easy, one-person access to the 325T's powertrain and hydraulic components for easier maintenance and servicing.





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PRODUCT FOCUS



KWIK-TRENCH

COMPANY: Little Beaver
URL: LittleBeaver.com
This mini trencher tackles a wide
range of applications, including
installations of sprinkler systems and
drainage lines, landscape edging
and root pruning. Featuring a triple
V-belt drive system, the Kwik-Trench
achieves rotation speed up to 800
rpm. Both models feature semipneumatic tires and a compact design

to allow easier access into tight areas.







COMPANY: Stihl URL: Stihl.com

The Stihl Carbon Concept chainsaw is not on the market; however, according to the manufacturer the knowledge gained during its development and testing will go into optimizing future products. It boasts a power-to-weight ratio of 1.11 kg/kW. Powered at 5.4 kW, the chainsaw weighs only 6 kg (without fuel and without cutting attachment). This low weight is achieved by the use of ultra-light materials, principally carbon, and it's powered by an internal combustion engine with electronic fuel injection.





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PRODUCT FOCUS

TREE CARE SUPPLIES



TREE-SHOCK

COMPANY: Bird Barrier

URL: BirdBarrier.com

The patent-pending Tree-Shock conditions birds to leave a protected tree. Flexible, tubular construction conforms to all branch configurations. Ultraviolet light-stabilized construction includes PVC tubing and stainless steel wire that's easy to mount and connect, according to the company. It's designed to be effective against all bird species and other wildlife.





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BUGBARRIER TREE BAND

COMPANY: Envirometrics

Systems USA

URL: TreeBands.com

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[from page 18]

SafetyWatch list of hazards

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

- Improper lifting.
- Lack of safety vest.
- Insufficient traffic direction.

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 in a future issue or with the online version of this story.

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INTERVIEW BY MARISA PALMIERI

National Association of Landscape Professionals

HERNDON, VA.

HISTORY





Now called the National Landscape Awards of Excellence



Precursor to today's Landscape **Industry Certified** program. Over the years, more than 14,000 professionals have been certified.

1961

Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) incorporated Berkley, Calif.

1969

ALCA's Environmental Improvement Awards launched

Student Career Days founded as ALCA Field Days

1990

Green Industry Conference premieres in Nashville, Tenn.

1993

Certified Landscape Professional designation created

1979

Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) founded Marietta, Ga.

1990

First Legislative Day takes place in March

First Certified Turfgrass Professional exam given

1996

Inaugural Renewal & Remembrance event takes place

"The National Association of Landscape **Professionals** is all about looking forward and creating more opportunities for our members by creating the future we want for the industry."

-SABEENA HICKMAN, PLANET CEO

This event draws hundreds of professionals from across the country to Arlington **National** Cemetery to spend a day volunteering.



2005

Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) formed by **ALCA/PLCAA** merger

2015

PLANET rebrands as the **National Association of** Landscape Professionals, effective in April



The association worked with New York-based b2b marketing firm DeSantis Breindel on the initiative.



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