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SMART MOVES

Home automation technology is on the rise, bringing opportunities for landscape companies.



May 2015

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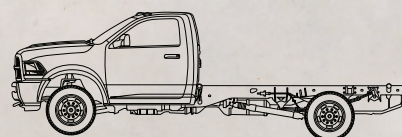
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Scott Jamieson, vice president of Bartlett Tree Experts

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MARISA PALMIERI
EDITOR

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



HEADQUARTERS

1360 East 9th St., Suite 1070,
Cleveland, OH 44114

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor Marisa Palmieri

216/706-3764 | mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net

Associate Editor Sarah Pfledderer

216/706-3756 | spfledderer@northcoastmedia.net

Art Director Tracie Martinez

216/363-7924 | tmartinez@northcoastmedia.net

Graphic Designer Courtney Townsend

216/363-7931 | ctownsend@northcoastmedia.net

Digital Media Content Producer Allison Barwacz

216/706-3796 | abarwacz@northcoastmedia.net

ADVERTISING STAFF

Publisher Bill Roddy

216/706-3758 | broddy@northcoastmedia.net

North American Sales Manager Craig MacGregor

216/706-3787 | cmacgregor@northcoastmedia.net

Account Manager Jake Goodman

216/363-7923 | jgoodman@northcoastmedia.net

Account Executive Classifieds Kelli Velasquez

216/706-3767 | kvelasquez@northcoastmedia.net

BUSINESS STAFF

Vice President, Sales Patrick Roberts

216/706-3736 | proberts@northcoastmedia.net

Administrative Coordinator Petra Turko

216/706-3768 | pturko@northcoastmedia.net

Marketing Manager Ryan Bockmuller

216/706-3772 | rbockmuller@northcoastmedia.net

Marketing Specialist Michelle Mitchell

216/706-7922 | mmitchell@northcoastmedia.net

Manager, Production Services Terri Johnstone

216/978-9622 | tjohnstone@northcoastmedia.net

Senior Audience Development Manager

Antoinette Sanchez-Perkins

216/706-3750 | asanchez-perkins@northcoastmedia.net

Digital Operations Manager Bethany Chambers

216/706-3771 | bchambers@northcoastmedia.net

Web Developer Jesse Malmacher

216/363-7925 | jmalmacher@northcoastmedia.net

MARKETING/MAGAZINE SERVICES

Reprints & Permissions Nick Iademarco

877/652-5295 | niademarco@wrightsmedia.com

Circulation List Rental Antoinette Sanchez-Perkins

216/706-3750 | asanchez-perkins@northcoastmedia.net

Subscriber, Customer Service 847/763-4942

For current single copy, back issues, or CD-ROM



CORPORATE OFFICERS

President & CEO Kevin Stoltman

216/706-3740 | kstoltman@northcoastmedia.net

VP, Finance & Operations Steve Galperin

216/706-3705 | sgalperin@northcoastmedia.net

VP, Graphic Design & Production Pete Seltzer

216/706-3737 | pseltzer@northcoastmedia.net

Editorial Director Marty Whitford

216/706-3766 | mwhitford@northcoastmedia.net

Mobile-ize

This month's cover story touches on mobile phones and their role in the smart home movement. It's an interesting read from Associate Editor Sarah Pfledderer. But that's not what this column's about. It's about another piece of mobile-related information pertinent to your business.

But first: Do you ever stop to marvel at all the things the small rectangular device in your pocket can do? (Or maybe it's not so small these days if you've upgraded to the iPhone 6 Plus.)

If you're like me, you're probably too busy fending off kids who want to watch YouTube videos on your phone to stand in awe of it. But, when you really think about it, it's astonishing.

Last year I read an article (buff.ly/1OLmWtw) about a 1991 Radio Shack ad promoting 15 consumer gadgets. We're talking a stereo, alarm clock, calculator, camcorder and the like. Of those items, the cost of which totaled more than \$5,000 in today's dollars, you now have 13 of them in your pocket at all times in the form of your \$200 smartphone. Is that not amazing?

Think about everything we use them for—not the least of which is to replace the Yellow Pages. That brings me to my point. Late last month Google instituted a major search change dubbed “Mobile-geddon.” The name may be slightly dramatic, but if you're familiar with the terms Panda, Penguin or Hummingbird, you may know how these algorithm changes can wreak havoc on websites.


Google said it now will favor websites it deems “mobile-friendly,” or those that fit nicely on a small smartphone screen without requiring a bunch of pinching-and-pulling to view.

Why does Google care? More than two-thirds of American adults now own smartphones, according to a study released last month by the Pew Research Center. That's up from 35 percent in spring 2011. Not surprisingly, smartphone ownership is especially high among younger Americans, as well as those with relatively high income and education levels. In other words: your target clients.

Google wants to make web searching better and easier for people. It doesn't want to serve up a results page full of websites you (or your clients) won't be able to view on a smartphone. In fact, it's going as far as labeling each search result with the term “mobile-friendly” so users know whether it's worth their time to click on the site.

Not sure if your site gets the stamp of approval? Get on your smartphone, open your browser and Google search for your company's name. On the results page, does it say “mobile-friendly” underneath the name of your website? This test is the first indicator of how your site is doing.

I'm happy to say the LM site passes muster, thanks to our crack digital team who had the foresight to make our site mobile-friendly more than a year ago. Our Digital Operations Manager Bethany Chambers was nice enough to pen a helpful blog post for readers looking to upgrade their websites ASAP. Check it out at LandscapeManagement.net/why-your-website-must-be-mobile-friendly.

And let me know if you've mobile-ized your site, whether Google's recent changes have had an impact on your business and how you're handling it. 

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Any predictions on how technology will influence the management of landscapes in the next decade?

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Arbor-Nomics Turf
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MORE ONLINE

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

"As the millennials come of age, be prepared. They don't want face-to-face interaction; they want fast, cost-effective goods and services purchased on their mobile devices."

"I predict water usage technology and portals where customers can view quality issues, bids, billing, statement, schedules, etc."

"Companies that do not embrace technology will not remain viable."

"With the labor issues we're having, mowers will be self-guided, much like the Roomba vacuum cleaner."



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Jody Shilan, Host

FromDesign2Build.com

Email: jshilan@FD2B.com

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Contact:

Bill Roddy, Publisher

216-706-3758

broddy@northcoastmedia.net

Craig MacGregor

216-706-3787

cmacgregor@northcoastmedia.net



BIG PICTURE

LIGHTING VIRTUOSO

LOCATION Bedford, N.Y.

COMPANY Cipriano
Landscape Design,
Mahwah, N.J.

THE DETAILS To the company's knowledge, this is the first project ever to incorporate glass tile and fiber optic lighting in a swimming pool design. It all started with the client's vision for a pool in the exact shape of a 1700s-era Stradivarius violin.

The entire interior of the pool is finished in glass tile as a means to replicate a violin's wood stain finish. Cipriano Landscape Design created 15 custom tile blends for this project.

The koi pond, which depicts the bow of the violin, intersects the pool. To create a more fluid transition while keeping the koi and pool water separate, the company installed clear acrylic panels directly into the gunite shell of the pool.

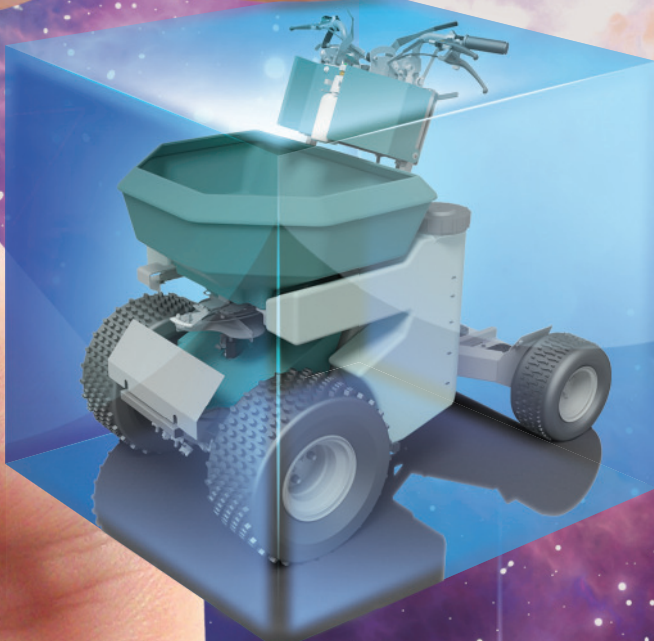
By designing and installing the majority of pool patios, dining patios, outdoor kitchen and bar on one side of the swimming pool, the team was able to properly scale these elements to the pool and home.

PHOTO The violin pool's fiber optic and landscape lighting is best showcased at night.

See more photos from this project, which earned a National Landscape Awards of Excellence Grand Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals, at LandscapeManagement.net/BigPicture.

PHOTO: CIPRIANO CUSTOM POOLS & LANDSCAPING

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NEWS + HOW-TO'S

LANDSCAPE
INDUSTRY
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AND TIPS

RECOMMENDER

ISSUE BRIEF

STEP BY STEP

NEW STUFF

SAFETYWATCH

SLEEP TIGHT



“Staying rested and warm is not only safe but increases efficiency on-site.”

do not
disturb

Readers at Case Snow Management have peace of mind knowing their shoveling crews have access to a place to rest and recharge during long, cold shifts.

A few years ago Case, a \$28 million snow-only firm based in Attleboro Falls, Mass., began providing hotel rooms for laborers during weather events that net 8 inches to 10 inches of snow or last for more than eight hours.

In the past, the company had difficulty keeping its shovelers motivated during big storms. “You’d send them home to rest up and they’d never come back,” says Neal Glatt, account executive.

Then when morning came, some sidewalks wouldn’t be cleared and the work wasn’t to scope. Plus, there were safety concerns with workers driving to and from job sites in the snow after having worked long shifts at all hours of the night.

Acquiring hotel rooms at about \$100 per night allows Case’s shoveling crews to work in shifts, alternating resting with working. With rollaway beds, rooms typically sleep four workers at a time. It’s a big cost, but Glatt says it’s worth the investment.

“We haven’t studied it, but I’m very confident we make up for what we spend,” he says. “When it comes down to efficiency, the more rested and warm a guy is, the better he’s going to shovel. By structuring it we’ve taken control of it and we’re able to monitor and control when guys are on and off the clock, so when they’re on, it’s efficient time.”

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JOHN DEERE

RECOMMENDER

Irrigation rotors

Which do you prefer and why?

Toro recently added five new ¾-in. rotor models to its T5 RapidSet Series product line.



PATRICK H. CRAIS

BLUE WATCHDOG CONSERVATION
CARDIFF, CALIF.

"I'm a huge fan of the Hunter I-20 rotor due to the way the nozzles are easily installed. I also like its flow stop. It's great during an installation and it's a helpful feature when doing inspections and having to change nozzles."



GREG WINCHEL
WINCHEL IRRIGATION
GRANDVILLE, MICH.

"Our rotor of preference is the Rain Bird 5004 PRS. With the PRS feature the sprinkler will deliver water more evenly and efficiently than a standard model, thus saving the end user money on the water bill and improving the quality of the lawn. Also, the rain curtain nozzle design gives superior water distribution."



JON KIRK JR.
WATERCENTRIC
CARROLLTON, TEXAS

"Hunter MP Rotators are my choice. They have great distribution uniformity, they're efficient and reduce water usage. They're great for conservation alternatives to conventional sprays and rotors."

ISSUE BRIEF



BY SABEENA HICKMAN

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

LEAF BLOWERS STILL UNDER ATTACK

Clients demand neat and well-manicured landscapes, and leaf blowers are an important tool for landscape professionals. But they're not always welcome by the neighbors. In Monterey County, Calif., a city commission recently raised concerns that leaf blowers are sources of air and noise pollution. The commission reacted sensibly by recommending education about best practices instead of enacting a citywide ban. Still, leaf blower bans exist in many communities.

In this case, a good offense is the best defense. Here's what you can do:

- Run leaf blowers at half throttle most of the time. Low throttle speeds significantly reduce noise, and they also provide the operator with maximum control. Full throttle is seldom necessary.
- Don't use blowers in residential areas when people are likely to be disturbed.
- Don't use blowers within 10 feet of doors or windows.
- Operate only one blower at a time on small residential sites.
- Use rakes or brooms to loosen heavier debris and don't use blowers to move large debris piles.
- Use the full nozzle extension to keep the air stream close to the ground.

In the past decade, manufacturers have responded to this issue by developing quieter gas-powered blowers and making battery-powered options that don't raise emissions concerns.

By using best practices and the best equipment, you can help to ensure communities get behind their local landscape companies instead of fighting them. 🍷



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STEP BY STEP

How to store pesticides

Pesticides require special attention when it comes to storing them. Proper storage helps extend the pesticide's shelf life and prevent injuries. Here's where and how to safely store your pesticides.

- Location.** Store pesticides in a location (locked or latched) that's cool, dry, well lit and ventilated. They should be kept away from vehicles, potable water, protective clothing, fertilizers, gasoline and power equipment. Designate a place that's only used to store pesticides. Make sure it isn't in a spot where flooding is possible or where the pesticides might spill or leak into ponds, wells, drains, ground water or surface water. Place liquid pesticides below dry ones to prevent them from leaking into another product.
- Container.** Always store pesticides in their original containers, which are made of materials that will withstand the chemicals. Keep all the original labels on the containers and refer to them for application directions, ingredient names, emergency/first aid information and disposal instructions. If the label becomes damaged, write down as much information about the pesticide as possible or download a new label from the web.
- Temperature.** Extreme temperatures can damage the containers and change the chemistry of some pesticides. Read the label to find each pesticide's acceptable temperature range. Generally, they're best stored between 40 to 90 degrees F.
- Safety.** Don't stockpile pesticides. Buy only the amount you need for the season. Follow all the storage and safety instruction on the label. Make sure to carefully calculate and measure the amount of pesticide you'll need for the application. If you have extra left in the equipment after an application, the best way to dispose of it is to use it on another property. 

SOURCE: National Pesticide Information Center, Penn State Extension, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



STEP 1

Find a well-ventilated location away from ignition sources, water, fertilizers and gasoline. Place the dry pesticides above liquids.



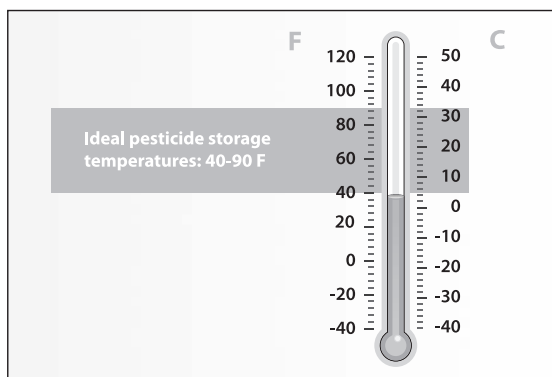
STEP 2

Keep pesticides in their original containers with the label intact.



STEP 3

Store the pesticide at the temperature recommended on the label. Make sure the location does not reach extreme temps.



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NEW STUFF



1. DINGO TX 1000 COMPACT UTILITY LOADER

COMPANY: The Toro Co.

URL: Toro.com

The TX 1000 has a rated operating capacity exceeding 1,000 pounds. With loader arms extended, the hinge pin measures 81 inches from the ground to the unit. Powered by a 24-hp Kubota 1305 diesel engine, it has ground speeds of up to 4.7 mph. The narrow-track model weighs in at 2,610 pounds, while the wide-track model is 2,790 pounds. Additional features include an auxiliary foot control integrated in the suspended platform and dual fuel tanks.

2. SNAP-FILL PROPANE-FILLING VALVE

COMPANY: Cavagna Group

URL: CavagnaGroup.com

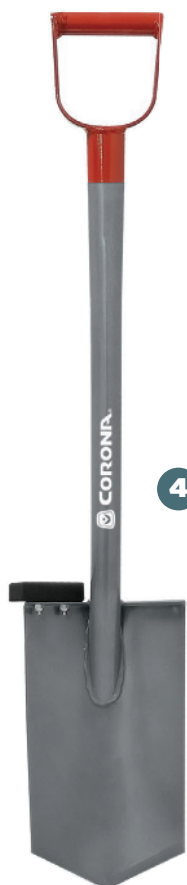
Ideal for use on propane-powered forklifts and riding mowers, this propane-filling valve allows equipment operators to secure a connection without cross threading. Designed with safety in mind, the SNAP-FILL's quick connection reduces emissions, according to Cavagna Group.

3. PRO LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR APP FOR ANDROID

COMPANY: Drafix Software

URL: ProLandscape.com

Formerly only available on iOS devices, the Pro Landscape Contractor App now is compatible with Android platforms. The free standalone landscape design and building app features an image library, with more than 11,000 items and plants categorized by climate zones; a proposal generator; the ability to share designs via email or social media; and more.



4. ALL-STEEL MAX SHOVELS

COMPANY: Corona Tools USA

URL: CoronaToolsUSA.com

The all-steel line of Corona MAX shovels features closed backs that are welded onto steel handles for maximum prying power, according to the manufacturer. The line comprises 14 models. The AS 90210 (pictured) has a 12-inch diamond blade, 26-inch steel handle and D grip.



5. FASTRAK SDX MOWER

COMPANY: Hustler Turf Equipment

URL: HustlerTurf.com

The Fastrak SDX features a commercial clutch, Hydro-Gear ZT 3400 drive system and commercial Kawasaki FX engine. The mower has a top speed of 9 mph and 23-inch tires. It's backed by Hustler's four-year or 1,000 hour limited warranty, plus a lifetime limited warranty for the frame and leading edge of the deck.

6. CTX50 MINI SKID-STEER

COMPANY: Vermeer Corp.

URL: Vermeer.com

The CTX50 mini skid-steer boasts vertical lift arms to keep the load closer to the machine and to hoist more weight than similarly sized machines with a radial lift path, Vermeer says. Powered by a 25-hp Kohler Command PRO electronic fuel injection gasoline engine, the unit has a full lift height of 17 inches and an ISO-rated operating and tipping capacity of 1,715 pounds.

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.

SAFETYWATCH

➔ This photo was staged to show several safety hazards or dangerous work habits. How many can you identify? Flip to page 63 for a list of potential hazards.

DOWNLOAD IT

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

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



PHOTO: LAURA WATLO BLAKE

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GET OUT AHEAD

Irrigation industry
advocates aim to
be proactive with
their updated best
management practices.

➤ PAGE 30

Mole patrol

Michigan company makes a name for itself with unique ideas and high-quality service.

BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER

Jim Zylstra recalls his foremen being less than enthusiastic about driving the company's new fleet of vehicles.

After all, each bright green and orange car, truck and van has a giant, helmet-wearing

mole mounted to its top. But even the most skeptical crew member had to acknowledge his boss was on to something when a potential customer approached him about the company's services during his first morning in the new truck. To this day the com-

pany, Tuff Turf Molebusters, gains hundreds of new clients each year simply by having its 15 vehicles on the road.

"My No. 1 source for business is referrals—No. 2 is people who see our trucks," says Zylstra, who redesigned his vehicles in 2009. "Before, we had white trucks with green letters and grass painted along the bottom, like everyone else. It took not even getting to the first job for our new trucks to work."

A former accountant who longed to spend his days outside, Zylstra started Tuff Turf Molebusters in 1994 "the same way everyone else does—by knocking on doors." But Zylstra has since made his living being a little bit different. The \$1.85 million company

in Byron Center, Mich., offers turf and ornamental services (60 percent) and pest control (40 percent) to a 90 percent residential, 6 percent commercial and 4 percent municipal clientele. Zylstra says his specialties are the time-consuming and other unpleasant services no one else wants to do, such as rolling lawns (more than 300 every spring), core aeration (with one dedicated crew member from mid-May to October) and, of course, mole control.

The company's 12-step, three-month mole control program uses traps, bait and repellents to eradicate the damaging rodents, and is his fastest-growing service requiring seven dedicated crews.

Continued on page 22

FOR THE WIN

Tuff Turf Molebusters won a 2015 Ford Transit van in an essay and social media contest held by Ford.



PHOTO: TUFF TURF MOLEBUSTERS

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2DQ contains three active ingredients that provide weed control of annual and perennial broadleaf weeds in warm-season and cool-season turfgrasses. 2DQ is for use on ornamental turf lawns (residential, industrial, and institutional), parks, cemeteries, athletic fields, sod farms, 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.



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TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

Continued from page 20

The “Michigan Mole Tally” keeps track of the company’s progress on its home page. It uses a computer system to track how many moles the company has caught to date: a record-setting 3,916 in 2014 and 18,615 since the tally began in 2005. Zylstra also shares the tally on the company’s Facebook page.

“At first we did it for fun, but then we realized we really do catch a lot of these things to the point where it’s unbelievable,” he says. “Our customers think it’s neat, but on the other hand, it’s become a selling point for us as a company that specializes in this. It proves we are catching them.”

The company’s distinctive characteristics recently helped Zylstra win a new vehicle for his fleet during the Transit Means Business Challenge, sponsored by Ford. To enter, applicants submitted 300 words about how they would use the prize: a new vehicle. In his essay Zylstra said he could create a new job and also “put a bright green and orange vehicle with a giant mole

on top on the road for people to gawk at.”

A panel selected the top 10 entries, and then put the vote on social media. Zylstra won a 2015 Ford Transit and was able to customize it to fit his needs. He added a ramp, a fertilization tank and his signature décor, which typically costs \$4,000-\$5,000 for the paint job. The wooden mole, which comes complete with a helmet that lights up, adds another \$1,400-\$1,500. Following through on his word, Zylstra hired a new employee, a fertilizer technician, in March.

SOME SIMILARITIES

Despite the ways Tuff Turf Molebusters is different, Zylstra faces many of the same challenges other company owners face.

Finding good help is difficult, and Zylstra tries to alleviate the problem by paying better than the competition and by making his company an overall positive place to work. Managing the company’s 12- to 15 percent annual growth is another challenge requiring constant updates to existing systems and procedures, and

implementation of new ones. Zylstra changes job descriptions every six months to keep up with evolving roles and new levels of management.

“I’m not a procedure or rules kind of guy, so it’s more for the staff than it is for me,” he says. “But as my guys find different ways to help the company improve efficiencies, I value their input. It also helps when we hire new people because we can all be on same page.”

Government regulations are another concern for Zylstra. He’s currently spending time and money to comply with pesticide storage regulations because his facility was out of compliance. The state has redefined the definition of “spot treatment” for weeds, resulting in the need for more training for his technicians and more education for his customers. And the health care “hoopla” has “not been fun to navigate,” he says.

But as long as pesky critters continue to ravage lawns, Zylstra is optimistic about the future. He says it’s a sign of an improving economy that more homeowners are able to invest in pest control, which he calls “sort of a luxury service.” Zylstra isn’t sure if there are more moles, mice and other varmints these days or if people simply have less tolerance for the damage they cause. But, he says, when customers are ready to take care of the problem, they know who to turn to.

“The company name they don’t always remember,” Zylstra says. “But they remember the cars.” 🐹

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

NEWS-FEED

FRANCHISE EXPANDS

In Q1 2015, Mosquito Joe opened 11 franchises and signed



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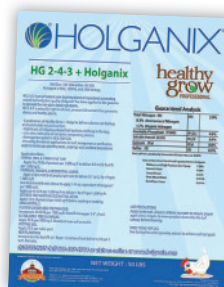
16 agreements to expand in 30 territories—a 100 percent increase from 2014.

GET CERTIFIED

The Principles of Turf-grass Management certification program, offered in partnership by the National Association of Landscape Professionals and the University of Georgia Center for Continuing Education, now is available as an on-line course.

NEW PRODUCT

Holganix partnered with Illinois-based Pearl Valley Farms and its Healthy Grow fertilizer to produce an organic-based granular fertilizer called Holganix Granular with Healthy Grow.



STANDING OUT

Tuff Turf Molebusters has been attracting new clients with its unique vehicles since redesigning them in 2009.



PHOTO: TUFF TURF MOLEBUSTERS



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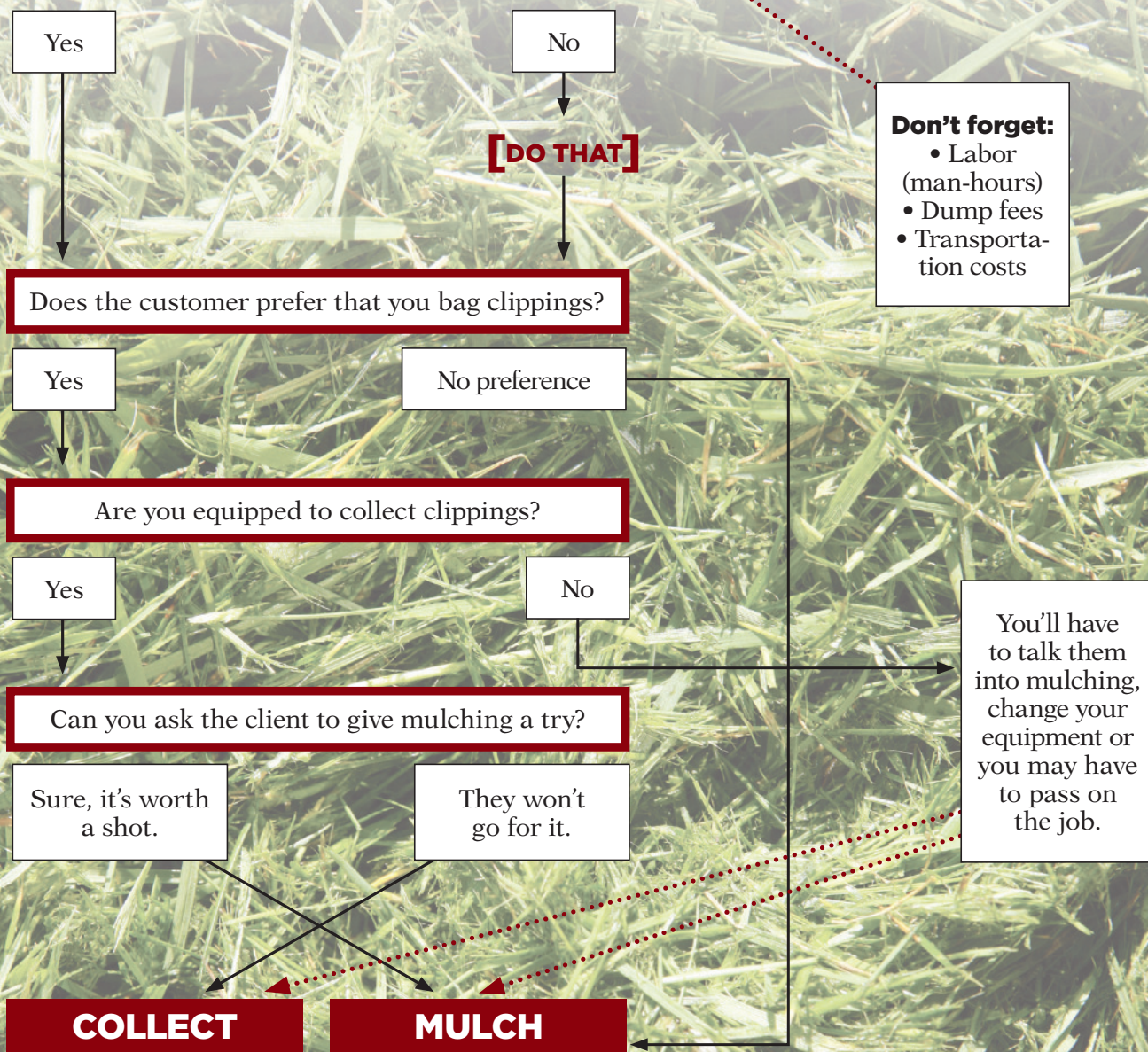
A PEARL VALLEY ORGANIX BRAND

Mulching vs. collecting

Despite evidence that leaving lawn clippings is good for turf, landscape companies sometimes face the mulch-or-bag question. Walk through the options here.

BY MARISA PALMIERI

HAVE YOU ACCOUNTED FOR THE TRUE COST OF EACH OPTION?



IF YOU DO COLLECT...

There are many benefits to leaving clippings on the lawn.

For example, mulching returns essential nutrients, such as nitrogen, back to the soil, says Mark Schmidt, principal scientist for John Deere.

But sometimes bagging is a contractor's only option based on client requirements.

"Bagging is very important for contractors concerned about lawn care aesthetics, as collection systems work lawns like vacuum cleaners for your carpet, removing and storing clippings as the mower moves along, leaving a nice freshly cut lawn," says Ron Scheffler, product manager for mower manufacturer BOB-CAT.



Collection systems also may improve striping patterns and are a benefit for companies that operate in areas where lawn debris, such as pine needles, can be difficult to mulch or

when fall leaf season rolls around, he says.

Regardless, experts agree lawn clippings, when bagged, should be kept out of landfills.

"If you do decide to bag, be sure to compost your clippings and reuse on site," Schmidt says.

The nitrogen in clippings is a valuable addition to compost, according to Colorado State University's extension office.

Another option is to dump clippings at a composting facility vs. a landfill.

Sources: Colorado State University Extension; Ron Scheffler, product manager, BOB-CAT; Mark Schmidt, principal scientist, John Deere

NEWSPEED

DAVEY GROWTH

The Davey Tree Expert Co. made its sixth acquisition in the last year, purchasing Nature First, a tree care company near Santa Cruz, Calif. Terms were not disclosed.

ENGINE OPTIONS

Dixie Chopper released new mowers: the Classic 3160EFI and XCaliber 3366EFI. The Classic is powered by the 31 hp 824cc Kohler Command PRO EFI engine; the XCaliber comes equipped with the 33 hp 824cc Kohler Command PRO EFI engine.

MILESTONE MOWER

John Deere manufactured the 500,000th unit at its Turf Care factory in Fuquay-Varina, N.C. The unit, a John Deere ZTrak Mower, was celebrated by the entire factory and will be on display at several upcoming local events. The facility produced its first unit in 1997.



PHOTO: BOB-CAT

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DESIGN/BUILD+INSTALLATION

Designs of the times

What's new with landscape design software. **BY LAUREN DOWDLE**



To land new projects, landscape professionals want to pull out all of the stops—from providing timely estimates to designs that wow. One tool that can help in the process is landscape design software.

Here are trends, new features, what's coming and how the industry is adapting to design software.

TOP TRENDS

For many landscape contractors, using design software is about increasing their productivity and helping clients visualize their projects—and software trends reflect that.

Mobile options are popular with both contractors and their clients, says David Sloan, marketing director for PRO Landscape by Drafix Software. They allow professionals to create and add on to designs while on site.

"They aren't being tied to a desktop anymore, but they still have the option to use their desktop," Sloan says.

Contractors are also learning how to create outdoor living spaces that both impress the customer and ensure they'll make a profit.



SHOW AND TELL

Software that works with mobile devices (above) and creates 3-D renderings (left) are just two trends among landscape design software users.

"One of the biggest trends is trying to help landscape contractors design for profitability," says Joe Salemi, product marketing manager at DynaSCAPE Software.

NEW FEATURES

Across the board, design software databases continue to expand to include more plants and materials. There also have been several software-specific updates recently.

DynaSCAPE's software now allows users to ungroup plants. Users also can replace grouped 2-D symbols with a

3-D object, which was a limitation before.

A new feature for PRO Landscape lets users search for plant material in the database by zone or color. Also, they can check boxes to find deer-resistant and drought-tolerant plants.

Contractors like Scott Cohen, owner of residential design/build firm The Green Scene in Chatsworth, Calif., are discovering other new tools to help with the design process.

For example, Cohen uses Pencil by FiftyThree, a stylus-like device used with an iPad, in addition to his CAD programs. Working with the Paper app, Pencil allows users to sketch, outline, write, color, mix colors and erase. The Pencil tool looks similar to a carpenter's pencil and costs about \$50.

Continued on page 28

NEWSPEED



CAT UPGRADES

Last month Caterpillar rolled out a variety of equipment at a press event, such as four

new D Series small chassis loader models (skid-steer models 226D and 232D and compact track loader models 239D and 249D) to meet Tier 4 emissions

standards and offer other upgrades.

RUPPERT HIRES

Ruppert Landscape's landscape construction branch in Virginia hired Mike Ryan and

promoted Angela Howes, Kelly McGuire and April Rose. The company also added Luke Alexander as the estimator for its national landscape construction division.



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DESIGN/BUILD+INSTALLATION

Continued from page 26

"It's great to be talking to clients and just be able to sketch something out for them," says Cohen, who mainly uses the tool while in the field. He'll also attach these drawings to proposals.

WHAT'S COMING

Going forward, contractors can expect to see more mobile options and the move to 3-D renderings. "In the next few years, 3-D designs are going to be the standard," Salemi says. That trend is gaining momentum, in part, because of consumers.

"The ability for the average homeowner to interpret a 2-D plan view representation is limited," he says. "The second you bring that into a 3-D presentation and put them into their potential new outdoor living space, they become instantly aware of the space and the experience of what it will be like when it's built."

Designer Susan Cohan, APLD, principal of Susan Cohan Gardens in Chatham, N.J., uses SketchUp, which she says helps with 3-D modeling. Her clients are mainly high-end residential.

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Clients are buying into—and expecting landscapers to use—design software. So, it's imperative contractors embrace technology to stay current with their customers.


"People don't want to look at hand-drawn plans," Cohan says. "I can email them the design, and we can talk about it over the phone without having a meeting with a big roll of paper," she says. "That's key in the design process going forward."

Overall, the green industry is adapting to the new technologies pretty well, manufacturers say, and the number of landscape contractors doing hand drawings continues to decrease. The biggest hurdle for them is showing some professionals that the value of using design software outweighs the initial learning curve, Sloan says.

"As long as they're willing to make it work for them, it will," he says. "Technology is powerful, but you have to embrace it—and the ROI is almost immediate."

Salemi says he sees both younger and older designers moving toward using software. "Students are learning it in their landscape programs, and the older demographic is asking how long it will take for them to learn the software," he adds.

Before buying design software, Sloan encourages landscapers to decide whether or not they're willing to learn and implement it properly.

"The mouse is just another pencil," Sloan says. "You just have to learn how to use it." 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Alabama.



Landscape pro Scott Cohen uses a stylus-like device to sketch drawings on his tablet for clients when he's in the field.



Aerial views

One California landscape design/build contractor is taking his design work to new heights.

Scott Cohen, owner of The Green Scene, makes a good point about landscape design: "Although we draw from the sky view, we rarely see the property from that view," he says. So, the author of design and construction books like "Outdoor Kitchen Design Workbook," "Poolsapes," "The Candid Contractor" and "Outdoor Fireplaces and Fire Pits" started using drones on his projects about a year ago.

"The drone allows me to see the project in the plot-plan view," he says. "We're able to get footage and images we couldn't get before."

He initially used the drones to photograph completed projects, but he found they were also useful as mapping tools in the beginning of the project. "You can see grade changes, sun and shade changes, the terrain and get a better feel for it," Cohen says.

He uses a drone with an attached GoPro camera and gimbal, which keeps the camera steady. "It's expensive, but necessary," he says, adding the equipment costs a few thousand dollars. He also uses a point-of-view screen, which is about the size of an iPhone. The screen attaches to the remote and shows what the drone's filming.

Drones aren't cheap, so he encourages operators to practice running them in a grassy area or find someone who is good at video games to control them.

"They're definitely not a toy, and they don't swim well," says Cohen, who has crashed two drones.

He doesn't take the drone more than 50 feet up in the air, and he's careful to film only his client's yard. In addition to video footage, he also extracts still photos from the drone.

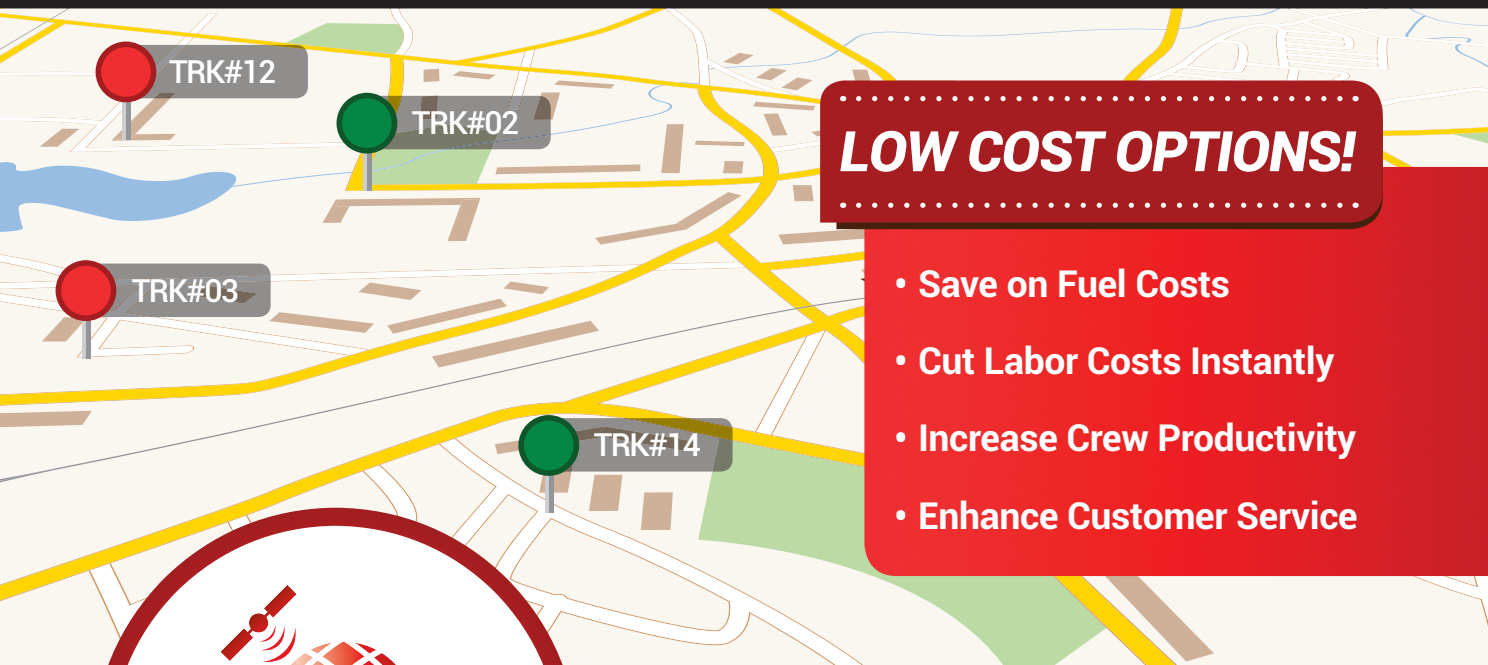
"It's one more tool for the trade," Cohen says.

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IRRIGATION+WATER MANAGEMENT

Staying current

Revised irrigation best practices focus on sustainability, technology and communication. **BY LAUREN DOWDLE**

The irrigation industry is constantly evolving, whether it's with the release of new equipment or sustainable practices.

To provide updated information for landscape irrigation contractors' changing needs, the Irrigation Association (IA) and American Society of Irrigation Consultants (ASIC) released a new version of their Landscape Irrigation Best Management Practices (BMPs) last May.

This revised guide offers comprehensive information and guidelines for every step in the irrigation process. Here's how the practices have changed through the years and what landscape contractors can learn from them.

BMP BACKGROUND

Before publishing the first BMPs, the IA and ASIC had their own guidelines.

The groups initially tried to blend the documents together, but they decided to start from scratch and create an original set of practices, which they released in 2002. They later republished the BMPs in 2005 and 2010 with minor revisions and then issued a new version in May 2014.

The newest BMPs cover irrigation system design, installation and management, plus practice guidelines for each category.

"It hopes to clarify the means, methods and technology that will reduce water use, protect water quality and sustain healthy and vibrant landscapes to meet the needs of the community," says John Ossa, account manager, Rain Bird, and chairman of the BMPs committee.

To date, this version is the most comprehensive, says Carol Colein, executive director, ASIC. "The practices are more based on real-world issues," she adds.

WHY NOW?

In the past few years, the irrigation industry has seen several advancements and changes. So, the committee wanted to provide contractors with updated practices.

"As an irrigation industry, unless we can show we are truly reacting and being part of the solution, someone else is going to be writing the practices for us," Colein says.

One area that has evolved since the last version is technology.

"Since drip irrigation, especially subsurface, works in some fundamentally different ways than conventional hardware, we added a greater level of detail in this section of the document," Ossa says.

Sustainability has become another key topic, especially in drought-prone states, so the committee wanted to address sustainable practices.

"We can't waste water for landscape use," Colein adds. "Some contractors are better aware of water use than others, depending on where they are in the country."

And the demand for sustainable practices isn't going away.

"Pretty soon, we'll have to justify why we are planting a tree there, have grass here or if there are other plants that would be more sustainable," says Brent Mecham, industry development director, IA. "It's not always the easiest, but it's what's best."

DIFFERENCE MAKERS

With the new version, the experts broke down the practices into three categories: design, installation and management.

NEWSFEED

TORO RELEASE

The Toro Co. added five new 3/4-in. rotor models to its T5 RapidSet Series

rotor product line: the Shrub, Shrub Effluent, 12-in. High Pop, High Pop Effluent and Lawn Effluent models.

ASIC HONORS

American Society of Irrigation Consultants (ASIC) named a new ASIC Fellow (FASIC)—



Doug Macdonald

Doug Macdonald, vice president of Aqua Engineering in Fort Collins, Colo. The society

also honored Stephen Smith, Ph.D., with the ASIC Roy Williams Memorial Award, and Linda Davis with the ASIC 2015 Sam Tobey Lifetime Achievement Award.

The old version included maintenance as a category, but this time they decided to include it as part of management, which is more proactive than maintenance, Mecham says.

The committee also wanted to expand on design. The design criteria were previously part of the appendix; they're now incorporated in the base document.

In the latest version, the appendix focuses on irrigation system inspections and commissioning; landscape water budgeting; irrigation scheduling; and a controller map and station data form. The inspection information has been especially helpful when it comes to clients, Mecham says.

"The contractor has to know how to inspect the system and make sure it works with the design and will be used efficiently," he adds.

The new BMPs also include elements addressing potential water sources that could be used for irrigation. "We're trying to maximize the use of poor-quality water and rely less on potable water for irrigation," Mecham says.



One focus of the revised BMPs is to improve communication among an irrigation project's designer, installer and maintenance professional.

The BMPs now have a Consumer Bill of Rights, which is a consumer protection component. The committee outlined the rights and process to verify the presence of specified hardware and execution of services, Ossa says.

Additionally, the creators intend this version to be a living document.

"We changed the format of the document to facilitate ease of use and ease of update and revision," Mecham says. "Our anticipation is the document will need to be updated periodically to stay



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IRRIGATION+WATER MANAGEMENT

relevant to emerging technology and changing demands in the marketplace.”

Since the new version came out a year ago, large property managers and municipalities have started to adopt the practices as part of their programs, he says.

GUIDE TAKEAWAYS

Geographical location, regulations and other components may be different around the country, but the experts say they hope the BMPs can be the foundation for proper irrigation nationwide.

“We want this to become the standard, with regional modifications as necessary, so you don’t have 50 different sets of regulations and mandates for all of the states,” Colein says.

The baseline is the same across the country, so once states have those prac-

tices in place, they can regionalize them.

“These are the suggested guidelines, but there’s the opportunity to adapt them locally,” Mecham says.

No matter the contractor’s location, there are universal elements all landscape contractors should focus on with the BMPs.

“Contractors sometimes take too many liberties in the field,” Colein says. “The contractor does not generally have access to all the project design criteria and parameters, and so they may not understand the impact of deviating from the plans and specifications. This can come back to haunt them when there is a final inspection and unauthorized changes are flagged for replacement or remediation.”

Sometimes changes are warranted, so in those cases, the contractor should

contact the system designer to discuss potential problems and get any changes authorized before straying from the project contract documents, she says.

Another theme in the revised BMPs is promoting communication. The designer, installer and people managing and maintaining the irrigation system need to be on the same page.

“You can have a great design, but if it’s not installed, managed and maintained properly, you have nothing, and vice versa,” Colein says. “There has to be communication at each phase, and that was the approach we took with these BMPs.”

Dowdle is an Alabama-based freelance writer.

Download the 55-page BMP guide at irrigation.org/landscapebmps.

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SMART MOVES

Home automation technology is on the rise, bringing opportunities for landscape companies.

BY SARAH PFLEDDERER

As you pull into the drive after a long day's work, the exterior lights on your home perk up. You walk in the front door to a perfect temperature compared to the brisk outdoors. The door automatically locks behind you, the security system arms and you hear the irrigation system humming as sunset turns to twilight. Your evening playlist filters through the surround sound as you enter the living room and slouch into your chair to wind down.

The tasks you once viewed as mundane are preprogrammed to your lifestyle and can be tweaked with the graze of your fingertips on a mobile device, a.k.a. the remote control to your "smart home."

Fast-forward five years, and this scenario will be more common in households across the U.S., according to research from MarketsandMarkets. By 2020 the smart home market is expected to reach nearly \$60 billion, up from around \$20 million in 2015.

How are landscape contractors and manufacturers translating this trend to the green industry? Some see new business opportunities, and they're gearing up for them. Others see the potential to change the way their services are delivered.

The bottom line: Now is the time to prepare for smart home technologies to proliferate and to migrate outside the home into your customers' landscapes.

Continued on page 36



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Continued from page 34

"Overall, when you look at our industry, we could do a better job of being innovative," says Scott Jamieson, president of the National Association of Landscape Professionals and vice president of Bartlett Tree Experts in Chicago. "There's potential, but I don't think we've grabbed onto it."

GRASPING THE TREND

Smart home technologies have evolved from independent, automated devices for household tasks—things like pre-programmed thermostats, lights and irrigation systems—to technologies that integrate these devices into one platform, predominantly an app.

One example is Wink, an app that acts as the remote control for about 25 smart home devices. It's the brainchild of General Electric and Quirky, an invention company powered by ideas submitted from the public.

"This idea of the smart home has been around for decades, ever since 'The Jetsons,'" says Matt McGovren, head of marketing at Wink. "It's actually happening a lot differently than what people expected. People buy products to solve problems, and that's what's happening now."

The technology is adaptable and can be valuable for everyone, McGovren says. He views it as "a big opportunity" for contractors.

Some landscape professionals do, too. Take Jason Brooks, owner of Picture Perfect Landscapes in Memphis, Tenn.

"I'm a fairly young guy," Brooks says. "We're a small company, and we're looking to grow exponentially. We're always looking for things applicable to the way people live day-to-day."

Still, the smart home market has a tough task ahead in terms of marketing itself. Around two-thirds of U.S. consumers with broadband households aren't familiar with smart home technologies and where to purchase them, according to a study conducted by the Consumer



Electronics Association and Parks Associates.

But the market is on the right path, McGovren says.

"These products are much more affordable than they ever have been," he says.

Another thing driving the trend is almost everyone has a "common platform" in a smart phone or tablet with wireless or cloud capabilities to operate a smart home system. Before, companies had to create their own interfaces. In fact, 64 percent of American adults are smart phone owners and rely on their devices as an entry to the web, according to the Pew Research Center.

Given some segments of the landscape industry already have dabbled in remote-controlled technology, McGovren says there's plenty of room for landscaping-related technologies in the smart home industry.

At Wink, some already are on board. Take the irrigation controller manufacturer Rachio. Its flagship product, the Iro, is a Wi-Fi-based smart controller. It comes in eight- and 16-zone models and bears an Environmental Protection Agency WaterSense program label. It also integrates with home automation systems beyond Wink.

"It's important that we play nicely with these platforms," says Ric Miles, business development and strategy, at Rachio. For instance, by "cross-sharing intelligence" with Nest, the Iro can detect a fire and the irrigation system will cycle.



Other manufacturers, such as Weathermatic, McCrometer, HydroPoint Data Systems, ETwater and IrriGreen, have released mobile-based technology, although they're all not designed to sync directly with smart home platforms.

IN SYNC
Rachio's Iro, an app-based controller, syncs with smart home systems.

PREPARING TO PAVE THE WAY

Some industry members say it's the landscape lighting segment that has the most potential to lead the industry into the home automation arena.

"That's where a linkage to the smart home is absolutely dead-on," Jamieson says.

Ryan Williams, product manager for landscape lighting at FX Luminaire says the company is not blind to this.

"Do we talk about smart home systems? Well, of course. It's the new big thing," he says. The manufacturer doesn't have a product that connects directly into smart home systems at this time, but its Luxor comes close. Via an app, users can control the Luxor's zoning, dimming and color from a palette of 30,000 hues.

Like in the irrigation market, manufacturers (Vista Lighting, Light Symphony and others) have introduced systems with app-controlled capabilities, though they're not necessarily linked to smart home platforms.

In terms of who's most interested in this technology, Williams says FX

Continued on page 38

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Continued from page 36

Luminaire sees most interest from high-end residential and small-scale commercial customers.

Brooks, the landscape contractor, installs the Luxor. He sees the same customer profile, namely white collar folks with a “sensible” income, as his clients may pay a 15 percent to 20 percent premium for remote-monitored systems over basic LED systems.

Men more than women look to “geek out” their homes, McGovren adds. And the most active population of smart home customers are between the ages of 35 to 45, he says.

“(Smart home customers) don’t want to deal with this kind of stuff,” Brooks says. “They just want it to work automatically. Ultimately, everyone wants their lives to be as simple as possible.”

To cater to that client segment, Brooks reads industry websites and magazines and works his vendor

“IT’S REALLY IMPORTANT FOR CONTRACTORS TO UNDERSTAND IT’S EASY TO GET STARTED. YOU DON’T HAVE TO SIT ON THE SIDELINES.”

—Matt McGovren, *Wink*

relationships to stay on top of the product pipeline.

Such tactics led him to Infrared USA, a manufacturer of automated pergolas—wired with remote-controlled heaters, lighting and fire pits. Brooks began offering these units this spring, quoting them at anywhere from \$15,000 to six figures.

It’s that open-mindedness—“no longer being isolated to your respected trade”—that will prepare the industry for the effects of the growing smart home market, McGovren says.

“It’s really important for contractors to understand it’s easy to get started,” he says. “You don’t have to sit on the sidelines.”

CONNECTING FROM AFAR

Aquascape is researching smart home and remote-monitoring opportunities in the pond segment.

“It’s just the way people live now,” says Scott Rhodes, director of product marketing at Aquascape. “More and more people want everything at their fingertips.”

Rhodes says the Aquascape products closest to the smart home market are its remote-controlled pump and underwater camera.

But it has tested out several off-the-shelf smart home systems to evaluate if those Aquascape products, among others, could integrate with them.

The “long-term goal,” Rhodes says, is to have a contractor’s team “dialing in” remotely on a regular basis to ensure customers’ water gardens are in proper shape. The contractor could do a remote diagnosis of a pond’s water temperature and chemicals upon receiving a service call. This way, technicians can arrive to the job site equipped with all they need to solve the problem. Or a best-case scenario would be to not have to go to the job site and instead make the fix from afar by adjusting chemical inputs, for example.

“It helps the contractor be in contact with their customer more often in a more helpful way,” Rhodes says. “Getting to problems before they happen is more important than how to solve them.”

The idea for this technology came about two to three years ago, Rhodes says. “It’s just a question of creating the system,” he says. The hope is to launch something in the next year or so.

Bartlett Tree also has danced around the automation market with remote-control technologies, primarily with its digitally driven tree

Continued on page 40



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Continued from page 38

inventory system called ArborScope, Jamieson says. It first used this technology eight years ago for clients with large estates and corporate or educational campuses, such as the Masonic Temple in Washington D.C., and the University of Chicago.

ArborScope creates a digital map of the exact location of trees on a property, also providing photos of the trees and measurements such as height and canopy width. Arborists use devices like a GPS unit and laser range finder to measure locations and tree heights, respectively. The system also communicates with i-Tree, an urban forestry analytical software program from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, to present ecological evaluations of a property, such as the amount of stormwater trees absorb, their cooling benefits and more. Again, the notion is this information can help technicians make a diagno-



sis from afar, better preparing them to go on a service call.

For further remote-monitoring, Bartlett uses drones to evaluate tree canopies. It first did so three years ago in London for the royal family when crews couldn't confirm if the top branches of diseased London Plane trees were safe to climb.

"It was kind of a novelty at first," Jamieson says. "Now, it allows us to be more efficient."

WHAT'S TO COME

While these examples, along with the irrigation and lighting segments,

SOUNDS LIKE... Another device in Bartlett's toolbox is sonic tomography, which it uses to see if tree trunks are rotten or hollow.

are paving the way for the landscape industry to enter the smart home market, the maintenance and lawn care segments seem to be trailing behind—in the U.S., at least.

For instance, robotic mowers are more predominant in Europe—with John Deere and Honda releasing their Tango E5 and Miimo, respectively—but they've yet to pick up steam in the U.S.

Meanwhile, forward-thinking contractors are left postulating what the future holds for such innovations in the landscape industry.


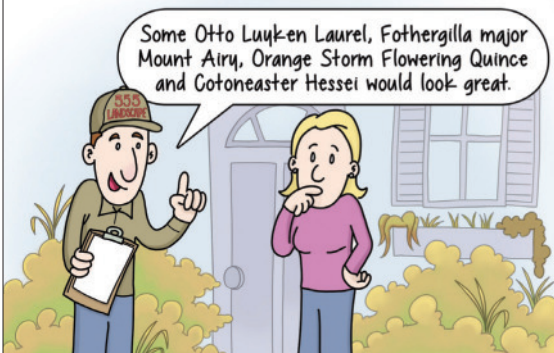
"I always thought, 'Wouldn't it be cool if trees could talk?'," Jamieson says. "Wouldn't it be cool if we could fit a tree with a sensor that tells us what they need in the moment? It's not that farfetched." 

PHOTO: BARTLETT TREE EXPERTS

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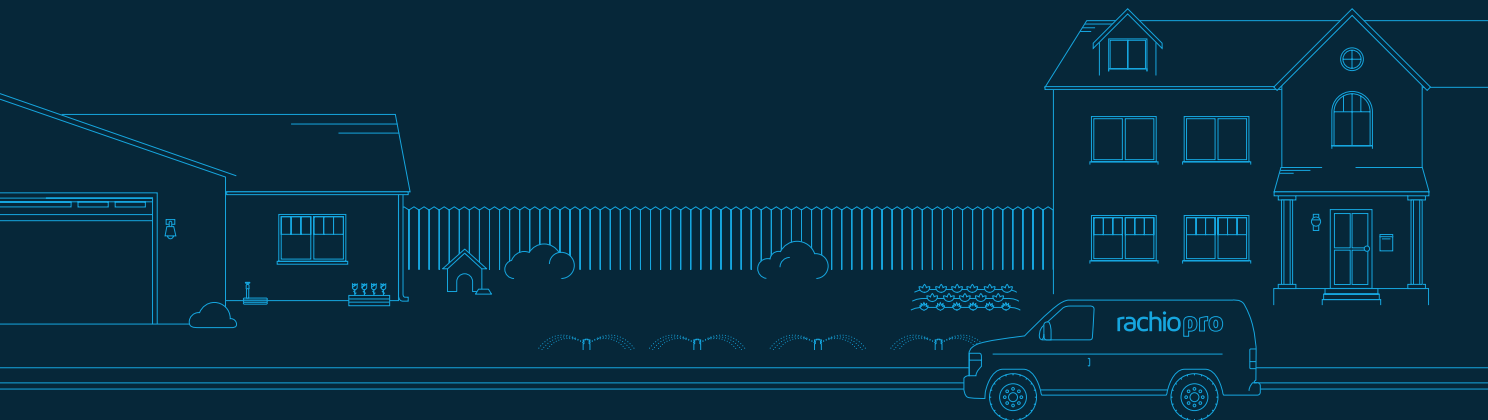


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SNOW+ICE

GUIDE

Another type of ammo

Learn what drove three snow removal firms to add liquid deicers to their arsenals. Plus, pointers for contractors considering doing the same. **BY SARAH PFLEDDERER**

Fearless execution

Piscataqua Landscaping & Tree Service • Eliot, Maine



Justin Gamester

He works neither in a tux nor with a martini, but Justin Gamester is, in fact, a “James Bond” in the snow removal industry—and he gives some of the credit to using liquid deicers.

The vice president of Piscataqua Landscaping & Tree Service received the “Shaken Not Stirred Award”

at the inaugural New Hampshire Salt Symposium, held last fall in Windham, N.H. As the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services says, the award honors a snow removal professional who is the James Bond of salt reduction, exemplifying a fearless, confident approach to this task.

Some snow removal contractors are still wary of using liquids deicers, but Gamester forged ahead five years ago when he introduced liquids to his now \$9 million company.

“I’m not advocating eliminating rock salt, nor would I do it myself,” he says. “Just evaluate another tool. If you give it time and the attention it needs, I don’t think you’ll be afraid to change.”

Contractors turn to liquids for a wide range of reasons. For Piscataqua Landscaping, which is 25 percent snow removal, it was to stay ahead of the regulatory curve. Gamester wanted to be prepared if customers or regulators ever require the company to limit salt use.

Through some trial and error, he now identifies salt brine as the company’s sole liquid of choice.

The solution is comprised of salt and water, and it’s created in-house

with a brine maker. It’s applied by two designated crews as an anti-icing agent on parking lots or roadways before a snowstorm.

“We started off slow,” Gamester says. “We didn’t just go buy the brine maker. We started off using saddle tanks on our salt spreaders and would add liquid as it was necessary, coming out of the salter.”

Before that, Piscataqua Landscaping tested out other liquid deicers by the jug from vendors. First, was a liquid calcium chloride, but this proved too corrosive. Then, there was a magnesium chloride blend, but the price was too steep for the level of use. After that, Gamester started researching salt brine.

He sought out municipalities using the deicer and colleagues at the Snow & Ice Management Association for some direction on how to get started. From there, as with any new product, he had to assess it in action.

OPTIONS Salt brine, shown here in storage tanks, is one liquid deicer option. Liquid calcium chloride and magnesium chloride are among others.





Jim Hornung Jr.

Right away Gamester observed how the brine, when used as an anti-icing agent, gives crews a “cleaner scrape” when plowing. He also noticed a cost savings because the brine reduced the amount of salt used.

Later, as the company relied more heavily on brine, Gamester weighed the costs associated with purchasing it by the jug versus the cost of a brine maker and opted for the latter. It wasn’t cheap, but he says it’s been worth it.

Inclined to think ahead

Polar Snow & Ice Solutions • Towaco, N.J.

Anthony Pennella started using liquids this past winter, and it was a bit of a case study.

The owner of Polar Snow & Ice Solutions used Ice B’Gone Magic Liquid primarily as an anti-icing agent on a hill leading up to two major high-rise buildings the firm serves. Pennella estimates 100 to 150 cars travel up the hill every hour. It turns out the traffic is the perfect ingredient to ensure the liquid deicer works, as the added friction ramps up the melting process.

“The more traffic that drives on the road, the higher percentage it will work,” Pennella says. He plans to use liquids more often as an anti-icing treatment in the future.

Polar Snow & Ice Solutions is a 2-year-old incorporated subset of Pennella’s Landscape Designs, of which Pennella is general manager. Polar Snow & Ice Solutions does about \$250,000 in annual revenue.

The firm got crafty with the equipment required for adding liquids to an operation. It fabricated a liquid spray tank, rigging it out of a 150-gallon tub attached to a gas-powered pump, hose and spray nozzle.

The push for such an investment in liquids, Pennella says, is to combat salt pricing and availability concerns.

“It’s definitely something to consider when operating a snow removal

company because that’s where the trends are going,” he says. “We’re looking into our future. We’re planning for five to 10 years out from now.”

Still, there are challenges, such as getting customers on board.

“Our granular application works very well, and our clients are more inclined to pay for the granular than the liquid because it can get pretty pricey,” he says.

Ice B’Gone Magic Liquid costs about 20 percent more than Polar’s preferred granular applications. The liquid, which Pennella settled on from a peer recommendation, is made up of magnesium chloride and agricultural byproducts. But he may “test the waters” on other liquids, he says.

In terms of upselling customers on those anti-icing treatments, it’s all about education, Pennella says. For instance, he informs them that liquid deicers stay put, whereas salt scatters, so their money scatters.

“Test it out with your clients,” Pennella says. “See what they’re willing to pay. It does become a little pricey, but they’re paying for what they get.”

Mastering the learning curve

Elbers Landscape Service • Buffalo, N.Y.

Jim Hornung Jr. has had a seat in a snow plow truck since he was 4 years old. Now, as president of Elbers Landscape Service, he’s in the driver’s seat, steering the 96-year-old firm in the direction of liquid deicers.

Elbers Landscape Service is a \$4 million landscaping company, with snow removal accounting for one-third of the business.

Hornung decided to get into liquids last summer, mainly to satisfy the environmental concerns of a large, commercial client. “It was a significant challenge, but it will pay off,” he says.

Due to the steep learning curve, he considers the company’s first season using salt brine a “limited success,” but notes the transition will pay off

with experience—and it’s important it does, since he invested in a brine maker.

Due to the capital need, using liquids may be a hurdle for small contractors, Hornung says. He settled on brine for his intro to liquids because it was the easiest to “brew,” and it’s simpler and less expensive to apply than other liquids. But the learning curve left the company doing a “limited roll-out” of the new deicing option its first year.

For instance, Hornung discovered salt truck drivers aren’t always the best brine truck drivers. Because liquids don’t scatter like salt, they need to be applied slower and more accurately to ensure the solution lands where it’s intended.

Using liquids also meant a shift in staffing. “We needed a crew on the anti-icing side in addition to the crew that worked the storm in addition to the crew that cleaned up the storm,” he says.

Still, none of the hurdles are enough to kill Hornung’s long-term plans to expand the company’s liquid capabilities.

“Potentially, we’d like to get to a point where we’re custom blending the materials based on the conditions,” he says. “We expect to get there in the next year or two.”

Along with that, Hornung intends to add more trucks, adjust how the brine maker is set up and double or triple its liquids storage capacity from its single 6,000-gallon unit.

It may seem like he’s overhauling the company’s deicing products, but Hornung assures that’s not the case.

“I don’t ever expect it to replace our granular applications,” he says. “In the same way that it’s a tool in the basket, taking granular salt out would be removing a tool from the basket.”

WEB EXTRA

Visit the Web Extras section at LandscapeManagement.net for three liquid start-up pointers from Michael Hornung Jr.



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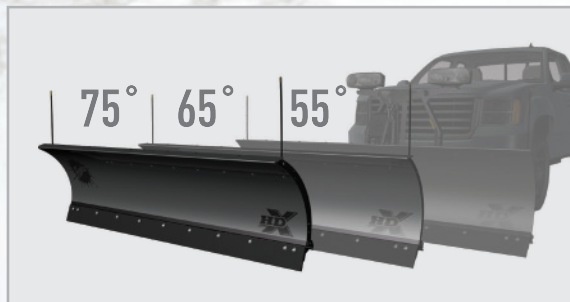
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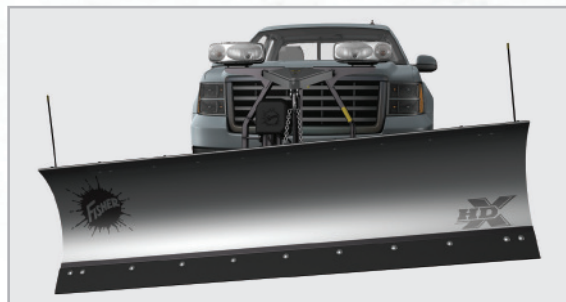
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BY PHIL HARWOOD

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

Become a talent magnet

There aren't enough people interested in working in the cold, at night, plowing and shoveling snow. We're worried about being able to perform the work we've sold. A similar problem exists on the green side, but at least the work is more steady and during the day."

Sound familiar? Many snow and ice professionals today tell themselves these same things. The reality is labor problems appear in all industries. It's time we face reality, roll up our sleeves and get busy. This is a serious problem and we need to get serious about the solution. We need to become magnets for snow talent.

To solve any problem sufficiently, we first need to define it. The real problem isn't that there aren't enough available people to supervise territories, drive our trucks or work on shovel crews; the real problem is that available people are in high demand, and if we're not a magnet for snow talent, we will fail to attract the people we need.

To become a magnet for snow talent, we need to do more than amp up our recruiting, but let's take a look at this process. While it may seem straightforward, a comprehensive approach to recruiting is more than meets the eye. To assess the strength of this area in your company, answer the following list of questions and make note of the questions you can't answer "yes" to.

RECRUITING-RELATED QUESTIONS:


- Is someone responsible for recruitment strategy and processes?
- Does a written job description exist for the position?
- Are job postings written and approved well in advance?
- Are situational interview questions prepared and in writing?
- Are interviews conducted with two or more interviewers in a group setting to reduce bias?
- Are final candidates asked to participate in one or more pre-employment assessments?
- Are job offers in writing and professionally prepared?

- When an offer is accepted, does a written onboarding process exist?
- Are new employees provided a formal orientation?
- Are new employees assigned a coach or mentor?
- Are new employees provided with a date or time frame for their first feedback review?
- Is the new employee recognized in front of his or her peers?

Of course, not all positions require all these items to be in place. However, if you want to be a magnet for snow talent, each item should be answered in the affirmative for some positions.

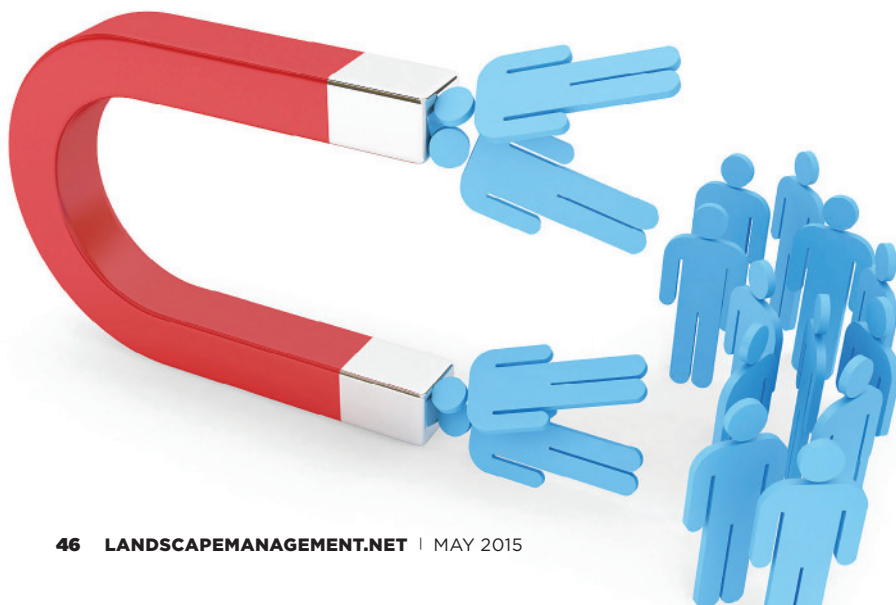
Earlier in my career, I was running dispatch for a large commercial snow and ice management company. I'll never forget the night Dave Smith (actual name has been changed) showed up for work. Dave was not just your typical sidewalk crew captain; he was the prototype in every regard. As he entered the control room, I asked him if he was "ready for the snow." His response was priceless. He looked at me like I had insulted him, and said, "Am I ready for the snow? Is the *snow* ready for me?"

Dave was a talented sidewalk captain. He motivated his crew through servant leadership and enthusiasm. There are plenty of "Daves" out there, working in other capacities and for other companies.

How will you find them and attract them to your company? By being a magnet for snow talent. 

WEB EXTRA

Visit the Web Extras section at LandscapeManagement.net for a list of 25 snow and ice recruiting questions.



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SNOW PLOW LINE

COMPANY: SnowEx Snow & Ice Control Equipment

URL: SnowExProducts.com

After years of research and development, the line comprises 20 snow control products with new technologies, such as the power-assisted AutomatiXX attachment system. The plows offer high-strength, low alloy steel components and formed base channels designed with multiple angles to add torsional strength and prevent twisting under heavy loads.

HDX SNOW PLOW

COMPANY: Fisher Engineering

URL: FisherPlows.com

The new HDX offers an adjustable attack angle that can be set to 55, 65 or 75 degrees to accommodate different plowing surfaces, weather conditions or operator preferences. The plow also features an articulating A-frame that allows the blade to pivot from side to side to follow the contours of the plowing surface for a cleaner scrape and more even cutting-edge wear.



GIANT DOORS

COMPANY: ClearSpan Fabric Structures

URL: ClearSpan.com

The Giant Doors, which only can be paired with ClearSpan buildings, can be built to any width and height and feature a bifold design that maximizes headroom and wall clearance. The design allows the door to elevate within its threshold, so it saves interior and exterior space. The door is powered by an electric drive unit with controls and can be outfitted with a lock and wireless remote.

STRIKER HOPPER SPREADER

COMPANY:

Western Products

URL: WesternPlows.com

Available in six sizes, the Striker stainless steel hopper spreader features a chute design that directs deicing material out and away from the truck. A circular shutter deflector allows more even one-sided spreading operations. Two 12-volt electric motors provide independent control over the conveyor and spinner. Gas and hydraulic options are available.



GROUND TRACKING TECHNOLOGY

COMPANY: Meyer Products

URL: MeyerProducts.com

Meyer's Ground Tracking Technology (GTT) allows the plow to pivot up to 12 degrees in either direction, making it automatically follow the contour of the road. Available as an option on Lot Pro, Road Pro and Diamond Edge plows, GTT is possible because the moldboard and black iron move around a center pivot point.



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POWER CLEAR 721 QZE



COMPANY: The Toro Co.

URL: Toro.com

The Power Clear 721 QZE single-stage snow blower features the Power Propel System. A pivoting scraper keeps the rotor in constant contact with the ground, pulling the snow blower forward and clearing snow down to the pavement. The Power Curve rotor throws snow up to 35 ft. When finished, simply fold down the handle for transport and storage.



SNOW BLOWER LINE



COMPANY: Loftness

Manufacturing

URL: Loft

ness.com

Loftness' seven skid-steer snow blower

models are available

in 72- to

84-in. widths. They come with a universal coupler, a single motor design and electric spout rotator. A total of 11 rear-mount, power takeoff (PTO)-driven tractor models also are offered with one-, two- or three-auger configurations. Standard features include adjustable skid shoes, reinforced body braces and shear bolt protection.



C-SERIES BROOMS



COMPANY: Caterpillar

URL: Caterpillar.com

The BP115C and BP118C pickup models can be used on snow with Cat skid-steer loaders, compact track loaders, multi-terrain loaders and compact wheel loaders. A new gutter brush features heavy-duty mounts and pivot joints, and the new bristle-height-adjustment lever is redesigned for easier use. The BA118C angle model features a new bearing-mounting plate that allows the brush to be changed without bearing removal.



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snowexproducts.com



RIGID-FRAME FABRIC BUILDINGS



COMPANY: Legacy Building Solutions

URL: LegacyBuildingSolutions.com

Combining rigid frame engineering with tension fabric, Legacy offers a line of fabric buildings that incorporates structural steel beams instead of open web trusses. This engineering concept provides a cost-effective, long-lasting solution for salt and sand storage facilities, according to the company. Unlike hollow tube steel, solid structural steel beams are not vulnerable to unseen corrosion originating inside a tube.

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FRONT-MOUNT SNOW BLOWERS



COMPANY: Kioti Tractor

URL: Kioti.com

Available in four models, Kioti's snow blowers feature carbon steel reversible blades. They quickly hitch to the subframe for easy mounting and operate on a mid-mount power takeoff (PTO) drive. The blowers are available on Kioti's CS and CK tractors and most DKSE tractors.

280 SKID-STEER LOADER

COMPANY: JCB North America

URL: JCBNA.com

Featuring a 2,800-lb. operating capacity and an 84-hp engine, the 280's "Powerboom" design improves visibility by 60 percent and makes it easier and safer to enter and exit the machine. JCB skid-steers are compatible with 30 attachment families, including snow buckets and snow pushers. Cab configurations include an open canopy, a heated cab and factory-installed air conditioning.





RED LINE

COMPANY: Corona Tools

URL: CoronaToolsUSA.com

From flat-bladed models that easily dig into packed snow to snow shovel/pushers that slice, push, lift and throw large scoops of packed snow, Corona's new RED line of snow shovels feature lightweight blades to minimize strain, yet resist impacts and harsh weather all season long. No metal edges mean shovels are less likely to get caught or damage property. Plus, the oversized D-grips are easy to use with or without gloves, according to Corona. Weather-resistant hardwood handles are 45.5 in. long.

SIDEWINDER

COMPANY: DuraClass

URL: DuraClass.com

The Sidewinder's body sidewall is shaped into a continuous top rail, side and running board configuration. This eliminates the outside seam weld below the top rail, preventing moisture and freeze problems. The unit is able to spread material up to 25 ft.—the width of two full traffic lanes—with continuous feed from the dump body.



A-TIPPER



COMPANY: Crysteel Manufacturing

URL: Crysteel.com

The tailgate of the redesigned Crysteel A-Tipper aluminum dump body boasts independent latching, minimal welds and a 3/8-in. stainless steel handle. Users can drop the tailgate, spread-through or simply remove. Standard features include 3/16-in. aluminum construction, rigid sides with single panel reverse bend, tarp-mounting provisions and integrated receivers, 6-in. board pockets and LED lighting with one-piece wiring harness.



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CASE STUDY: ADD-ON BIZ

NOT A BANK

Why and how to
get your company's
accounts receivable
under control.

▶ PAGE 54

OVERDUE

BUSINESS BASICS: NUMBERS

A/R: The keys to the kingdom



BY DANIEL GORDON

The author is a CPA who caters to landscape and lawn care firms. Reach him at dan@turfbooks.com.

Cash is king, and healthy accounts receivable (A/R) makes for a sustainable kingdom that promotes an environment of profitability and growth. A business that doesn't have control of its A/R usually will have poor cash flow and trouble meeting its expenses in a timely fashion. It's often also a sign there are other financial issues that will hamper growth and sustainability.

When you sell your services you generate top line income. If you collect the money, it's cash in the bank. But what about when you don't collect? Obviously you create A/R but with no money in the bank. As businesspeople, we understand there's a difference between cash and A/R. But many of us have trouble managing cash flow as opposed to managing net income. Effective A/R management is the first step in effective cash flow management.

Many of us know how to manage a profit and loss statement. However, just because we show a profit doesn't mean there's cash in the bank to pay the bills. Take, for example, the lawn care professional who provides services to his customers of \$50,000 for a month. His technician labor, materials, vehicle costs and other direct costs amount to 50 percent or \$25,000, leaving a gross margin of 50 percent. And his sales and other non-direct costs are another 35 percent or \$17,500. He's left with a 15 percent, or \$7,500, net profit. Not bad! But what happens if he collects only 75 percent of his sales or \$37,500? He's owed \$12,500 and is short not only his net profit of \$7,500 but another \$5,000 he needs to pay his bills.

Most of us understand this concept; it's fundamental to managing a business. But why do many of us have trouble executing an effective cash management program? Are we too aggressive in trying to make that sale by giving overly generous terms to our customers? Or have we designed our business to service mostly commercial accounts that take a minimum of 30 days to pay? Under either scenario, we may not be doing the wrong thing. But we better have a plan to either collect that money quickly or access other funds or credit lines to fund the current expenses of our businesses. In terms of formulating this plan here are some factors to consider.

1. Don't become the bank! Allowing your customers reasonable credit terms is not a bad idea. It's when they take advantage and go beyond those terms that problems surface. Banks make bad loans, and you will have customers who don't pay. Banks stop lending these people money. If customers don't pay you for round one of their fertilizer program, shame on them. If you then service round two and they don't pay, shame on you for servicing them again without payment for the first round.


2. Attack the problem. A/R management starts with laying out a formal collection procedure, which should begin with an A/R aging report. This report should categorize the firm's receivables by age. There should be columns for current, 30, 60 and more than 90 days. At each point you should make a collection effort. In any event, don't allow a large percentage of your receivables to go over the 60-day column. History shows the older a receivable is, the more difficult it is

to collect. Making collection calls is one of the worst jobs, but some people are surprisingly good at it—and they may be right under your nose. Evaluate your

team for someone with a professional presence, who is adept at handling difficult people, skilled at follow up and well organized to document collection efforts. This is the person for the job. There are also agencies you can outsource this task to.

3. Create a financial environment where days to collection with regard to A/R are less than days to payment with respect to accounts payable. This isn't always easy. But if you give your customers 30 days to pay, see if your material suppliers will give you 60 days to pay their bills and the like. Doing so ensures you'll have enough money coming in to meet the payments going out.

4. If you're growing quickly, make sure you have a credit line available to fund your outstanding receivables. On several occasions I've been asked to help companies that are literally days away from going broke because they're growing so quickly, extending their customers payment terms but have no cash to make payroll or pay other expenses. If you're in this situation, you should speak to a CPA or other financial professional to do the projections necessary to secure a credit line that will allow for this growth.

A/R management is one piece of the financial and management function of growing a business. When managed properly, it allows the successful owner to operate from a position of strength and make sound business decisions about expansion, cost reduction and efficient operation of his firm. 

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Habits of successful salespeople: Meeting prep



BY KEVIN KEHOE

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 25-year industry veteran. Reach him at kevinkehoe@me.com.

While riding to a sales call, I asked the young salesman, “What’s the goal for this meeting?” *Meet with the guy!* “What’s your agenda?” *Talk about the job!* “Why should he hire you?” *Because he likes us!* “OK, but what objections might he have to hiring you?” *What do you mean—objections?* “If he has objections, what’s your negotiation strategy?” *What do you mean?*

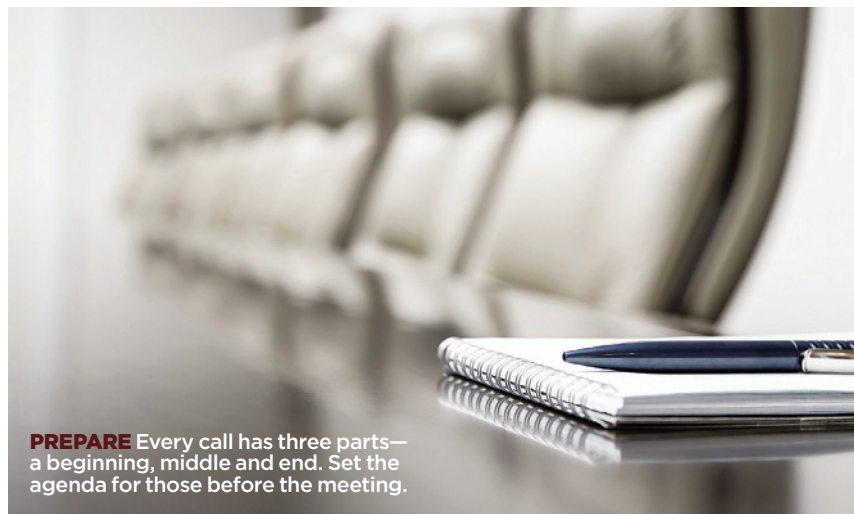
The call did not go very well, although the salesman thought it went OK. I followed up later... He never closed that opportunity.

The most successful salesmen prepare for every call. They have a goal, an agenda, answers for potential objections and a negotiating strategy. They may commit this plan to written notes and/or visualize it. I prefer writing it to winging it. Yes, there may be some sales you close due to your charm and good looks, but most are the result of preparation.

“Yes, there may be some sales you close due to your charm and good looks, but most are the result of preparation.”

Let’s break down the process. This process applies to any call, email, phone and face-to-face.

Goal. In a “sales cycle” there are only two possible goals for a call: 1.) Get a decision (yes or no) or 2.) Get an advancement (a promise on both



PREPARE Every call has three parts—a beginning, middle and end. Set the agenda for those before the meeting.

sides to actions that will result in a decision later). Before you make the call, determine your goal.

Agenda. Set the agenda for the call. I prefer to do this in an email before any phone or face-to-face meeting. Every call has three parts: 1). Beginning—set the purpose of the call (discovery of needs, management of objections, negotiation of contract, etc.); 2). Middle—discuss the issues related to the purpose; and 3). End—get a decision regarding the purpose. This process keeps the call “on track.”

Why. The prospect needs to trust you more than he or she likes you. Even if the prospect does not ask “why,” you must provide reason and proof. It can be as simple as: “Our clients do business with us because we meet their production schedules. They find this saves them money and hassle. Is this important to you for this job?” You must address what they value—honestly and directly.

Objections. Before any prospect makes a purchase they want two things: 1). A good deal (that’s why they almost always bring up price) and 2). The feeling that they’re not making a mistake by hiring you. Objections and normal prepurchase concerns are natural. Visualize their objections and have ready responses. I have addressed this in a previous column (read it at buff.ly/1GDE6JX), but in review: Validate the objection, explore the objection, then make a suggestion to address it.

Negotiation. Know how much you’re willing to negotiate price before you get on a call. You may never have to negotiate it—especially if you do a good job with objections—but know where you “have room.”

If you provide a price concession, request a concession from them, like schedule flexibility, material types or quantities or simply a signature on the dotted line.

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Mike Lysecki served for 10 years as director of operations at TBG Landscape, a full-service landscape contractor based in Brooklin, Ontario. He now serves as COO of the Landscape Management Network (LMN), the landscape estimating and timetracking software company that sprouted from TBG Landscape. He's presented TBG's real-life landscape business management experiences to more than 3,000 landscape contractors from Australia to Boston and just about everywhere in between.

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CASE STUDY: ADD-ON BIZ

Slick service

A Kansas landscape company adds value by offering oil clean-ups. BY CASEY PAYTON



Joe Flake,
owner of
Target Lawn
Care

After cleaning up an oil spill from a car accident one day, firefighter Joe Flake had an idea. He often saw oil spots on drive-thru lanes and on residential driveways while on the job for his full-service landscape business. But he didn't know of anyone who offered oil clean-up as a service. It's a simple idea, he says—but that's why he liked it so much.

"I'm a big believer in simple," says Flake, who has been a firefighter for 25 years and owns Target Lawn Care in Paola, Kan. "Oftentimes the good ideas are the simple ones."

Adding the service was simple, too, Flake says. There was minimal investment. A typical job requires an oil absorbent product (like those found at an auto parts store), a broom, a shovel and possibly a metal scraper (if the oil is really caked on). Manpower is the biggest investment, but Flake says it's almost always a one-man job.

"It's a good profit margin—probably around 75 percent," Flake adds. "And there's really no competition for this in our area. There are some companies that powerwash, but we really discourage clients from using that for oil clean-up. Not only is it blowing around the mess, but it also allows

the oil to run into the storm sewer. One of our big selling points is that our clean-up process prevents that oil from getting into the sewer."

Flake says his primary customers are banks he already provides landscape services for. For example, he may mow weekly and do the oil clean-up once a month. For commercial clients, he calls the service "lane clean-up." It also includes picking up debris such as crumpled receipts or pens that have fallen out of vehicles in the drive-thru lane.


Flake says there's a significant difference from lane to lane when it comes to clean-up needs. The primary lane is always the worst, so Flake charges the most for that lane. The second lane is typically priced a little cheaper—and if there's a third lane, even cheaper than the second. Of course, the ATM lane is often priced higher as it gets a lot of traffic. Flake didn't share his pricing strategy, but he says lane clean-up pays more than a typical one-man service call does. Overall, the service makes up about 1 percent of the company's \$300,000 revenue.

"It's definitely a small service, but it makes us more valuable to clients," Flake says. "Any service you can offer that others aren't ties you a little tighter with the client."

While Target Lawn Care mainly serves commercial accounts (about 80 percent), Flake says there's also a market for this service on the residential side. He has done oil clean-ups on driveways, particularly for homeowners who are looking to boost their curb appeal.

"If someone is looking to sell their home, cleaning up oil spots can instantly make their drive look a lot better," Flake says. "On occasion I've inquired about houses on the market and offered this service. But for the most part, people find out about it on my website or by word of mouth."

From an execution standpoint, it wasn't difficult to add this service, he says.

"Honestly it's something that anyone can learn to do, but it's one of those things nobody really wants to do," Flake says. "Services like this tend to be easy to add on and popular with clients. It's amazing what you can find out there to do for people if you just look. It's usually the simple things." 

Payton is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.

BUSINESS BREAKDOWN

COMPANY: Target Lawn Care

LOCATION: Paola, Kan.

SERVICE: Drive-thru or driveway clean-ups

ANNUAL REVENUE: \$300,000;

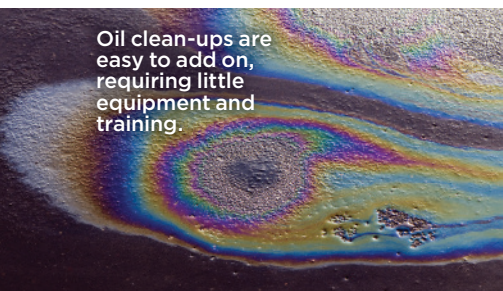
about 1 percent from lane clean-ups

WHY? To fill a need, primarily for banks

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: Working in drive-thru lanes while customers need to use them is a challenge. "We've learned the busy banking times," owner Joe Flake says. "We'd never do this at 5 p.m. on a Friday or on a Saturday morning."

BEST TIP: "Bank customers are often determined to use the first lane, even if we're working in it and others are open," Flake says. "I tell my crew that the bank's customers are *our* customers. If they really want to use that first lane, just step aside and let them go."

Oil clean-ups are easy to add on, requiring little equipment and training.



A person wearing a green hoodie and a black baseball cap is seen from behind, working on a wooden fence. The fence is made of horizontal wooden planks. In the background, there is a large agave plant with thick, pointed leaves. A small red and orange flower is visible near the base of the agave. The scene is outdoors with a clear blue sky.

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LAST CALL

COMPANY: Nufarm Americas

URL: Nufarm.com

Last Call herbicide contains a proprietary formulation of fenoxaprop, fluroxypyr and dicamba to deliver selective postemergent weed control in cool-season turf. Last Call controls a wide spectrum of grassy and broadleaf weeds, including dandelion, clover and tough mid-tiller crabgrass. It also can be used for the removal of Bermudagrass from cool-season turf.

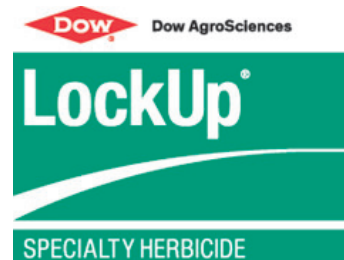
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LOCKUP

COMPANY: Dow AgroSciences

URL: DowAgro.com

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TENACITY

COMPANY: Syngenta

URL: Syngenta.com

Tenacity herbicide selectively controls 46 weeds and grasses pre- and postemergence. Once applied, Tenacity translocates throughout the weed and terminates growth within two to three weeks.



CELSIUS WG

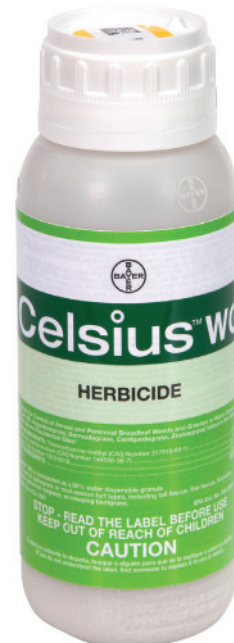


COMPANY: Bayer

Environmental Science

URL: BackedByBayer.com

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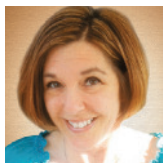
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[from page 18]

SafetyWatch list of hazards

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

- Lack of safety vests.
- Lack of hearing protection.
- Lack of eye protection.
- Lack of cones or traffic control devices.

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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EDUCATION

Andrean High School
Merrillville, Ind.
Class of 1980

Purdue University
West Lafayette, Ind.
Class of 1984, B.S., Urban Forestry

Michigan State University
East Lansing, Mich.
1984-1985, M.S., Urban Forestry

DePaul University
Chicago
1989-1994, MBA

WORK EXPERIENCE

1982-1987
Field technician
ChemLawn/ChemScape
Hickory Hills, Ill.

1987-1989
Sales manager
ChemLawn
Mokena, Ill.

1989-2008
Arborist, district manager,
regional vice president, COO,
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Hendricksen The Care of Trees
Wheeling, Ill.

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Vice president
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President
National Association of
Landscape Professionals
(formerly PLANET)

On the rebranding: "We've got the brand, we've got the name, now we've got to execute. We have to drive value to the members."



In March Jamieson received a Certificate of Distinction from the Purdue Agricultural Alumni Association.

"The company was sold to Davey and, as often happens when you're the CEO, you don't go with those deals."



"It's been several years of good economy for the tree care industry. We're going full blast."

"I was a kid who grew up in Gary, Ind. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought I'd have the opportunities I've had."

"It was all night classes. I would work in the field, climbing, chipping brush and spraying trees. Then, I'd go to downtown Chicago where DePaul was, go in the bathroom and change quickly and sit in classes with a bunch of business people. I was worried how bad I smelled."



For a second year (in 2014), Jamieson participated in Tour des Trees, a seven-day, 500-mile cycling tour to raise funds for tree research.

WORDS OF WISDOM "You only grow through people. You've got to bring in great people and grow them." • "Connect with people. You never know where those relationships will help you out." • "There's great reward in giving back and trying to make a contribution to something greater than your company, making a contribution to the industry." • "You have to be very careful with who you trust. People are always working their own agenda. It doesn't matter how in sync you are."



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WEED CONTROL THAT GIVES YOU SUMMER HOURS.

Last Call™ herbicide delivers post-emerge control of more than 40 grassy and broadleaf weeds – including mid-tiller crabgrass – when most other herbicides check out. And since Last Call is labeled for most managed areas in cool-season turf, there is no reason to feel the heat this summer. Plan your summer, it's your call.

SEE YOUR DISTRIBUTOR OR NUFARM.COM/USTO FOR MORE INFORMATION ON LAST CALL.

Last Call™

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