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# MANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT



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# ISINESS PLANER 2016

# The MUST LIST

14 must-do's for smart, growing landscape firms.









6.41 HISIMIT BEST-IN-CLASS

1,265 LBS MAX PLOW WT

429 LB-FT TORQUE

410 HORSEPOWER



ON THE COVER

14 must-do's for smart, growing landscape firms.

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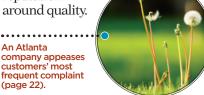
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ON THE COVER: ARTWORK: ©ISTOCK.COM/T KIMURA/ALEX WEST





**FIGURE** The Sectional Sno-Pusher<sup>TM</sup> has too many "moving" parts!

The Sectional's individual "moving" mold boards contact and clean the asphalt better than any plow on the market!

**FIGURE** The Sectional is too hard to use!

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

**THE Sectional is too expensive!** 

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# 

# WEB RESOURCES WORTH SHARING





# SHARE YOUR LM PICS, WE'LL SHARE ALIKE

→ We can't believe it's been a year since we launched our new design and brand. In honor of the one-vear anniversary, we're launching #LMgram. Snap a pic showing us where/when/how you read LM and post it to social media with the hashtag #LMgram. We'll pick our favorites and publish them here. And we'll also send you some LM swag!

# 

### Waze

Getting lost or stuck in traffic on the way to a job is as frustrating as it is inefficient. In addition to routing your trip, Waze calculates traffic and how fast others are traveling on the road, redirecting your route to shorten your commute. It also alerts users to upcoming construction, accidents, red light cameras and hidden cops. IOS, Android • Free





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# **Planning** + pink

s you can see from this month's cover, it's our 12th annual Business Planner. This is the issue where

we tap an array of industry experts to cover topics vital to growth. This year, we specifically asked them to write about the things they believe you *must do* during your planning period to have a successful 2016.

There's lots of good stuff in here. Some of it's strategic, and some of it's tactical. And it's overflowing with tips and quotables.

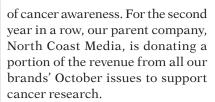
I realize everything we publish doesn't apply to all of our readers, as you vary in services, sizes and locations, but I'm confident there's something here for everyone.

Maybe you don't even know where to start when it comes to planning. Well, the articles by Bruce Wilson (page 40) and Phil Harwood (page 44) are a good introduction. Maybe you're trying to perfect your teamand who's not hiring these days? Then you'll want to check out Kevin Kehoe's advice on page 68. Or maybe you're working on harnessing the information you already have within your company or improving your systems. Read up on what Frank Ross (page 52), Monica Muir (page 88) or many of our other contributors have to say.

Because we're calling this "The Must List," we've created a checklist for you to use as you read through these articles, discuss them within your company and, hopefully, implement them. Check it out on page 39.

# **OUR PINK LOGO**

As you also can see from the cover, we've gone pink this month in honor



We chose pink because it's Breast Cancer Awareness Month, although our donation supports cancer research in general. Last year we donated \$8,000 to the American Cancer Society (ACS), and this year our funds will go to a local cancer research initiative.

My colleagues and I are proud of our company for making this donation, and we appreciate all the support from our readers and advertisers, which allows us to give back, so thank you.

This year feels extra personal for me. Since this initiative was announced just last year, my family lost my Aunt Heather to cancer, and we've learned about my Uncle Ray's diagnosis and treatments over the last few months. As we wrap up this issue of LM and I reflect on the significance of our pink logo, I stop to honor them and wish them much love.

Of course, when it comes to cancer, my family's not unique. Nearly everyone has been touched by this disease, as Kevin Bryan, co-founder of Top Turf, notes on page 24. In fact, the ACS says there will be an estimated 1.6 million new cancer cases diagnosed and more than a half million cancer deaths in the U.S. this year. That's why his company puts out pink lawn signs during October. And it's why North Coast Media publications' logos are pink this month.



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# The best time to plan for the following year is...

constantly. Though you may
have your scheduled
planning time at
some point in the
your the process of year, the process of proper planning is a continuous

"...in the fourth

quarter, the

moment things

settle down. For

us, that's early

December.

# **Landscape Professionals**

Richard Bare Arbor-Nomics Turf

Norcross, Ga.

### **Bill Bemus**

Bemus Landscape San Clemente, Calif.

.... Chris Joyce

Joyce Landscaping Cape Cod, Mass.

..early December We have many -person and team-member meetings over the inter months to epare for next year."

Adam Linnemann ...

Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping Columbia, Ill.

·Jerry McKay McKay Landscape Lighting Omaha, Neb.

**Greg Winchel** 

Winchel Irrigation Grandville, Mich.

## **Industry Consultants**

Dan Gordon TurfBooks Newton, N.J.

Jeff Harkness

3PG Consulting Alpharetta, Ga.

Kevin Kehoe 3PG Consulting Laguna, Calif.

Phil Harwood ··· Pro-Motion Consulting

Farmington, Mich.

Frank Ross 3PG Consulting Alpharetta, Ga.

Jeffrey Scott : Jeffrey Scott Inc!

Trumbull, Conn. Jody Shilan

FromDesign2Build.com Upper Saddle River, N.J.

**Bruce Wilson** Wilson-Oyler Group Scottsdale, Ariz.

"...several years ago. Planning for an upcoming year is best done well in advance as part of a comprehensive planning process.

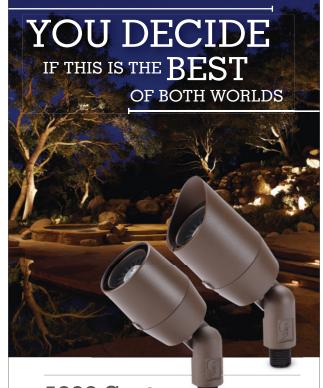
"Review your annual strategic plan results in July or August and again in October or November. Wait for January, and it'll be too late."

"Begin the process in August, and update it continually until you lock in place in January.

# MORE ONLINE

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

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



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# RAISE THE ROOF

**LOCATION** New York City

**COMPANY** Town & Gardens, Long Island City, N.Y.

THE DETAILS To match the developer's vision for these contemporary condos in Manhattan's East Village neighborhood, Landscape Architect Jordan Clough created a design featuring modern, innovative materials and native/adaptive plant material.

Town & Gardens built private roof spaces, the common roof garden and streetscape entrance planters. The steel-plate elements, built in solid lengths up to 12 ft., required a coordinated installation with other tradesmen due to their weight and size.

"The planting palette required a selection of vibrant, high-contrast grasses, perennials and succulents, selected for their ability to quickly colonize and thrive on a sunbaked roof, and reflect the urban aesthetic of the neighborhood," Clough says.

**PHOTO** The Town & Gardens team designed and built the private roof spaces for more intimate gatherings and outdoor grilling.

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







<sup>\*</sup>Applies to select ZTrak models equipped with TWEELs and ordered onsite at the John Deere booth during the GIE Expo only.

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LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY TRENDS, VIEWS AND TIPS

**RECOMMENDER** 

**BRUCE'S VIEW** 

STEP BY STEP

**NEW STUFF** 

**SAFETYWATCH** 

# KEPING TRACK



of mind and efficiency, the system has more than paid for itself.

fter two instances of equipment theft, Level Green Landscaping, based in Washington, D.C., invested in a GPS system for its 70-vehicle fleet. "Our trucks would get stolen, and we'd find the truck and trailer days later with all the equipment missing," says Owner Doug Delano, whose company does mostly commercial work and will bring in about \$12.5 million this year.

Through its fuel supplier, the company purchased a GPS system from VehiclePath. The service costs \$29 per month per truck, including the leased equipment and installation.

The company's leadership now knows where each truck is constantly. It also can tell when trucks are speeding or idling. Delano receives notifications if a truck exceeds a certain speed or idles for more than five minutes.

As a result, the company has cut its average idle time in half since purchasing the service. Crew members even compete to see who logs the least idle time per month.

A few months in, the system was tested when a vehicle was stolen. Within five minutes, Delano was able to find the truck and track its location overnight, leading to the retrieval of about \$235,000 worth of equipment.

**BROUGHT TO YOU BY** 



# RECOMMENDER

# **Aerators**

Which do you prefer and why?

New Hampshire Sen. Kelly Ayotte operates a Turfco TurnAer XT5 at the NALP Renewal & Remembrance volunteer service day at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C., in July.





AARON POPE OWNER, AARON'S LAWN CARE VIRGINIA BEACH, VA.

"I choose the Plugr PL800 because you don't have the huge engage and disengage lever that wears you out. It works like pistons instead of the normal rolling barrel with plugs. I can turn around on a dime with no engaging and disengaging. The engine starts up with no trouble and is so light and easy to maneuver."



ANDREW STEPP

OWNER, PREMIUM ORGANIC LANDSCAPES ASHEVILLE, N.C.

"I prefer the Toro 30-in. Stand-On Aerator for its ease of use. You can train someone very quickly on how to use it efficiently. Guys don't get tired as quickly riding on the platform as they do when manhandling the walk-behind types. Plus, 1,200-pounds of down pressure comes in handy in hard, claytype soil."



# **BOB HOOVER**

OWNER, LITTLE BOB'S LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT BARRINGTON, N.J.

The majority of the properties we service range from 3,500 square feet to about a half acre. We use the Ryan Lawnaire V model for most properties, and we have a Lawnaire IV to get through smaller gates or for small areas with more turns. They both pull a good plug."



# **FAMILY RULES**

he saying, "From shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations," describes the inability of a family-owned enterprise to survive long enough for the grandchildren of the founder to lead it.

Successful family-owned landscape companies share six common behaviors.

- 1. Family members earn their stripes. They're not put in managerial positions without proving themselves. Some owners require their children to work for other companies as part of their development.
- **2.** Healthy boundaries and rules for conduct are well-defined and adhered to. There's a clear line between the business and the family, and business decisions are made from a business perspective first.
- **3.** Management and teams are a strategic mix of both family members and other qualified staff. Promotions are merit-based and the leadership team is well-rounded with diverse talent, experience and a balance of personalities.
- **4.** Family cohesion and swift conflict resolution are vital. Settling family disputes quickly avoids putting employees in an awkward position, where they have to take sides.
- **5.** There's no attitude of entitlement. Family members don't get special treatment or think they can just show up, get a job and be protected. Praise for exceptional work and discipline for bad behavior are expressed equally.
- **6.** Everyone is ready for succession and transitions. Owners insist that family members in the business are prepared to lead, which may mean working elsewhere or getting a business education to go with their landscape education and experience. (



# STEP BY STEP

# How to tank mix chemicals

ank mixing fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals can save time and money if done correctly.

Generally, you can tank mix within product categories, such as mixing herbicides with other herbicides. However, be cautious when mixing cross-category products. There are some herbicides that shouldn't be mixed with certain insecticides or plant growth regulators.

Before creating a batch for application, first test the combination on a small scale. Wear personal protective equipment when pouring chemicals.

Using a clean, quart-size glass jar with a lid, add 1 pint of the carrier solution, which could be water or liquid fertilizer that's being used as the carrier. Add a compatibility agent if needed, and shake or stir the mix with the lid tightly fastened.

Then, add 1 teaspoon per ounce of pesticide that will be applied per 1,000 square feet. For example, for a planned application rate of 4.5 ounces, you would add 4.5 teaspoons to the mix. When you're mixing more than one pesticide, add them in order of the WWW WALES Method. (See sidebar.) After each addition, invert the jar 10 times to mix the products. When everything is added, let the mixture sit for 15 to 30 minutes and then look for any separation, large flakes, precipitates, gels, oily film on the jar, heat or other signs of incompatibility. When the mixture separates but can be readily remixed, it should be able to be sprayed.

If the mixture is incompatible, you can test again, first trying to slurry the dry pesticides before adding them or adding a compatibility agent (if you haven't already). You also may try adding half of the compatibility agent to the fertilizer or water and the other half to the emulsifiable concentrate or flowable pesticide before adding it to the mixture. If none of that works, don't use the mixture.

Once you have a compatible mixture and use it in the tank, you still need to monitor the pH level, as some products can be sensitive to pH extremes. Remember, always read the label or check with the manufacturer if you have mixing questions.

Source: Syngenta

this page to use as



Pour 1 pint of the carrier solution and any needed compatibility agent into a quart-size glass jar with a lid. Shake or stir the mix.





# STEP 2

Add 1 teaspoon per ounce of pesticide that will be applied per 1,000 square feet. Invert the jar 10 times to mix the products, and let it sit for 15 to 30 minutes.



# STEP 3 (1)

Look for large flakes, gels, precipitates, oily film or any other signs of incompatibility. If the mixture separates and can be readily remixed and shows no signs of incompatibility, it should be safe to apply.



## **WWW WALES** Method

Water conditioners

Water-soluble packets

Wettable powders

Water dispersible granules

**A**gitate

Liquids and flowables

**E**mulsifiable concentrates and microencapsulates

Surfactants and other adiuvants

(Fertilizers need to be jartested because some mix best when added first and some best when added last.)

Walker has spent 3 years trying to determine the most productive mower in the industry . . .

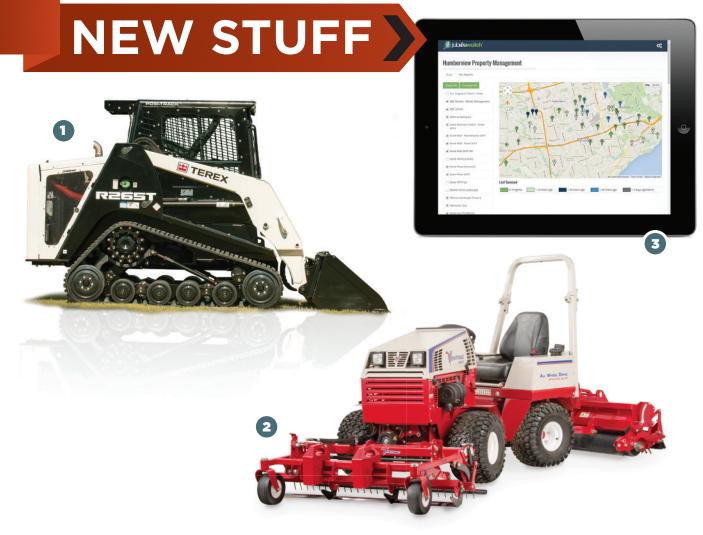


Let us show you why the Walker is 25-30% more productive than the competition.

Request a free demonstration



walkermowers.com



# 1. R265T COMPACT TRACK LOADER

**COMPANY:** Terex

**URL:** Terex.com

A new addition to the company's Gen2 family, this compact track loader is a radial lift-path model with a 2,650-lb. rated operating capacity. A 74-hp Tier 4 Final engine with variable flow hydraulics powers the machine. It comes standard with 18-in. wide tracks, with the option of a 20-in. track.

# 2. DR540 GROOMER & DG550 RENOVATOR ATTACHMENTS

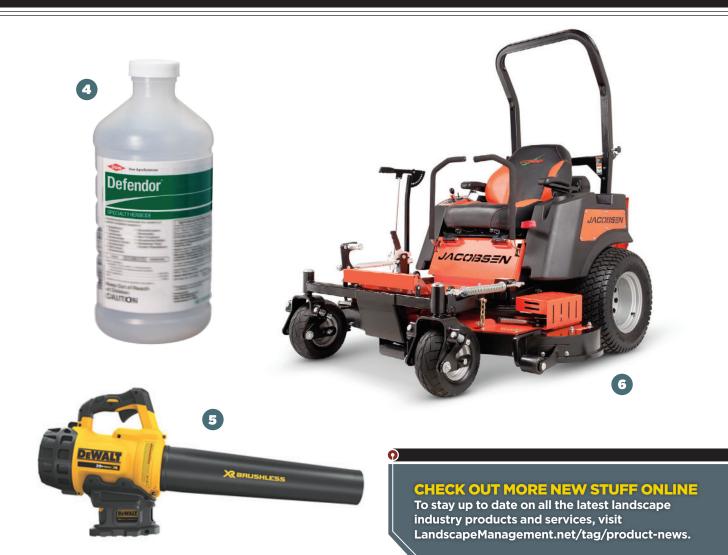
COMPANY: Ventrac
URL: Ventrac.com

These attachments are designed for use together. The Groomer attaches to the rear of a Ventrac or small compact tractor with a category one 3-point hitch. It features a leveling bar for carrying and distributing material to fill in low-lying areas. A roller packs down the dirt to give a sporting field consistent play and bounce. The Renovator attaches to the front of a tractor and includes three renovation blades for weed

removal, leveling and cutting/maintaining edge lines.

# **3. JOBSITEWATCH APP**

COMPANY: Landscape
Management Network
URL: GoLMN.com/JobSiteWatch
Employees can use this new
site-reporting app to clock in and
out, and the GPS feature makes
sure they're actually there. Plus,
property managers can receive live
status updates on each job, service
notes and weather information. The
app also stores payroll information,
which can be shared with QuickBooks in minutes, LMN says.



# 4. DEFENDOR SPECIALTY HERBICIDE

**COMPANY:** Dow AgroSciences **URL:** DowAgro.com

This specialty herbicide is now being sold alone for application flexibility, the company says. The postemergent product is intended for application during preemergent timing or in the fall. It's designed to eliminate unsightly dandelion blooms and control other winter annual and perennial weeds. Defendor can be purchased in a 1-qt. jug or in a 1-gal. container with Dimension 2EW specialty herbicide.

# **5.** 20-V MAX LITHIUM ION XR BRUSHLESS BLOWER

**COMPANY:** Dewalt

**URL:** Dewalt.com

The 20-v MAX brushless blower features an axial fan design that provides air output and runtime at 400 cfm and 90 mph. It's designed to be lightweight, at 7.1 lbs, and low noise, at 61 dB, the company says. Other features include a variable trigger and speed lock.

# **6. PRO SERIES**RZT MOWER

**COMPANY:** Jacobsen

**URL:** Jacobsen.com

The RZT mows up to 5.3 acres per hour. It's powered by the buyer's option of a 25- or 27-hp Kawasaki FX engine or a 27-hp Kohler EFI engine. The RZT mower is the flagship of Jacobsen's new Professional Series line, which includes three zero-turn mowers and six UTV models.

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New York, NY Nov 23+24, 2015 Warner. NH Feb 10+11, 2016

Toronto, ON Nov 26+27, 2015 Miami, FL Feb 16+17, 2016

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Phoenix. AZ Dec 3+4, 2015 San Francisco, CA Feb 23+24, 2016

Chicago, IL Dec 8+9, 2015 San Diego, CA Feb 25+26, 2016

Calgary, AB Dec 10+11. 2015 Denver, CO Feb 29+Mar 1, 2016

Boston, MA Dec 10+11, 2015 Detroit. MI Feb 29+Mar 1, 2016

Atlanta. GA Jan 19+20, 2016 Phoenix, AZ Mar 7+8, 2016

Richmond, VT

Las Vegas, NV Mar 9+10. 2016

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# **PARTNERS SUCCESS!**



# BY WAYNE IMPULLITTI

More than 60 years ago, Impullitti Landscaping was founded on the principles of setting the standard for high quality work and excellence in customer service by Cliff Impullitti Sr. That desire to be the best has attributed to every aspect of the company's success.

Wayne Impullitti, president, is the third generation of his family, to head a successful landscaping company. The recent addition of his sons Michael Impullitti and Tommy Impullitti, will represent the fourth generation of family in the landscaping business. Impullitti Landscaping prides itself on their rich family history and deep ties to the community it serves. Since 1952, Impullitti Landscaping has been relentless in this pursuit in all aspects of the business- design, build, maintenance, commercial snowplowing and customer service.

### How have you used technology to boost your company's success?

As Impullitti Landscaping has grown to more that 100 employees and served more and more of the community, the need to become more efficient with our "paperwork" was also evident. There were two main reasons that we desired to move to an electronic time tracking system. First, we wanted to be able to provide better and faster information to our clients, especially when it came to critical and safety sensitive services such as snow and ice management. We can now instantly inform our clients of when services have been provided using LMN.

The second reason, was simply to improve office efficiency. Throughout the years, we have tried many systems, including data entering timesheets and dispatch systems, but nothing has even compared to the value of LMN. The time savings, has allowed for our office staff to focus their efforts on other projects. The accurate reports we are able to generate, help us to budget and plan crews and routes more efficiently. From a management perspective, the LMN program has helped in every aspect of running the business.

### How has technology passively shaped your company's outlook?

We have always had some system of tracking the time spent by our crews, however, the reports we generated always were accompanied by the phrase, "Here are the numbers, but they aren't quite right because..." There was always some reason, the crew didn't turn in the paperwork, the information was incorrectly data entered, etc. But now, because the employee's pay is tied to their record keeping in LMN, we have confidence that the reports are right! Now when we look at the numbers, we can make better decisions about how to plan, organize and move forward.

It forced us to do a better job estimating because that affects our scheduling. LMN has helped everyone in the company have a better understanding of how all functions are interrelated and affect the whole circle of business from estimating all the way through to billing.



### Please describe some challenges that you have recently faced.

We have several people in the company that are responsible for bidding work in our estimating department. However, each of them looked at things a little differently. This could create inconsistency in our estimates. Additionally, when trying to be competitive, the sales staff really did not know where the numbers needed to be in order for the job to profitable. By implementing the estimating system and using the budget for the company, now everyone knows with certainty what the bottom line is. Now we estimate jobs with confidence.

# What other resources from LMN have helped Impulitti succeed?

We had been evaluating various software programs for nearly 7 years before we found LMN. All of them each had several attributes that we really liked and wanted for our business, but none of them could do everything we wanted. We had even considered getting a custom program built at one time so that we could have it track and do it all. And then we found LMN! It had been the answer to so many of the issues that the others software programs just could not provide.

We attended the SIMA show in June, worked with the LMN team through the summer and fall, and all crews were using LMN for that snow season. Since then, we have taken some classes, like the Paperless Snow Co. Workshop. We also have had our managers participate in an LMN webinar provided through NALP, which helped improve their management techniques with the use of LMN.



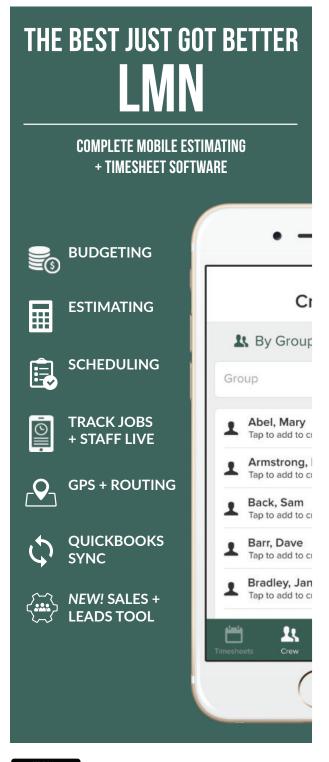
"By implementing the estimating system and using the budget for the company, now everyone knows with certainty what the bottom line is. Now we estimate jobs with confidence."

The LMN team has been a great partner. The training videos and LMN support staff were outstanding in helping us with this endeavor. They were with us every step of the way even if it was at midnight! They understand the business not just the software – and that makes all the difference.

If you could 'forecast the future' – what do you see down the pipeline for your company? Is there any exciting news that you could share at this time?

As our company continues to grow, LMN will be an integral part of our operations. This Spring, Impullitti Landscaping will open a second location on the west side of Cleveland. LMN allows us to seamlessly track employee time for payroll, regardless of which shop the employee reports to, track hours, prepare reports, create schedules and process our billing from anywhere. That ease of mobility allows us to more quickly and easily respond to the needs of our clients and thus provide excellent customer service so that our clients can truly... Enjoy the View!

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# NEWS + HOW-TO'S

# **SAFETYWATCH**

→ This photo was staged to show several safety hazards or dangerous work habits. How many can you identify? Flip to page 131 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.



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# 

IDEAS AND STRATEGIES TO KEEP YOUR DIVISIONS IN THE BLACK

TURF+ ORNAMENTAL CARE MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

DESIGN/BUILD+ INSTALLATION

IRRIGATION+ WATER MANAGEMENT





f there's anything Kevin Bryan has learned in his 22 years running Top Turf, it's this: success boils down to quality. And for Top Turf, that means focusing on weed control and employees.

"Business-wise, the biggest challenge is always getting and keeping the best employees," he says.

Agronomic challenges change year to year, but weeds always remain enemy No. 1 for Top Turf.

"Typically, when people are upset it's because they have weeds," Bryan says.

Top Turf, which Bryan founded with his brother, Scott, employs about 160 people.

Here's how the company, which has locations in four major Southern markets (Atlanta, Dallas, Charlotte, N.C., and Greenville, S.C.), works to ensure quality in these two key areas.

# **DOUBLING UP**

Bryan takes pride in saying many employees have been with Top Turf since the early days.

"We still have our first employee," he says. Something else that's been with Top Turf since the beginning? The concept of always having the next technician on deck.

It's an idea that, on the surface. seems to add cost, but Bryan and Jason

### UNDER CONTROL

Focusing on weed control is key, Top Turf's owner says, because it's the No. 1 thing customers complain about.



Miscedra, service coordinator for Top Turf in Atlanta, say it pays off in training and quality.

"You're only as good as your worst technician, right?" Bryan says.

From day one. Top Turf has strived to staff itself with two-man crews: a lead technician and a helper.

"We do it so we can provide better quality, and so whenever there's a technician position that comes available, we already have someone trained," he says. "We don't always achieve two techs per truck, but that's what we're aiming for."

For perspective, in Lawrenceville, Ga., there are 21 technicians and 18 helpers.

An important component of this concept, Bryan says, is rotating the helpers among the technicians.

"When we have a technician position open, the helpers are already trained," he says. "And they've been with the technicians who are good and the ones who are average, so they have a wide variety of experience to pull from."

The helpers ride along and assist the lead technician with anvthing that will make him more efficient. Miscedra says.

"They may help pull the hose, run a spreader in the back or spray weeds," he says. "It just helps move

things along, and we find it helps them spray a lot more weeds."

Continued on page 24

Jason Miscedra

# NEWSfee

# TURF GUIDE AVAILABLE

Bayer released the **Baver Turf Solutions** Guide for lawn care professionals. Available

in print and e-book, it provides information on the identification. biology and controls for common diseases. weeds and insects affecting warm-season, cool-season and transition zone turfgrass.

# TRUGREEN M&A

TruGreen acquired Marlborough, Mass.based Noon Turf Care. Founded in 2002. Noon Turf Care reported a 2014 annual revenue of \$7 million.

# ALOFT DISTRIBUTION

Nufarm Americas, the exclusive distributor of Valent USA Corp. products for professional turf, ornamental and aquatic uses in the U.S., is now distributing Aloft Insecticide. It controls major turforass insects. including white grubs and surface-feeding pests, Nufarm says.



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# **TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE**

Continued from page 22

Bryan says another thing that allows the company to focus on quality is branch structure. Each branch manager has service managers who report to him. One service manager is responsible for four lawn care technicians.

When the technicians are out treating lawns, they note which lawns need extra attention, and they put in a service call for those accounts.

After the weed control from the primary visit has had time to take effect, the service manager goes back out to follow-up on the lawn and do additional weed control, if necessary.

"That's how the service managers are able to maintain high quality in their routes," Bryan says. "That creates a lot of good will for customers. They see somebody has been on their lawn, but it hasn't cost them anything."

### **FOCUS ON WEEDS**

The company's strategy of doubling up on technicians and providing followup service calls by managers allows it to pay extra attention to weed control. Beyond that, product selection plays an



important role in the company's goal to be the "neighborhood weed control experts," as its tagline says.

For the past two years, Top Turf has opted for combination postemergent herbicides to control a broader spectrum of weeds with a smaller selection of products on the truck.

In the past, the company's technicians carried several different hand cans and a backpack sprayer on their trucks.

"A tech would pull off one hand can for nutsedge, a different hand can for dallisgrass and so on," Miscedra says. "You might have five to six different types of weeds in a particular lawn."

The result? It would take technicians longer to spray weeds if they had to go back to the truck for multiple products. Those trips take time

and energy. Although the technicians are incentivized based on quality over speed or quantity, any bump in production is a good thing.

"We get some 95 degree days here," Bryan says. "The quicker they can get into the AC, the better."

Having a herbicide that controls so many weed types is simply a time saver, he says. The savings could be 10 to 15 minutes per stop, depending on how bad the weed situation is, Miscedra adds.

The company's foray into combination postemergents was about two years ago. It has used Tribute Total and Solitaire.

"We're constantly testing different weed control," Bryan says.

The company taps distributors, extension agents and manufacturers to help with product choice and agronomic challenges.

"But mostly, we get out there and figure it out ourselves," says Miscedra. He adds that the No. 1 quality the company looks for when testing new products is efficacy.

"We just want something that's going to work," he says. "We'd rather spend the extra money on something that's going to work better and save us customers, rather than something that's going to take three or four treatments anyway."

Bryan agrees, noting it all goes back to customers' concerns about weeds.

"The way we look at the cost/benefit (to more expensive products) is word gets around," he says. "Most of our business is from referrals, so, to me, you're just shooting yourself in the foot if you're going to use products that aren't quite as effective."

# **TOP TURF FOR THE CURE**

Top Turf customers' lawns are speckled with pink lawn signs this month. Since 2011, Top Turf began donating \$10,000 annually to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation (BCRF). Custom lawn signs are the company's way of informing customers about the effort.

"We just wanted to give back," said owner Kevin Bryan. "The reason we chose breast cancer is everybody knows somebody who has been affected by it."

Top Turf also provides a space on clients' bills where they can opt to donate to



whatever charity Top Turf is supporting at the time. The company typically promotes four nonprofits per year. The BRCF and Angels Among Us Pet Rescue are two the company has supported consistently. For Angels Among Us, Top Turf matches client funds for a minimum donation of \$1,000.

Because the pink lawn signs have been well-received, the company plans to extend the idea to seasons and holidays next year, Bryan says. For example the signs will sport American flags in July for Independence Day.





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# **MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE**

Statues and artwork are commonly incorporated into Lawns Ltd. clients' properties.



# Driven to serve

Compassion makes the difference at Lisa Torgersen's Texas landscape firm.

BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER

ne of the first questions Lisa Torgersen asks a new client is, "Do you have a dog?" If the answer is yes, the owner of Lawns Ltd. in Waco, Texas, and her crews are sure to design an outdoor space that will suit both the clients and their pet, creating areas where the animal can roam and play without impeding on the landscape and its function.



Lisa Torgersen

"You have to think about that with animals because they can be destructive, but they need their space, too," Torgersen says. "We like to create easy environments for our clients to coexist with their dogs."

It's that kind of thoughtfulness and attention to detail that has helped Lawns Ltd. evolve from a one-woman mowing and maintenance operation to the multimillion-dollar, full-service landscaping firm it is today. Nearly 40 years and countless projects later, the first commercial client Torgersen ever earned is still a client today, and some of Lawns Ltd.'s employees have been with the firm for more than two decades. Torgersen credits this longevity to an insatiable drive to please her clients and a personal goal to treat all her employees with kindness and respect.

"If you don't have relationships, then you just have a job," she says.

Growing up in West Texas, Torgersen began mowing lawns when she was 16 years old. Her mother had a passion

for yard work, and her brother also mowed lawns "but never finished anything he started," allowing Torgersen to step in and take the reins.

"As a kid you can mow yards or you can baby-sit to make money," she says. "I did both."

Torgersen went on to study horticulture at Texas State Technical College and then earned an education degree from Baylor University, continuing to mow lawns all the while. In 1979, equipped with a Sears credit card, she decided to make Lawns Ltd. "a real company," even though she says landscaping really wasn't a profession in the early 1980s. Homeowners took care of their own lawns, and commercial companies had maintenance crews to do the moving and landscaping. Torgersen notes that since Lawns Ltd.'s humble beginnings, the field has evolved from manual, blue-collar jobs to an industry where entrepreneurs and designers with a passion for the outdoors can establish long-term, respectable careers.

"At this time, there was one other guy in town that did this—now there are three pages of us in the phone book," she says. "Back then, it was just blue-collar work. Now, I hire college grads and educated people who just love to do what we do."

Continued on page 28

# NEWSTE

### MILITARY-FRIENDLY

Military Times named U.S. Lawns to its "Best for Vets: Franchises" list. "We strive to reach out to our military veterans

and offer them a chance to become entrepreneurs as they transition out of the military," said U.S. Lawns President Ken Hutcheson.

# YELLOWSTONE

**EXPANDS** YELLOWSTONE

Austin Outdoor and Bio Landscape, the two companies that make up Yellowstone Landscape Group, are unifying under one brand: Yellowstone Landscape. The company also acquired

Ackman Bros. Landscaping, based in Orlando, Fla.

# RCI RECAPITALIZES

Raleigh, N.C.-based

Triangle Capital Corp. invested \$10.3 million in Rotolo Consultants Inc. (RCI). RCI is a Slidell, La.-based landscape construction and maintenance firm. RCI said the move will help expand its maintenance division.







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# **MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE**

Continued from page 26

By the mid-1980s, Torgersen's customers began asking for more than just mowing and maintenance, and she knew it was time to expand her service offerings. She hired a full-time landscape designer to run the company's new design and installation division. She remained with Lawns Ltd. until retiring two years ago. While Lawns Ltd. soon became known for its landscape design services, Torgersen says she wouldn't recommend expanding a business just to fulfill client requests. The decision should be intentional, well thought out and incorporated into the business plan.

"We decided to offer landscape design services because of client demand instead of saying, 'This is what we're going to do," Torgersen says. "It's a totally different skill set, so if you want to evolve beyond maintenance, make a decision that this is what you want to do, hire someone who is qualified in it, market it to your current clientele and get the necessary equipment."

Today, Lawns Ltd., which earns between \$2 million and \$3 million annually, performs 65 percent lawn maintenance and 35 percent landscape installation/irrigation services to a 30 percent residential, 70 percent commercial clientele.

While lawn maintenance still comprises the bulk of the company's work, landscape

### **EVER EVOLVING**

Lawns Ltd. has grown from a one-woman mowing operation to a \$2 million, full-service landscape company



# **WORKS OF ART**

To Lisa Torgersen, landscape design is a form of art.

"We see landscapes as more than just plants," she says. "It's living spaces, things to look at and art in itself."

The owner of the full-service landscape firm Lawns Ltd. in Waco, Texas, and her team of landscape designers always leave space in a landscape to incorporate works of art chosen by the client—whether it's a bird bath, a statue or a metal sculpture. They let the client determine what the piece of art means to them.

"We want to engage their brains about what they want to look at besides plants," she says. "We love evolving with a client and totally changing their environment and watching the positives."

Torgersen and her designers also aim to provide their clients with low-maintenance landscapes that suit their lifestyles and offer benefits beyond the aesthetic. Lawns Ltd. also strives to incorporate sustainable practices into everything it does, including minimizing chemical and water usage and maximizing shade.

"We are the green industry, not the black industry," Torgersen says. "We are here to treat things that are living and breathing and provide pleasure."

design has become Torgersen's passion. She says it allows her to focus on the artistic side of the business while establishing and maintaining long-term client relationships.

"As a landscape design company, you are in peoples' spaces forever," she says. "Our designers leave an imprint of who they are and give a part of themselves to each project. We love that. We love getting involved with clients."

# **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Lawns Ltd. also makes an effort to be involved with the community. Each year for the past 10 years, the company finds a project or a cause to which it can donate time and services. Last year, it provided free landscape design services around a group of sculptures installed by the city of Waco. This year, the company donated a large piece of copper art to a local cancer center. The art was placed in the center's healing garden to help provide a calming environment to patients undergoing cancer treatment. Torgersen is also in the early stages of providing an outdoor environment to a Texas-based nonprofit organization for disadvantaged adults, and she has plans to donate services to The Humane Society's new facility next year.

"It's not hard to find a nonprofit to give to," says Torgersen, who served on The Humane Society board for 12 years and has five dogs as a result. "We include the staff when choosing an organization so they are emotionally involved."

Emotion drives many things at Lawns Ltd. right down to Daisy, the homeless dog that once roamed the neighborhood and is now Torgersen's "copilot" and the company's mascot, providing moral support to Torgersen, her staff and even some of her clients.

When she first started out, Torgersen never imagined her passion for maintaining exterior spaces would take her where she is today, but she gives most of the credit to her dedicated employees and her loyal clients.

"I'm 56 and I've been doing this since I was 16," Torgersen says. "I don't know too many people who have been doing the same thing for 40 years.

"That could be a good thing or a bad thing," she says, laughing.

"It's passion and focus," she adds, of her company's success. "We love what we do." (19)

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



# **GOING THE XTRA MILE**

The XCaliber from Dixie Chopper

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# Environmental pressure

be the mantra for many landscape and irrigation contractors, but the industry and many clients are changing. Water conservation is a top priority across the country, so it's important for professionals to update their practices to meet new standards and expectations.

Irrigation manufacturers are also changing their products with efficiency at the forefront. They are designing components like sprayheads to better manage water output with elements like pressure regulators and check valves.

Here's a look at what's driving sprayhead trends, how they've advanced and what landscapers can expect to see with these products in the next few years.

Adam Jones
are says

# WHAT'S BEHIND UPDATES?

California, in particular, is under pressure to cut back on water use, but conservation is a hot topic across the country.

"It's all about water efficiency and conservation," says Orion Goe, product marketing manager for residential and commercial irrigation at The Toro Co. "Our focus is on looking for products that deliver the same level of performance but by optimizing the use of water. We

BY LAUREN DOWDLE

want to use less water without starving the landscape of water."

Water restrictions, regulations and conservation efforts are spreading across the nation, so the need for more efficient irrigation is the driving force behind product updates and new technology. "Most innovations we're see-

How and why sprayheads are

becoming more efficient.

ing in the irrigation industry are related to water conservation," says Massey Services' V.P. of quality assurance Adam Jones. "It's the natural evolution of the need, whether it be the control systems or the equipment itself. It's going to be a continuing trend going forward."

Orlando-based Massey Services offers pest prevention, lawn care and irrigation services for residential and commercial customers. The company had \$178 million in 2014 revenue.

# **UNDER PRESSURE**

One way sprayheads are evolving is by incorporating pressure regulators. In fact, pressure regulation is the main advancement with sprayheads Patrick Hibbs sees. He's product manager of spray bodies and nozzles for Rain Bird. Sprayheads are now available with in-stem pressure regulators, which ensure all the heads are

applying water at the desired pressure, instead of having to use the city's standard water pressure.

"Instead of needing to install pressureregulating systems in the sprayheads



**Kurt Thompson** 

yourself, more manufacturers are offering that option already included in the heads," says Kurt Thompson, technical and training director of irrigation for Massey Services. "The technology is there now."

Continued on page 32

# 

### SPANISH COURSES

Hunter's Technician Level online training courses, providing basic product knowledge, are now available in Spanish.

TRAINING EVENTS

Rain Bird will host

more than 85 irrigation training events throughout the U.S. from September through May. Both Rain Bird Factory Trained and Rain Bird Academy events are

designed to help irrigation professionals enhance their skill sets and career prospects.

# **CHANGING THE WORLD**

Fortune magazine ranked Jain Irrigation

Systems seventh on its list of companies that "Change the World." The list spotlights companies addressing major social problems as a part of their business models.





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# **IRRIGATION+WATER MANAGEMENT**

Continued from page 30

Being able to regulate pressure can mean savings for the client. For example, each 5-psi reduction in pressure reduces water use by 6 to 8 percent, according to Rain Bird.

"The focus on water efficiency has created a need for reducing water wasted to misting, drainage and runoff, as well as overwatering due to a lack of uniformity," says Kelsey Jacquard, product manager of MP Rotators and sprays at Hunter Industries. "Pressure regulation in the sprayhead allows for the optimal operating pressure at the nozzle, increasing uniformity and significantly reducing overthrow and misting."

Some municipalities are even requiring irrigation systems to have pressure regulators, Jones adds.

### **PREVENT WATER LOSS**

Irrigation installers can further increase sprayhead efficiency by using ones with check valves, which are also becoming standard. "The added check valve eliminates unnecessary drainage from the head," Jacquard says.

Check valves are especially useful if the sprayheads are damaged. The shut-off devices limit the amount of water lost



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and keep the rest of the system working properly, Goe says.

Jones agrees. "A lot of the problems we see with spray nozzles are that if they stay up, they tend to get broken off, which can lead to a lot of water waste, especially on commercial sites," he says. "But if you have pressure regulators with check valves, you'll have less water lost."

### **SUSTAINABLE SOURCES**

There are other sprayhead advancements designed for water efficiency. For example, some products are changing to work better with different water sources.

More property managers are turning to reclaimed and graywater to conserve resources. Manufacturers are creating more robust spray bodies and heads to handle those types of water, Hibbs says.

Other professionals also have noticed updates beyond the sprayhead. "Most of the advancements in sprayhead technology have come from the different types of nozzles now available," says Todd Wilson, irrigation manager at Native Land Design in Cedar Park, Texas. Wilson says the MP Rotator nozzle and system monitoring options have made a big impact for him. Wilson works in the company's Houston branch. The \$11 million, full-service company also has a location in McAllen. Texas.

### WHAT'S TO COME?

Creating water-efficient sprayheads will remain on manufacturers' agendas, Jacquard says. These updates save customers money and conserve water, two selling factors for contractors.

While installers can purchase pressure-regulating sprayheads with set psi levels, regulators with some level of customization or adjustability may be available in the future, Goe says.

There also will be a continued focus on the benefits of efficient products, such as high-efficiency nozzles. With manufacturers continuing to release more efficient components and products, Goe says it's important for users to become more educated on the new options going forward. 

①

Dowdle is an Alabama-based freelance writer.



What's in landscape contractors' heads as they select which brand of skid-steer, compact track loader, mini excavator or other machine to buy? We found out.

#### **DEALER RELIABILITY**

A contractor's first interaction is not with the equipment itself but the dealership that sells and services it. Hence, everything revolves around the dealer, landscape contractors say.

Tim Groenewold, owner of CT Lawn & Landscape in Bethel, Conn., says a savvy, trustworthy dealer is the top factor that sways him when buying equipment. Contractors like dealers local, responsive and accommodating.

"I'm buying what they sell and service because I need a dealer that will be able to turn things around for me overnight, and I need support after the sale," Groenewold says.

Dave Goodsell, sales manager for equipment dealer Bobcat of Omaha (Neb.), knows that when equipment goes down, contractors are losing money. His dealership keeps about 90 percent of parts stocked and offers a rental fleet to keep customers working. "Anyone can sell the first (machine), but customer service, shop guys and parts guys sell the third and fourth one," he says.

#### **REASON TO CHANGE**

When it comes to their choice of equipment manufacturers, many contractors follow the dictum, "If it's not broke, don't fix it." David Katz, president of Elite Landscaping in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., says a change of heart requires a strong technological or financial advantage. "After you've done it for 31 years, there's got to be some incredible benefit to switching models," he says.

#### **EQUIPMENT DEMOS**

Goodsell gives prospective buyers a demo to ensure buyer satisfaction. He'll haul a skid-steer, for example, to spend a day on a contractor's jobsite. During a demo day, Groenewold's employees test the equipment's usability and quality, and his mechanic looks over the machine to ensure easy serviceability. "Since I rarely use the machines, the ultimate decision lies in the guys who are going to be using it every day," he says.

#### **RESEARCH AND REVIEWS**

Before showing up at the dealership, contractors educate themselves with online research or reviews.

Groenewold even discusses equipment with his

competitors. The depth of investigation often depends on the purchase size. "A hundred dollars isn't worth six hours of investigation," Katz says. "If I'm spending \$50,000, I'm going to put more time and thought into it and see if I really need the equipment." He spent about

15 hours researching his last major buy: a truck.

#### **PRICE AND INCENTIVES**

Once the due diligence stage is over, it's decision time. Many dealers offer financial incentives, which are important to weigh against any other information an investigation uncovered. "I was using one manufacturer for years until my dealer told me about another manufacturer that offered the same quality equipment," Groenewold says. "I saved \$3,000 that year because that manufacturer had a savings program."



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#### AMERICANHORT EVENT

AmericanHort will host its NextLevel



event Jan. 18-20 in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. The keynote speaker will be Brian Kight; he will provide leadership strategies to improve company culture and help attendees recognize and respond to critical moments. Education tracks will include leadership, marketing, family business and human resources.

#### HOMEOWNER GUARANTEE

Porch, a home services platform for homeowners and professionals, launched Porch Guarantee. The program will guarantee the quality of Porch professionals' work by ensuring they've been prescreened, passed a comprehensive background check and subscribed to the Porch Pledge. When homeowners book a job with a guaranteed pro on Porch, if they are not satisfied with the quality of the work, Porch will work to make it right.

#### **INDUSTRY GROWTH INITIATIVE**

The National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) launched a consumer awareness campaign and seeks to raise \$1 million per year to fund it. Dubbed the Industry Growth Initiative (IGI), the program is designed to create demand for professional landscape services, increase the size of the industry's labor pool and defend the industry from activists' attacks. The IGI efforts will include public relations, social media, advertising campaigns and other marketing initiatives. NALP Vice President of Public Affairs Missy Henriksen is spearheading the IGI.

#### **NEW BACKHOE**

JCB released its new 3CX Compact Backhoe Loader. It is 35 percent smaller than the standard model 3CX but designed to maintain the same power and speed, the company said. Key features of the 3CX machine include 4-wheel steering, providing a 19-inch turning radius; a choice of 2CX and skid-steer hitches plus an excavator quick-hitch; a Tier 4 Final JCB Diesel Kohler engine, delivering 74 horsepower; and more.



# **BUSINESS PLANNER 2016**

# MUST LIST

14 must-do's for smart, growing landscape firms.

#### INSIDE

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# DO THESE



### 12 operational tips to help owners prevent breakdowns. BY BRUCE WILSON

To avoid the breakdowns that often occur as ideas progress from the abstract to the actionable, all owners **M-U-S-T** do the following things to ensure their businesses achieve results.



✓ Manage your balance sheet. Managing from your profit-and-loss statement only takes you so far. It doesn't answer the question, "Am I building a sound business?" The balance sheet is your bottom line health barometer. You must keep balance sheet ratios in line to have a healthy company.

✓ Measure performance. Measuring employee and company performance drives achievement and contributes to goal setting. Look for effectiveness, efficiency, quality, timeliness and productivity, as well as if and where improvements are necessary.

Manage organizational culture. Companies often don't think about culture until it's too late. When your business struggles with quality and responsiveness, it's most often tied to competing internal subcultures and sending of mixed signals, which confuse individual employees and the whole crew. Only then do owners realize they lack alignment on shared goals, camaraderie and accountability. Unify your culture by forging better internal relationships across

divisional turf and reinforce the right behaviors for better performance.



✓Understand key financial ratios. When top companies benchmark performance, balance sheet ratios are as critical to success as profit-and-loss ratios are to sales. Current ratio and quick ratio are liquidity metrics that let you know if you can pay your bills. Your debt-to-equity ratio lets you know if you have too much debt. And your retained earnings and equity balance let you know if you're increasing value. Banks care about the balance sheet, and ratio compliance is a key factor in lending decisions. The best companies maintain dashboards of key ratios and performance targets and strive to hit them.

✓ **Urgency.** Creating a sense of urgency in your culture helps employees share your commitment to become an outcome-oriented—not a task-focused—business. Owners must lead by example. A lack of urgency at the top leads to a lack of urgency at the bottom, creating unengaged employees who lack commitment.

✓ **Use at-risk compensation to encourage achievement.** Employee complacency is a challenge. It's common for world champion sports

Continued on page 42



Solve problems by looking at the totality of what it represents, and use problems as opportunities for continuous improvement to break down silos, improve communication or evolve.

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### **BUSINESS PLANNER 2016**

Waste is what we refer to as a dumb tax. You either pay it or try to pass it on to a customer. These dumb taxes eat profits and make you less competitive, ultimately costing you sales.

Continued from page 40

teams to slide from the top following a championship year because success can be taken for granted. It happens with companies, too. Young, successful companies slip into complacency because employees can make good livings and take the success for granted. Keeping employee base salaries lower and allowing compensation to increase based on performance is a better way to operate. It also prevents the agonizing challenge of having to reduce pay during economic downturns. The base remains low, and the at-risk factor shrinks if economic conditions limit company performance.

✓ Usher in high-performing people. Highperforming companies employ high-performing people. Look for achievers who can dive into problems to figure out solutions, people who can take on broader responsibilities and those who have the ability to remain agile. Sometimes you have to craft a position that best fits a person's needs instead of forcing a high-potential person into an ill-defined job.



✓Strive for a safe work culture. Efficiently managing health and safety risks in the workplace is essential to your business and your customers' businesses. A poor safety record increases costs through workers' compensation modifiers and high insurance rates, rendering a company less competitive or profitable. Equally important: Customers won't award work to companies with poor safety records because it may affect their own rates. Companies have had contracts cancelled because of their safety records. Institute plans for prevention, response, hazard management and recovery.

#### ✓State your values and mission clearly.

Good company values make happy employees. Employees aren't motivated by company profits

or profits they see going to owners and their families. They care about their own well-being and contribution to a greater good. Organizational values play an important role in how employees rate their job satisfaction—whether it's honesty, respect, quality, environmental awareness, loyalty, commitment or work ethic. Values act as your moral compass and inspire employees to go the extra mile. When values aren't aligned or are confusing, small problems develop into larger ones if the employee and company fundamentally disagree about their guiding motivation.

✓ Tackle problems head on today. Problems, like wounds, seldom heal by themselves without leaving a scar. When they keep mounting, it's natural to take shortcuts to alleviate the distraction, but a quick fix never solves the core problem. Solve problems by looking at the totality of what they represent, and use problems as opportunities for continuous improvement to break down silos, improve communication or evolve.

√ Trim waste to maximize

on process improvements. margins. Waste is what we refer see page 70. to as a dumb tax. You either pay it or try to pass it on to a customer. These dumb taxes eat profits and make you less competitive, ultimately costing you sales. Determine the root cause of the waste and streamline processes to save time, protect resources and improve operational efficiencies, employee engagement and the overall strength of the business.

For more

**✓ Tailor services to customer needs.** A successful customer service strategy isn't based on assumptions, which can be a critical mistake that can affect revenue. Understand what your customers want before they do. Find out what level of service and responsiveness they expect, learn how far they're willing to stretch for your service and what they're willing to pay. Strategically customize your services by understanding the source of value your company provides, tailoring your services to align with customer needs and providing value at a lowest cost.

Wilson, a consultant with Bruce Wilson & Co., is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at bruce.wilson@brucewilsoncompany.com.

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



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# SIMPLIFY STRATEGIC PLANNING



### Not all processes are complicated, nor do they demand enormous effort. BY PHIL HARWOOD

For more on building a great team, see page 68.

everal large-scale studies have shown that most organizations in the U.S. haven't embraced strategic planning as a regular, ongoing, essential business process. Strategic planning is usually attempted with a half-hearted approach. Not surprisingly, these attempts produce limited results. Additionally, because many strategic planning processes are overly complicated, it's common for leaders to be frustrated by the time and effort expended.

The good news is not all strategic planning processes are complicated, nor do they demand enormous effort. There are simplified models more appropriate for small and mediumsize organizations. Unless you have a full-time strategic planning department, a simplified approach is probably better than a model developed for a Fortune 500 company.

The main reason to create a strategic plan is to have an agreed-on plan for the upcoming year. Beyond that is strategic in nature, which means the plan is aligned with the company's stated direction. Plans that don't take into account the strategic direction of the organization aren't strategic plans; they're just plans. The danger of not having a strategic direction is the likelihood that you'll change course every year without getting anywhere. Plus, organizations without a clear direction will always struggle to find and retain good people because there's a

sense of frustration and anxiety associated with not knowing the plan. If for no other reason, employee retention is a great reason to commit to serious, ongoing strategic planning.

Imagine your company as a large cruise ship. Without a plan, the ship will just remain docked. The ship is still an amazing sight to see, and people may even pay to board the ship and enjoy its comforts, but it's not going anywhere. With a shortterm plan, the ship will embark on a journey. The excursion may be exciting and satisfy your desire for entertainment, but it won't capture anyone's attention for the long haul or tap into the deeper needs for fulfillment and satisfaction. But with a strategic plan, the ship, crew and passengers recognize they're on a purposeful journey with a long-term destination in mind. Short- and medium-term plans exist, too, but they're part of a more significant mission. Short- and long-term direction is clear, and all the benefits of being docked remain. The thrill of a short-term excursion is still intact. However, on top of everything else, a greater, more meaningful and longer-term plan exists. This is the value of strategic planning.

#### **WORKING BACKWARD**

Strategic planning works most effectively by beginning with the end in mind and working backward. One component of the strategic plan is the long-term direction of the organization, referred

Continued on page 46



start your strategic plan by beginning with the end in mind and working backward.



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to as vision or strategic vision. It's the imagined future of your organization at some point down the road, typically 10 to 20 years from today. When creating a vision, it's often helpful to identify a specific goal. In the book "Good to Great" by business consultant Jim Collins, he uses the term BHAG to refer to the "big, hairy, audacious goal" associated with creating a vision. I encourage you to learn more about BHAGs and vision casting because it's a critical component of leadership.

Once the long-term direction is set, mid- and short-term benchmarks are often easy to identify. For example, if your 20-year vision is to be one of the top three franchise operators in your industry, a 10-year benchmark could be to implement a successful franchise model with a growing group of franchisees. A five-year benchmark could be to launch the initial franchise model. A one-year benchmark might be to finalize your research and have a preliminary model ready for beta testing. The plans all begin with the end game in mind—the long-term direction.

Of course, vision is largely determined by an overarching organizational purpose, which is referred to as mission—the reason your organization exists. Often, the mission is unclear and,



# The danger of not having a strategic direction is the likelihood that you'll change course every year without getting anywhere.

as a result, the vision is difficult to ascertain. Until the mission is clearly understood, vision is seen as random and devoid of meaning. In other words, mission is the starting point of the strategic planning process.

To support the strategic plan, I recommend a five-year rolling plan. This plan outlines all significant aspects of the strategic plan throughout the upcoming year, along with the four years following. Each plan is unique, so these plans shouldn't follow defined criteria; however, common elements include projections for revenue, profit, people, facilities, major purchases, marketing, etc. This five-year rolling plan is updated annually as part of the annual strategic planning process.

The one-year plan is where the rubber meets the road. It's an expansion of the current year of the five-year rolling plan but in a much more detailed format. The one-year plan is several plans combined into the plan for the upcoming year. Again, plans are unique in nature, but a typical one-year plan includes financial, operational, marketing, staffing and equipment plans.

The final piece to the strategic planning puzzle is accountability. Too often, plans are created but not implemented or implemented initially but abandoned or forgotten. Create accountability by committing to review and assess progress regularly.

There are two parts to this element. The first is a quarterly strategy review session to review the plan so concerns can be identified and actions taken. This meeting is usually a four-to-six hour review session. The second part is a weekly meeting to review information related to the plan. This meeting isn't a full review of every aspect like the quarterly review session. It's a quick scan to look for problems that could be addressed immediately.

Now go forth. (2)

Harwood is the founder, president and CEO of Pro-Motion Consulting, a management consulting firm based in Farmington Hills, Mich. Reach him at phil@mypmcteam.com.

# WHILE THE PAVEMENT IS COLD



### **Estriker**

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# HOW TO BUILD WEALTH

### 12 strategies to build your wealth—and your legacy.

BY JEFFREY SCOTT

wise old man once told me your definition of wealth will change as you accumulate it and grow older. In my work with large and small contracting firms, I've discovered four types of wealth that are measurements of success. You might place these in a different order, but I'm sure you'll think of all four throughout your life:

- personal earnings you can spend or invest as you see fit;
- the value of your business;
- stress-free discretionary time; and
- personal and professional legacy.

The beauty of this list is that each one supports and creates synergy with the others. The following are 12 strategies you can undertake this winter to build wealth in all four areas.

**Your salary.** Increase your weekly salary and build it into your overhead recovery calculation. Don't just hope for enough profits to magically increase your income. Profits are often plowed back in to a growing business; therefore, make sure each job your company

sells is paying for part of your income. Part of this increase will go through payroll, and part will be distributions.

Incentives. Develop incentives that will increase profits directly. Make sure your commissions, bonuses and feedback systems aren't focused on small incremental improvements or strictly topline growth. Instead, have them focus on having a large impact on your company's overall profit performance.

This summer I spent three days with a company in Chicago that needed to pull together more as a team. One of the first

things I did was throw out the firm's convoluted, individualized commissions and incentive system. I told the five leaders they'd

Remember, it's best to build your budget backward. Start with the amount of profit you plan to earn.

all be tied to the same net profit goal. Once I explained why, and how we would measure success, they straightened up in their seats. Within a few minutes, they started brainstorming about ways to make the company more efficient.

Budgets. Use a monthly budget so you don't slow down after you finish sprinting through the mad spring rush. Many owners lose steam and/or focus after July 4. By using a monthly budget, you'll be able to set month-by-month strategies to ensure you maintain momentum in the third and fourth quarters.

Remember, it's best to build your budget backward. Start with the amount of profit you plan to earn, and then identify what sales volume, margins, overhead employees and overhead you can afford to hit your profit number. Budget annually by division—all the way to net profit—to ensure all your major services are priced and produced profitably.

**Equipment.** Optimize your equipment costs. Make a list of excess equipment you need to sell and broken down equipment that's more cost effective to replace. Decide to rent equipment you don't make a return on each year. Ensure the remaining equipment and any new purchases are being recovered through a conservative amount of hours being sold. Many contractors overinvest in equipment because of their ego or misguided accoun-

Continued on page 50





### **BUSINESS PLANNER 2016**

Continued from page 48

tants. To prevent this from happening, it's important to track your return on fixed assets year over year. Track the past five years, and identify if they're trending in the right direction. If it's not providing you a good return, it's eating away at your wealth.

Here's a tip: Preventive maintenance and safety training will help you take better care of your people and equipment. Consider online training services. It will add to your bottom line.

**Growth.** Slow down your growth so you can optimize your profit. Your ego may want to grow at 25 percent, but your cash flow may only allow it to grow at 17 percent—and the high-value (high-profit) clients might tap out at 15 percent. Know the limits of these factors to increase your wealth. The highest-profit contractors I work with are very choosy about whom they sell to. They sell at high margins that ensure high profits, and they aren't dismayed by a low closing ratio. What three changes would you need to make to raise your margins?

**Hours.** Be sure you can track your crews' hours each day. Measure it, manage by it and provide feedback based on it. Nothing beats knowing your numbers by the day.

**Owner's role.** To increase your business value and the amount of your discretionary time, you must increase the owner-independency of your business in:

- sales and marketing systems;
- production systems;
- administration and finance;
- client relations: and
- people development systems.

Which of these are you still overseeing that you can train someone else to take over? Are you managing more than 10 percent of your client base? If you are, what steps can you take to wean your main clients off you as their primary point of contact?

One exercise you can do is identify what you'd have to do to go on vacation for three weeks or simply go on vacation at all (first start with one week, then two weeks, then three weeks). Afterward, do a post-mortem of what needs to be addressed to smooth out the bumps.

Recurring business. Another way to increase the value of your business is to increase the company's percentage of recurring business (maintenance business and the amount of design/build work that comes from repeat clientele). Identify your percentage and determine if you can increase this percentage without drastically changing the company strategy and profitability.

**Large client risk.** You also can grow your value by minimizing the inherent risk of the business. Is

one client responsible for 10 percent of your business? Are two clients responsible for 15 to 20 percent? Ensure you're growing without overly depending on one or two large clients.

Superstar risk. Does your company depend on a single superstar who would cause havoc to the company if he left? If so, ensure this person is tied to the long-term success of the business, a noncompete agreement is in place and you have clear systems so a new person can step in and do the job if needed. Lastly, build your bench strength so you can deal with changes smoothly.

Slow down your growth so you can optimize your profit. Your ego may want to grow at 25 percent, but your cash flow may only allow it to grow at 17 percent.

**Equity risk.** Another way to reduce risk is to ensure your company has sufficient positive equity on the balance sheet so it can withstand a bad year, an emergency or jump on an opportunity that would require the immediate use of funds.

Legacy. Developing your legacy is important to your business and personal life. Your legacy can be defined by what you've done to impact your family, community, employees and clients. Whatever your goal, be clear in writing what you want your legacy to be. Develop a legacy mission statement, hang it on your wall and intentionally work it into your business plans. Examples might be donating your landscape services to local community organizations, spending time on a community cause important to you or spending personal time with your family.

For instance, a good friend and client of mine, Shayne Newman, president of YardApes in New Milford, Conn., built his company so he can give back to his community. He's developed a business that naturally builds his legacy, and his community has responded by supporting the company, protecting its reputation and referring good employees to it. He takes care of his community, and it takes care of him. It's a wonderful symbiosis.

So what legacy do you want to achieve? (

Scott, an author and consultant, facilitates The Leader's Edge peer groups for landscape business owners. Reach him via GetTheLeadersEdge.com.



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Perform better by using information to your advantage. BY FRANK ROSS

committing to a CRM. see page 76.

f I had to grade the economy during the past three years, I'd probably rate it OK. Certainly not great, but compared to the years during the Great Recession, the past three were decent. I doubt we'll get back to great for awhile—three to five years, anyway, or until the housing market receives a much-needed dose of adrenalin, which I don't see happening anytime soon.

The sluggish economy notwithstanding, how is it many companies throughout the country have performed impressively (more than 10 percent growth) and so many others haven't (less than 5 percent growth)? I'd categorize the answer as self-inflicted wounds.

I've had the pleasure of traveling our great country extensively and have seen numerous highly profitable companies despite the economy. I've also seen the lower performers more than I would have liked to. Both have the passion and desire to perform well. Both have fine reputations in their communities. Both have exceptional employees who perform good work and have a strong moral and ethical fiber by which they operate. The difference between the two-other than cash flow and leaders-is information. Those who are taking advantage of the current market have dialed in their performance standards and score keeping to a T. The average performers work hard but rely on their gut to make the right decision, which is a high-risk/low-return proposition. The following are my top five differences between the highly profitable companies and low performers:

Sales and lead tracking. Otherwise known as a customer relationship management (CRM)- k program, this system tracks every lead that comes into your office. It manages complete customer data on the front end, tracks the contacts your people make with prospective customers and stores any proposal information and proposal statuses. The information is maintained in perpetuity until you wish to access it again. It's a must for owners who want to build a library of

current and future customers for mailings, email

blasts and call-a-thons, and for those who want to create a series of metrics to measure and track the success of their sales programs.

**Estimating systems.** We all have estimating systems; however, here's a litmus test for you: "If you were to send (independently) each of your salespeople to the same job to estimate and price it for an imaginary customer, would each of their prices be the same?" If not, you don't have a system; you have a process in which each salesperson prices the job for what he believes will make the sale regardless of the profit. That's a bad gamble. And you most likely don't know how much profit you have on every job you sell.

**Labor hour tracking by job.** Once a proposal is signed and sent to production for service or installation, does the crew leader know and understand the scope of work and the

Continued on page 65



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BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER

ike Leedy loves a bargain, so participating in chemical and fertilizer suppliers' early order programs is a no-brainer. Through these purchasing plans, which offer incentives such as discounts,

rebates and extended payment terms for preordering materials for the coming year, Leedy saves an average of 8 percent on large quantities of product he would have to purchase anyway.

"If I have the opportunity to pay less money for a certain product, I'm going to take it," says the owner of Aabby Group in Tyrone, Ga.

Like Leedy, many turf and ornamental care professionals see the advantages of early order programs. But despite the



Mike Leedy

benefits, the programs also have downsides. Four operators share the pros and cons of early order programs and how they tailor the offers to work for them.

#### **KEEP IT SIMPLE**

Leedy purchases about a third of his firm's annual chemicals and fertilizers through early order



programs. His \$7 million company offers 45 percent landscape design, 50 percent maintenance and 5 percent lawn care services to a 40 percent residential, 60 percent commercial clientele. He earns rebates and discounts from both the product manufacturer and the distributor. For example, he ordered one preemergent herbicide and received a rebate from the manufacturer and a discount from his distributor for ordering the product early. He also takes advantage of the extended payment terms offered to him by his distributor. This year, he received his preordered product in August, and he doesn't have to pay for it until April.

One complaint Leedy has about early order programs is they can be unnecessarily complicated. He says it's often unclear if the manufacturer is going to give him a credit through the distributor or send him a rebate check directly. It can be cumbersome to track down, fill out and submit the rebate paperwork, and it can take six months or more to receive the money. Leedy says it would be more convenient if the manufacturer offered a straightforward discount upfront instead of issuing a rebate later.

"If they would simplify the process, that would be better," he says.

Leedy is also sure to take advantage of other money-saving deals offered by suppliers. For example, Rain Bird recently offered a \$2,000 rebate on a purchase of drainage product totaling \$5,000 or more. Like his participation in early order programs, the chance to receive \$2,000 of free product was something he just couldn't pass up.

"We're a larger company so I'm always looking for deals," he says. "I know I'm eventually going to use the product."

#### **BEING PREPARED**

Joe Holland, founder and president of Majestic Lawn Care & Landscape in New City, N.Y., has been using early order programs for more than 10 years, and he sees an average annual savings of about 10 percent. The



Joe Holland

\$1.6 million company has a service mix of about 60 percent maintenance and lawn care, 21 percent

# We're a larger company, so I'm always looking for deals. I know I'm eventually going to use the product. •

-MIKE LEEDY

snow and ice management, 17 percent landscape design and installation and 2 percent tree care and removal services. Its clients are half commercial and half residential.

Holland preorders about a quarter of the year's seed, fertilizers, herbicides and other products for spring in February. In August, he preorders materials he'll need for winter snow and ice control. After a few harsh winters during which he ran out of product, Holland took a different approach this year and preordered an entire trailer of calcium, which should be more than enough to manage this season's snow and ice conditions.

"The last few winters have been really bad and people have been running out of product and scrounging around to get it," he says. "This year I ordered ahead of time so that won't happen to me again."

Holland likes early order programs because he locks in current prices and receives discounts and extended payment terms. By ordering his supplies early, he feels more prepared and minimizes his risk of not being able to serve a customer or having to use an inferior product to get the job done.

For Holland, the biggest downfall of early order programs is storing so much extra product. With only 640 square feet of pallet storage space available, storage in his shop is limited when a large preorder arrives. In fact, a primary selling point of his preordered trailer of calcium was that his supplier offered to store it for him at no extra cost.

"Our shop isn't that big, and dedicating a few hundred square feet of space to product is a big deal," he says, adding that space isn't as big of a problem in the spring because his crews move materials so quickly.

For contractors considering early order programs, Holland says, "Go for it."

A pallet of fertilizer plus preemergent herbicide comes off a truck at Paradise Lawns. The company, like many others, struggles with storing early order materials.

"Especially if you have a tight budget, this would be the way to go," he says. "And it's more efficient to have the product in your shop instead of having to go to your distributor every time to get what you need."

#### **MAKING SPACE**

Dena Kreher, owner and president of Paradise Lawns in Freeburg, Ill., purchases about 23 percent of her company's fertilizers and 30 percent of its herbicides through early order programs, seeing an aver-

age savings of 10 percent. Paradise

programs, she also likes tak-





ing the opportunity to secure inventory while there is plenty of product available.

"Prior to the kick-off of a new season, fertilizer lead times can increase," she says. "Having the fertilizer in-house is peace of mind, knowing we are ready to go when the weather is ready."

But without knowing exactly how heavy of a workload the spring season will bring, Kreher finds it difficult to determine just how much product to preorder. For example, the company typically uses 27 pallets of fertilizer plus preemergent but ordering too much can result in excess inventory that needs to be stored until the following year, occupying precious shop space in the off-season.

"During the winter months we're actively involved with shop maintenance projects and, at times, the inventory space required for the fertilizer does become an issue," she says. "We also provide snow removal and salt services, and we keep our equipment and products indoors, which adds to the space issue."

#### **PREDICTING THE NEED**

Steve Okros, owner and COO of Heron Home & Outdoor in Apopka, Fla., purchases about 25 percent of his annual product through early order



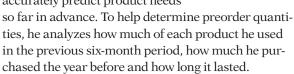
programs. The company, which expects to have revenue of \$19 million this year, is a lawn and pest control company that primarily services residential customers.

Like many operators, Okros participates in early order programs to earn discounts, rebates and extended payment terms, which are usually about six months. He says early order programs typically save him 11 to 15 percent.

"We saved \$37,000 last year, and I would have bought the product anyway," Okros says.

While the extended payment terms are a plus, he says one downside to early order programs is eventually receiving that very large bill.

Another challenge is trying to accurately predict product needs



For example, last year he "burned through" certain types of fungicides during brown patch season, so this year he will be sure to purchase more of those products.

"If you use a lot of one particular product, be sure to get that early," Okros says. "And be cautious of the big bill you will get." (19)

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

Steve Okros



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Razor Burn®	\$3.00/gal	\$2.00/gal	
SELECTIVE HERBICIDES	PERIOD 1 REWARD	PERIOD 2 REWARD	
4-Speed® XT	\$4.00/gal	\$3.00/gal	
BroadStar™	\$0.09/lb	\$0.05/lb	
Change Up™	\$5.00/gal	\$3.00/gal	
Cool Power®	\$3.00/gal	\$2.00/gal	
Elliptical™	\$5.00/gal	\$3.00/gal	
Envoy Plus®	\$5.00/gal	\$3.00/gal	
Escalade® 2	\$5.00/gal	\$3.00/gal	
Horsepower®	\$3.00/gal	\$2.00/gal	
Last Call™	\$20.00/gal	\$12.00/gal	
Manor®	\$15.00/lb	\$10.00/lb	
Millennium Ultra™ 2	\$5.00/gal	\$3.00/gal	
Prosedge™ 2	\$2.25/oz	\$1.50/oz	
Quincept®	\$4.50/gal	\$2.50/gal	
SureGuard®	\$11.00/lb	\$6.00/lb	
Triamine®	\$1.50/gal	\$0.75/gal	
Triamine® Jet-Spray	\$0.50/can	\$0.30/can	
Triplet® Low Odor	\$2.00/gal	\$1.00/gal	
Velocity®	\$20.00/lb	\$12.00/lb	

#### **ELIGIBLE PRODUCTS AND REWARDS CONTINUED**

FUNGICIDES	PERIOD 1 REWARD	PERIOD 2 REWARD	
26/36®	\$8.00/gal	\$4.00/gal	
3336® DG Lite	\$0.08/lb	\$0.05/lb	
3336® EG	\$1.00/lb	\$0.75/lb	
3336® F	\$12.00/gal	\$8.00/gal	
3336® WP	\$0.50/lb	\$0.35/lb	
Adorn®	\$12.00/qt	\$7.00/qt	
Affirm™	\$7.00/lb	\$4.00/lb	
Alude™	\$10.00/gal	\$6.00/gal	
Cuproxat®	\$15.00/gal	\$10.00/gal	
Emblem™	\$15.00/pt	\$10.00/pt	
Spectro® 90 WDG	\$1.00/lb	\$0.80/lb	
Stellar®	\$22.00/btl	\$12.00/btl	
Strider™	\$3.00/gal	\$2.00/gal	
Torque™	\$10.00/gal	\$6.00/gal	
Tourney®	\$30.00/lb	\$20.00/lb	
INSECTICIDES	PERIOD 1 REWARD	PERIOD 2 REWARD	
Arena® 0.25 G	\$0.09/lb	\$0.05/lb	
Arena® 50 WDG	\$11.00/lb	\$6.00/lb	
DiPel® Pro	\$1.00/lb	\$0.60/lb	
Distance® IGR	\$9.00/qt	\$5.00/qt	
Distance® FAB	\$0.30/lb	\$0.20/lb	
Gnatrol®	\$1.00/lb	\$0.70/lb	
Minx™	\$20.00/gal	\$15.00/gal	
Overture®	\$4.00/lb	\$2.50/lb	
Safari® 20 SG	\$10.00/lb	\$6.00/lb	
Tame®	\$5.00/qt	\$3.00/qt	
TetraSan®	\$0.44/ea	\$0.26/ea	
TriStar®	\$35.00/gal	\$20.00/gal	
GROWTH REGULATORS	PERIOD 1 REWARD	PERIOD 2 REWARD	
Anuew™	\$7.00/lb	\$4.00/lb	
Fascination®	\$9.00/gal	\$5.00/gal	
ProGibb®	\$2.50/qt	\$1.50/qt	
RiteWay®	\$15.00/gal	\$10.00/gal	
Sumagic®	\$15.00/gal	\$10.00/gal	
Verve™	\$7.00/gal	\$4.00/gal	
AQUATIC Herbicides	PERIOD 1 REWARD	PERIOD 2 REWARD	
Clipper® (4x1 lb only)	\$4.00/lb	\$2.50/lb	

**NEED TO KNOW** 

Deadline: Period 1: Oct. 31, 2015; Period 2: March 1, 2016 Website: nufarmrewards.com

Nufarm 11901 South Austin Ave., Alsip, IL 60803







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et next season started off with these great cost saving, end-user programs from Quali-Pro of Control Solutions Inc. Some conditions and restrictions apply. To see a list of all of Quali-Pro's end-user programs and download redemption forms, visit www.quali-pro.com/ promotions.

**2DQ** – powerful three-way herbicide for broadleaf weed control on warm and cool season turfgrasses.

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- Buy 10 cases of 4 x 1 gallon or 2 x 2.5 gallon, get THREE CASES FREE!

**Enclave**<sup>®</sup> – broad spectrum fungicide with Quad-Control Technology for turfgrass and ornamentals.

- Buy 2 cases of 2 x 2.5 gallon, get a \$100 VISA GIFT CARD!
- Buy 5 cases of 2 x 2.5 gallon, get **ONE CASE FREE!**

**Enclave®** and Foursome® – powerful three-way herbicide combined with our unique pigment additive for broadleaf weed control.

• Buy 2cases of 2 x 2.5 gallon Enclave® plus 1 case of Foursome®, get



Foursome® – unique formulation pigment additive designed to enhance and extend the aesthetic appearance of turf.

- Buy 2 cases of 4 x 1 gallon, get a \$100 VISA GIFT CARD!
- Buy 4 cases of 4 x 1 gallon, get **ONE CASE FREE!**

Negate® 37WG – unique dual powered post-emergent Sulfonylurea herbicide for grassy and tough broadleaf weed control.

• Buy 2 cases of 6 x 1.5 ounce, get a \$50 VISA GIFT CARD!

Strobe<sup>®</sup> 2L – broad-spectrum, liquid azoxystrobin fungicide with protectant, curative, eradicant and systemic properties.

- Buy 2 cases of 2 x 1 gallon, get a \$100 VISA GIFT CARD!
- Buy 5 cases of 2 x 1 gallon, get ONE CASES FREE!

**Strobe**<sup>®</sup> **50WG** – broad-spectrum, wettable granule azoxystrobin fungicide with protectant, curative, eradicant and systemic properties.

- Buy 2 cases of 2 x 6 pound, get a \$400 VISA GIFT CARD!
- Buy 5 cases of 2 x 6 pound, get ONE CASE FREE!
- Buy 2 cases of 6 x 1 pound, get a \$150 VISA GIFT CARD!
- Buy 5 cases of 6 x 1 pound, get ONE CASE FREE!

Strobe® T – Azoxystrobin and Tebuconazole in a suspension concentrate product with multiple modes of action.

- Buy 2 cases of 2 x 1 gallon, get a \$100 VISA GIFT CARD!
- Buy 5 cases of 2 x 1 gallon, get ONE CASE FREE!

**NEED TO KNOW** 

Deadline: November 30, 2015 Website: quali-pro.com/promotions

Quali-Pro | 5903 Genoa Red Bluff, Pasadena, TX 77507







# **Syngenta**GreenTrust™ 365



reenTrust<sup>\*\*</sup> 365 gives you the biggest savings on proven lawn and landscape products throughout the season. You can lock in a yearlong rebate, defer payment until July 6, 2016, and save on future purchases throughout the season. Just make your purchases during the Early Order Period from October 1, 2015, to February 29, 2016. Then you can capitalize on all these program benefits:



#### YEARLONG REBATES

Lock in a yearlong rebate by spending a minimum of \$5,000 on Qualifying Products during the Early Order Period: October 1, 2015 to February 29, 2016. Your yearlong rebate is valid for all purchases of Qualifying Products made during the Program Year: October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016. The more you order, the more you save—and with the Barricade® Brand Bonus, rebates can be as high as 14%.

#### SAVINGS SNAPSHOT

Your yearlong rebate ranges from 5% all the way up to 9%. This percentage is determined by the dollar value of Qualifying Products purchased during the Early Order Period.

### Dollar Value of Qualifying Products purchased during the Early Order Period

#### Yearlong rebate percentage

\$5,000 to < \$10,000	5%
\$10,000 to < \$20,000	6%
\$20,000 to < \$30,000	7%
\$30,000 to < \$40,000	8%
\$40,000 +	9%



#### **Barricade Brand Bonus**

When you purchase Barricade brand herbicides you get an extra 5% added onto your yearlong rebate for a saving of up to 14%.

**NEED TO KNOW** 

Deadline: **February 29, 2016**Website: **GreenTrust365.com** 



#### **BARRICADE® BRAND BONUS**

Just for meeting the minimum program requirements, you'll get an additional 5% added to your yearlong rebate percentage so you can save even more on up-front and future purchases of Barricade brand herbicides.



#### **SUMMERPAY™**

Keep your cash flow in check by deferring payment until July 6, 2016. All you need to do is order Qualifying Products by February 29, 2016.



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Protect your customers' lawns with confidence through expert application recommendations and performance guarantees.



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#### **PALLET SOLUTION**

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#### **GET MORE INFO AT:**

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#### **EOP LISTING**

# Start your SEARCH

#### Considering early order program purchases? Begin with this list of suppliers who offer them.

#### **BASF**

2016 Early Order Program URL: betterturf.basf.us/eop/

Deadline: Varies

#### **BAYER**

2015 Fall Solutions

URL: myrewards.cropscience.bayer.com

Deadline: **Dec. 11, 2015** 

#### **DOW**

The Power of More 2015-2016 URL: powerofmore.com Deadline: Aug. 31, 2016

#### **FMC PROFESSIONAL SOLUTIONS**

2015 FMC Early Order Program

URL: fmceop.com Deadline: Dec. 11, 2015

#### **HARRELL'S**

2015-2016 Early Order Programs

URL: harrells.com/products/early-order-programs

Deadline: Varies

#### **NUFARM**

Nufarm Turf Early Order Rewards Program

URL: nufarmrewards.com Deadline: March 1, 2016

#### PBI/GORDON

2016 Gordon's Professional Early Order Program

URL: eop.gordonsprofessional.com

Deadline: Jan. 15, 2016

#### **QUALI-PRO**

Quali-Pro Early Order Programs URL: quali-pro.com/promotions Deadline: Nov. 30, 2015

### SITEONE LANDSCAPE SUPPLY (FORMERLY JOHN DEERE LANDSCAPES)

SiteOne Landscape Supply 2015 Early Order Program URL: siteone.com/2015EOP

Deadline: Varies

#### **SYNGENTA**

Syngenta GreenTrust 365 URL: **greentrust365.com** Deadline: **Feb. 29, 2016** 

#### **WINFIELD**

WinField Early Order Program

URL: winfieldpro.com/programs/early-order-program

Deadline: Dec. 31, 2015

#### **WAYS TO SAVE**

Ask other manufacturers or distributors if they have early order programs. Many of them have offers that are regional or vary by branch.



That's because GreenTrust™ 365 will maximize your purchasing power. With proven lawn and landscape products, you can lock in a yearlong rebate, save on future purchases and defer payment until July 6 of next year. On top of all that, you can earn an additional 5% bonus rebate on Barricade® herbicide brands. Just make your purchases during the Early Order Period from October 1, 2015 to February 29, 2016. Then, you'll start seeing a bigger return on your investment. Get started at **GreenTrust365.com/Lawn** 







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Continued from page 52

hours needed to complete the task? If not, here's what will happen: He'll perform the tasks as he sees fit, not how you estimated and priced the job. How comfortable are you that he'll make the profit you intended?

Chart of accounts. One of the most common faux pas I see is companies not knowing what their overhead is. So how can you price work if you don't know how much overhead you must cover? Well, you can't, and it's likely your pricing will be based on what the market will bear. If you set up your accounting system correctly, you'll be able to identify those costs you estimate specifically for the job (direct costs) and those you don't (overhead costs). Here are two tests to see if you're recording data correctly in your accounting system:

- At the end of the year, assume your direct costs are the costs of one rather big job. Price it using your current processes. If there's a difference between the selling price you just calculated and what you actually generated in revenue, you have a problem.
- Are you making the percentage of net profit at the end of the year you think you're applying to the jobs you sell? If not, you have a problem.

The difference between highly profitable companies and the lower performers—other than cash flow and leaders—is information. ""

**Rolling budget.** Do you prepare a budget every year by profit center? If not, you need to. Is the budget flexible enough that you can update and revise it as you move through the year? If not, you're not budgeting, you're just guessing. A rolling budget is prepared annually by profit center and updated monthly with the actual data for the month and a fresh look forward about how the year will end. That's the point, isn't it? You want your budget updates to allow you and your crew as much time as possible to react if you don't like what the numbers say. Now you have a management tool, not just a random guess.

Imagine if your company embraced the aforementioned information sources. Doing so would improve your bottom line most likely. If each one of these enabled you to add a point to your profits, an additional 5 percentage points in net profit probably would put you on the road to improvement. These applications are taught in texts, seminars, peer groups and on the Internet, so hitch up your britches, make a commitment and just do it.

Ross is owner-manager of 3PG Consulting. Reach him at frank@3pgconsulting.com.





(formerly PLANET, Professional Landcare Network)

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# ADHERE TO A BUDGET

Increase your chances for success by focusing on a game plan. BY DANIEL GORDON

QUICK TIP:
Make a plan, reduce
the plan to a lineby-line budget and
execute the plan.

See "Simplify strategic planning" an page 44. ow do you keep score in your business? How do you know if you're winning or losing? Is it money in the bank? Profits? Growth? It's all of that. Budgeting is key to your operational and financial plan, but how do you formulate a common-sense budget that's useful and simple to understand and prepare? Start by understanding your vision. Knowing what you want to accomplish strategically is absolutely vital, and measuring against this objective is paramount. A budget is your game plan.

Budgeting is nothing more than formulating a coherent financial plan for some time period, usually one or two years. As you implement your plan, you can rate your efforts compared to your budget. Budgeting allows you to predict the amount of technicians, vehicles, equipment, etc., that you'll need based on your revenue projections. Three keys to a successful budget are:

- Creating realistic sales and expense forecasts;
- Making realistic goals based on your income and expenses; and
- Reviewing and adjusting the budget often to achieve your goals.

#### **SPECIFY A TIME FRAME**

Budgets are often created one year at a time, but you also might want to budget monthly, quarterly or semiannually. Even if you prepare a budget based on one year, think about breaking it down on a month-by-month basis. Accounting programs, such as QuickBooks, make this task easy by offering various formatting options.

#### **CREATE ASSUMPTIONS**

Your assumptions are extremely important to budgeting. They should be listed as part of the budget document because you might have questions about where certain numbers originate. Consider the following assumptions when preparing a budget:

- By percentage, how much growth do you expect in revenue? How much will you sell to existing customers? How much do you expect to sell to new customers?
- How many technicians or laborers will be in your organization, and what will they be paid (total direct wages)?
- How much are vehicle leases or payments and total auto costs?
- What are material costs, which are a function of projected revenue?
- What are advertising costs? How many leads do you want, and how much are you willing to pay per lead?
- What are general and administrative costs?
   What'll it cost to maintain and staff the office?

#### **BUDGETING THE GROSS MARGIN**

The gross margin is vital because it allows you to understand how much business you must do to break even. Using the gross margin, an owner can analyze his or her pricing strategy to determine if and how much profit can be made based on his company's capacity (i.e., the number of employees and assets). The gross margin must be budgeted for depending on the service line (i.e., lawn care, maintenance, irrigation, etc.). Each service line will have a different gross margin. (For more

information about gross margins, read my article, "Why gross margins matter," on page 78 of *LM* October 2014 or at buff.ly/1PybmUc.)

#### **REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE TIME**

It's also a sound idea to consider when income and expenses will be incurred. For example, if your company is highly seasonal, most of your income will be received during the warmer months. Budgeting your annual income evenly throughout 12 months wouldn't accurately reflect your situation. A much better approach would be to budget the income and expenses for the months you expect to receive or pay.

#### **USE A LINE-ITEM METHOD**

When creating your chart of accounts, you create a list of general categories for revenue and expense types. When creating a budget, look at the chart of accounts, and code revenue and expenses in those categories. If you use QuickBooks, enter the budget into the program and produce actual-versus-budgeted-numbers reports.

#### **EMPLOYEE BUDGET AUTHORITY**

A critical element of work and authority delegation is assigning responsibility for expenditures and bottom-line outcomes. At the beginning of each period, identify the amount of money budgeted in each area of the business, and assign that area to a manager. Then, on each reporting period, check the results of their expenditures against the amounts budgeted and how well that person worked within the budgeted amounts. Perhaps you can include an incentive program for those who come in under budget. Whether in the corporate or small business world, it's human nature to spend all the money in a budget because there's always a piece of equipment to upgrade or replace. Put a price on resisting that urge, and explain all the reasons behind your budget decisions.

#### **CHOOSE A DIRECTION**

Know where you want to go with your business in terms of growth, profitability and time frame.

Make a plan, reduce the plan to a line-by-line budget and execute the plan. If you take these steps, you should have better visibility and avoid costly errors. (4)

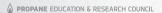
Gordon, a New Jersey-based CPA, owns an accounting firm that caters to lawn care and landscape companies throughout the U.S. Reach him at dan@turfbooks.com.



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# ASSEMBLE TH RIGHT TEAM

# Before you budget, assess whether you have the right people on the bus.

BY KEVIN KEHOE

Learn more about budgeting on page 66.

usiness owners are in charge of getting the right people on the bus and in the right seats. The business plan provides the destination and direction. But before owners commit to a budget, they need to make certain they have the right people. Too many owners and managers avoid the uncomfortable work of assessing and addressing an employee's poor fit and performance. As a result, companies stick with the wrong crew and it hurts financials.

Addressing performance starts with the owner. Often, the owner is part of any company problem and should address leadership, but the business has to flex to address his strengths and weaknesses. A sound plan with the wrong people is far worse than an average plan with the right people.

Every company has problems, and at the root of every problem are people. The Peter Principle exists, personal agendas hinder productivity and poor chemistry can savage communication and cooperation.

#### Employee performance assessment

Factor	Description	Score	Weight	Total
		1-5 (5 = best)	(Total to 10)	(Out of 50)
Goals	Is this person exceeding his numbers? Sales, costs, hours, etc.	4	2	8
Role	Can this person organize and manage people to attain a goal?	3	1	3
Exchange	Can this person listen, present an idea, engage in conflict and build trust with co-workers?	5	3	15
Attitude	Is this person positive, and does he hustle?	3	3	9
Talent	Does this person have the ability and interest to grow into the job as the job develops?	4	1	4
			10	39

The basic question is: Are the key people holding the company back, or are they advancing its success?

I've used a simple process to assess performance (see chart below). I use the scoring to assess each factor and the weight to assign its importance. There's nothing magic about the numbers. They're used to clarify relative fit and performance. Of all the factors, nothing kills group performance quicker than poor attitude and low exchange IQ, which is the ability to deal with people and conflict.

Armed with this assessment, owners can provide feedback to improve individual contributions. Perhaps more importantly, it allows owners to compare and contrast personal assessments as a group in light of the owner's strengths and weaknesses and the condition of the business—fast growth, low profits, etc. In the simplest terms, what an owner lacks and what the business needs determine whom and what he needs on the bus.

Several years ago, this assessment revealed a problem that was hampering one company's profits. It uncovered a common situation: long-term, loyal people in charge who are willing but unable able to grow and handle the management needs of a larger company. In this case, a key person—who ultimately stayed with the company but in a position of lesser responsibility—was identified as a bottleneck in the operation. Although the company was excellent at client relations, it didn't communicate internally very well. To compound the problem, it was ineffective at conflict management, a skill required of every good manager. The answer was to keep the veteran manager on the bus but move him to a new seat. To date, the new manager in that position is doing the job the company needs done, and profits and morale reflect the change.

Before owners build their budgets, they need to assess and address the people on their bus and sit them in the right seats. It makes a significant difference, resulting in less drama and more restful evenings. (

Kehoe, the owner and manager of 3PG Consulting, is a columnist for *Landscape Management*. Reach him at kevinkehoe@me.com.



New!

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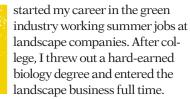


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- · Optional side deflector kit available



CHATE A standard process yields satisfied clients, happy employees and profitable work. BY KEN THOMAS



During the early years, I learned and mastered all the field-level skills that helped me become a great landscape technician. Eventually, I started my own business and quickly realized my field skills wouldn't be enough to make me a successful business owner.

At first, the business flowed smoothly because I had my hand on most areas. But as it grew, it began to slip out of control. No matter how many people or how much money I threw at the problems, I couldn't control them. The turning point in my career came after reading Michael Gerber's book, "The E Myth: Why Most Businesses Don't Work and What to Do About It." His simple but profound insights about building a process-based business connected with me in a powerful way.

Based on the principles of building a process-based business, my crew and I began to change our task-led enterprise into a well-oiled machine that delivered a consistently excellent product and service in a standard way. Over time, we learned all landscape jobs flow through a predictable path from start to finish. We figured out how to break the jobs into steps

and group tasks and accountabilities into the right phases to organize our work into a standard product delivery system. We coined our formula for success the Start Clean Finish Clean (SCFC) process as a way to organize all the chaos that comes with producing a great landscape product into a standard group of processes that guarantee three main outcomes from every job:

- extremely satisfied clients;
- happy employees; and
- profitable work.

SCFC breaks every job into six phases: lead, design, estimating, closing, work in process and close out.

In each phase, there are processes (standard work) and accountabilities (who's responsible) that ensure that phase's success. All phases are connected and work together to form a successful job. The beauty of SCFC is no person is responsible for the entire process. Each employee just has to execute his portion of the job as it flows through his area of responsibility.

#### PHASE 1 All jobs start with

a work request from a customer or prospect. How we develop that lead starts our process. The following are the main components.

- Menu: What do we sell and why?
- Qualifying: How do we select the leads that will progress?

• Tracking: Where did the lead originate? What did it cost? What was the final value of the lead to the company?

#### PHASE 2 THE DESIGN

All landscape jobs have a design, whether it's as simple as picking a replacement for dying material, a complicated plan for a design/build job or even designing a scope of work to bid for a maintenance contract. The main points are:

- Determine how much design is needed to sell the work. Don't overdesign. If you're building the work yourself, you need to design only enough to estimate and sell the work accurately.
- Determine how much design work is needed to produce the work. It should be enough to give your crew a clear, working plan to install what you sold. The basics include scaled plans that are labeled correctly. Anything that's unclear will require more designer time on-site. Create a standard work scope on items you produce regularly so specs don't have to be on every plan.

#### **ESTIMATING**

Once the design is established, an estimate must be developed to determine the final

Continued on page 72



The KYMCO UXV TURF Series Side X Sides come loaded with all the features of the KYMCO's Recreational Series Side X Sides - Flawless automatic CVT transmission with H-L-N-R-P make them fun and easy to drive. Maintenance free shaft drive, Independent dual A-arm suspension, hydraulic disc front and rear brakes deliver a smooth, comfortable ride with confident stopping power under any load. Their work horse 420-lb. payload, smooth operating hydraulic dumping cargo bed, standard 2" receiver hitch with 1,200-lb. towing capacity will tackle anything you can throw at them. You'll be impressed by automotive quality fit and finish with features like a locking glove box, underseat and under hood storage, multi-function digital instrument display, 12V accessory outlet and dual beverage holder. KYMCO TURF Series is the perfect choice for anyone that loves the outdoors or makes a living off the land-from weekend Campers, Home Builders, Landscapers, Golf Course Maintenance to Resort Management and First Responders. KYMCO TURF Series Side X Sides - The Perfect Solution for Work and Play. See the full line of KYMCO Vehicles at your local KYMCO Dealer.



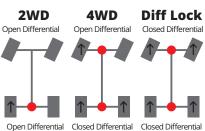






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Continued from page 70 sales price. Too many people in this industry estimate by using a multiplier of material costs. This approach will not get you where you need to go and doesn't allow you to negotiate based on facts. Consider the following:

- All estimating needs to be cost-based, which means identifying all material and labor costs so you can determine your break-even point on bids. Once you know your costs, you can apply an appropriate gross margin markup to determine your final sales price.
- All estimates should be constructed in a way that feeds budget information for materials, labor, equipment and subcontractors to your teams in production and administration. From there, they can set up the jobs and manage them properly.

At some point, you need to close the sale. This phase requires salespeople to:

- generate a contract, review it with the client and get a signature or client approval;
- generate the job package that contains the proper deliverables for accounting and production; and
- route the job to administration to be set up in the system.

#### **WORK IN PROCESS**

In this stage you perform the work that was sold. It includes:

- scheduling;
- purchasing;
- material and labor management;
- safety, quality and productivity; and
- change-order management.

#### **JOB CLOSE OUT**

The final phase, wrapping up a job, includes:

- the final walk through and punch out;
- a client review;
- collecting payment; and
- the job cost review.

Creating a Start Clean Finish Clean process for your company will enable you to organize the chaos associated with



accountabilities into the right phases to organize work into a standard product delivery system.

selling and producing work and consistently achieve the aforementioned three main system objectives on every sale. You work less and accomplish more.

Thomas, a 30-year veteran of the landscape industry, is principal at Envisor Consulting. Reach him at kenthomas@envisorco.com.





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Columns





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# A PLAN

#### How to host a planning session.

BY BILL ARMAN



o you want to have a successful business? Really successful? Do you want to make money? Real money? Do you want to avoid 72-hour weeks? Have time with your family? Have a company that's worth a lot in the future? Of course you do. Well, it doesn't happen by accident; it takes planning. You need to have a plan.

For the dozens of companies we've worked with and owners we've talked to, we find that if they don't plan for at least one year, the company runs them instead of the reverse. So ask yourself:

- Do you have a current written plan in the hands of all your key people?
- How often do you review the plan? What changes have you made to the plan?
- How much time do you allow for planning, and how often do you plan? Annually? Quarterly? Monthly? Weekly? Daily?
- What are the key areas in the plan?
- What goals have you set? Are you achieving those goals?
- If you were to change the way you plan, how would that be?

If you don't have the answers to these questions, then perhaps it's time to build a plan. So why not take time this winter and build one? The following are simple tips to help you prepare for a planning session.

#### Surveys, fact finding, lessons learned.

Before you start planning, prepare. Gather as much information beforehand as possible. Suggested items are employee and customer

surveys, financial and sales reports and results, and lessons learned (good and bad). Also, conduct one-on-one sessions with key employees to get their input.

**Who attends?** This topic can be sensitive, so be careful and considerate. Sometimes it's difficult to invite some team members and not others to this process. Send the invite at least a few weeks ahead of time so employees can prepare.

When to hold planning meetings? You should conduct planning meetings two months before the start of a new fiscal year. For most companies, this timing would be from October to Dec. 15. This way, you have enough information to use from the current year, and you will have the plan completed, reviewed and adopted before the start of the next fiscal year. The plan will have fresh legs and positive energy for a start to the new fiscal year.

**Have an agenda.** Make an agenda with clear expectations, let participants know if they should prepare anything for the planning session and start and end on time. If there are problems, issues or missed opportunities that need to be resolved, spend 10 percent of the time talking about the problem and 90 percent of the time deciding on the solution and action steps needed to remedy the situation or move forward.

Where to hold your meeting? If possible, don't hold these types of meetings at your place of business. Usually, we like to have them at an off-site location, maybe at a client's facility, such as a hotel, the back room of a restaurant

Conduct planning meetings two months before the start of a new fiscal year. For most companies, that's

October to Dec. 15.

or a homeowner association clubhouse. Hold it in a quiet, comfortable room that has enough space where you aren't likely to experience interruptions.

How long should the planning session be? These meetings will vary depending on the size and complexity of your company and where it's heading. At a minimum, it will require a four-hour session. For larger, more complex companies, it can take as long as two days. For most companies, though, this meeting is a half- to full-day session.

**Facilitate or not to facilitate?** If planning is new to your organization, having a meeting facilitator is a good idea. If you feel confident about your meeting facilitation skills, got for it.

**Take action.** Be prepared to review and decide what areas need work. Examples are your vision and mission statement, sales and marketing, customers and financials. Also, perform a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of your company and your competition. Then decide what best practices need to be implemented or tuned up.

**Follow up.** Pick one to three key areas that will have the most positive effects on the organization, and assign champions to these areas. Identify time frames to accomplish goals and how you'll measure the results of your efforts. Review your progress regularly, but don't wait until the next year's planning session to review that progress.

If you follow these suggestions, you should be in a good position to build your plan. Remember, by having a well-executed plan, many good things will happen for you and your organization. (4)

Arman, an author and speaker, is co-founder of The Harvest Group, a landscape industry consulting firm. Reach him at bill@harvestlandscapeconsulting.com.

Do you want to avoid 72-hour weeks? Have time with your family? Of course you do. Well, it doesn't happen by accident. You need to have a plan.



# SCALE CLIENT RELATIONS

# Before investing in a CRM program, determine what customer information you need—and capture it.

BY JAMES CALI AND JASON NEW

veryone knows companies that have solid client relationships have successful businesses. As your company grows, how do you take the client information in your head and put it where all employees can access it and take action based on it?

Also, how do you capture the information your employees are receiving so everyone is on the same page?

Plenty of experts suggest implementing a customer relationship management (CRM) software program, but we suggest holding off on that investment. Before you spend the time and money on a potentially pricey program, determine what information you need and capture it. Start on paper. Various studies show about half of CRM implementations fail because of a lack of focus and commitment or due to using a CRM as the only solution. Sound familiar? How many other programs have you implemented with similar reasons for failure?

To get started collecting client data:

- Determine the exact information you want to capture per department, such as maintenance, construction, irrigation and interior plants.
- Set goals to collect this information for 10 clients a week. Pick a number, and drive accountability daily.
- $\bullet$  Review the information, and file it in a notebook or Excel.
- Always update the file, which should be a living document that changes regularly and is handy whenever you discuss or prepare to visit clients.

Also, show your employees how this information helps everyone, including them. When you make collecting data a



part of how you manage your day-to-day business, it won't be a task anymore. It will be your repository and part of how you conduct business. Using this information will help you and your employees achieve your desired professional image and provide a better client experience.

We all have clients with specific property needs, such as:

- Don't perform services on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.
- We only want white flowers.
- We only dislike pink flowers.
- Mow the field twice a month during growing season.
- Use hand pruners for shrubs instead of hedge trimmers.

And how many times have we made mistakes even though we know the requirements? Additionally, be sure to capture fun information, such as birthdays, hobbies, pets' names, professional background, educational experience and favorite sports teams. Knowing more about clients and using this information will build better personal and long-standing relationships with them. (For a list of recommended data points to collect, see sidebar on page 78.)

And what happens when you change your client's company contact? With this data, you have a client biography and you know how to better serve him or her. Nothing is more frustrating for a client than to have to train a new employee about his or her specific needs. By reviewing customers' CRM data in the initial introduction meeting, your team will be able to wow your clients.

#### **AN EVOLUTION**

As you begin to use this tool daily, you'll determine some information is beneficial, and other information isn't.

Continued on page 78



Be sure to capture fun stuff, such as birthdays and anniversaries, hobbies, pets' names and favorite sports teams. Knowing more about clients and using this information will build better personal and long-standing relationships with them.



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#### Continued from page 76

You'll decide to add different data to your repository, because you'll look for client data that's not available. It's better to determine these needs as a team in the ramp-up phase of your program.

This winter, implement a manual CRM. And remember, the information in the system is only beneficial if you use it. Once you make it through a season or two using this method, find the right CRM program for your company. At that point, you'll know exactly what data you're tracking, so searching for a software program and implementing it will require minimal effort.

Because you already will have successfully driven the CRM program internally, you won't become a part of the failed statistic for CRM implementation. Instead, you'll ensure success in a new system that helps your employees provide an outstanding client experience.

Cali and New, former landscape industry executives, are the principals of McFarlin Stanford, a business-coaching firm based in Dallas. Reach them at james.cali@mcfarlinstanford.com and jason.new@mcfarlinstanford.com.

#### Client information: What to collect?

#### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

- ☐ Primary client name
- ☐ Spouse name
- Housekeeper/property manager name
- ☐ Assistant name
- ☐ Children's names
- ☐ Pets' names
- ☐ Service address☐ Billing address☐
- ☐ Email address
- Phone numbers
- Preferred method of communication
- ☐ Special billing request
- ☐ Related clients
- Hobbies
- ☐ Birthday
- Anniversary (wedding/employment)

#### **CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

- ☐ Gate code
- ☐ Garage code
- ☐ Gate key location
- ☐ Home value

- ☐ Client profession
- ☐ Spouse profession
- Reason for choosing our service

#### LANDSCAPE INFORMATION & PREFERENCES

- ☐ Incumbent provider
- Architect for landscape design
- ☐ Preferred day of service
- ☐ Number of contracted service visits
- ☐ Irrigation controller type
- ☐ Controller location
- ☐ Number of zones
- Communication style (phone, text, in person, email)
- ☐ Preferred garden style (manicured, natural, special requests)
- ☐ Preapproved amount for enhancements (groundcover, irrigation, lawn applications)
- ☐ Equipment to use
- Favorite garden colors, garden plants and landscape features



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# WHY AND HOW TO FIRE BAD CLIENTS

Is there ever a time to fire a client? You bet.

BY BEN GANDY

n the landscape maintenance field, clients are like stock portfolios. Some yield great returns; others don't. In either case, you're spending resources—including crew time, equipment use and management attention—to keep them. Just as you should assess a stock portfolio periodically, you should assess clients to ensure you're allocating resources to their best advantage. Once a year, list your clients, and assess them on a matrix, rating the following.

- **Revenue size.** Generally, larger accounts are more valuable. Small accounts can be difficult to profit from. Even if they're profitable, the total dollars generated might not be enough to contribute significantly to your overhead.
- **Gross profit.** This number is the profit remaining after the materials and labor costs. The higher the gross profit as a percent of the revenue, the higher the rating.
- Extra sales. Sales above the base contract make clients more valuable. Generally, there's little or no competition on these sales, which should be profitable. The more extras, the higher the rating.

• **Location.** You don't make money driving; you just incur risk. Closer clients rate higher than distant ones.

- **Connectivity.** Rate how connected your clients are to other clients or opportunities. The greater the connectivity, the higher the rating.
- Ease of doing business.

  Clients who are unreasonable or abusive suck a lot of energy and time out of you and your employees. Your efforts may be spent better elsewhere.

The clients who score high on the matrix mean the most to the business. Everyone in your organization should know who these clients are. If keeping them happy requires a concession, favor or special service, do it. They're the heart of the business. Their continued loyalty and referrals will go a long way to help the company grow.

The clients who score low on your matrix need to be scrutinized. Ideally, you'd like to identify the low-rated clients and develop a strategy to remove them from your list to free capacity to take on new, higher-rated clients. This process requires analysis and planning.

Continued on page 82

Don't break contracts midseason. In rare circumstances, it might be necessary, but it puts you in legal and reputational jeopardy.





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\* Attack angle adjustment may be limited on certain vehicles due to varying vehicle heights. Refer to your snowplow Owners Manual or FISHER eMatch system for more details.

#### ADJUSTABLE ATTACK ANGLE



Allows you to choose your attack angle based on plowing surface, weather conditions or the operator's personal preference

#### ARTICULATING A-FRAME



Pivoting A-frame allows blade to freely follow contours of the plowing surface for a cleaner scrape









Continued from page 80

First, understand the overall gross profit represented by the lower-rated clients. You may have identified clients you'd like to replace, but if they contribute a significant amount of gross profits to the business, trim the list or don't act on these clients until you've sold other work to replace the gross profits.

Second, consider the clients whose low ratings are primarily related to profitability. Before doing anything else, visit the job sites with the crews in action, and assess whether the problem is price or production. It could be that the crew has a poor understanding of the scope or a poor approach to the job. If production isn't the problem, consider a strategy of significant price increases during the next few seasons to get them priced right. Remember, it's not the client's fault if the job was mispriced. While you can't perform at low margins forever, you might owe the client time and consideration to get him where he needs to be.

Third, protect your reputation. Sending a cancellation letter blindly to your low-rated clients risks damaging your image. Instead, consider the following.

• If you're on a one-year contract, consider a nonrenewal. Wait for the end of the contract's term, then approach

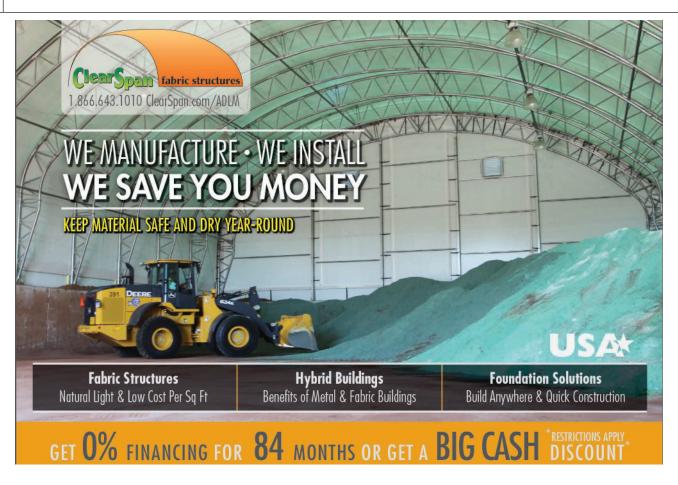
the client and let him know you won't be renewing it. Thank him for his business, and let him know about your inability to renew your service because of the economics and strategies of your business. Note that it has nothing to do with your relationship.

• If you're in an evergreen contract with no clear renewal date, send a cancel notice with a stipulation that you'll work for another 60 days, which provides plenty of time for the client to find another contractor. Again, thank him for his business, and let him know you appreciate the relationship, even if you can't continue the business.

Breaking contracts midseason isn't advisable. In rare circumstances, it might be necessary, but it puts you in legal and reputational jeopardy.

A price increase might seem like a way of weeding out low-rated clients, but remember increases won't change the job size, location, spending habits or the ease of doing business. You have a fixed amount of capacity, so before spending money on more assets, ensure your crews, equipment and managers are servicing clients that serve your business.

Gandy is a partner at Envisor Consulting. Reach him at bengandy@envisorco.com.





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Analyze what buyers are seeing, thinking, feeling and doing when they interact with your business. BY JEFF KORHAN

hen hiring, many business owners say they value attitude and personality more than expertise and skill because the latter can be learned. If this claim is true, why are most green industry websites selling skill and expertise to buyers who are looking to hire companies with personality and a caring attitude?

Most industry websites are glorified menus of products and services, featuring projects that might have earned awards, a few anonymous testimonials and maybe a brief history of the company. That's all useful, but it's not nearly enough in a world where people make decisions based on meaningful human qualities. Every day, potential buyers are deciding if they should connect with your business. What they really want to know is who you are and what you care about. If that story is relatable and memorable, they're more likely to engage with your business.

Seeing Thinking
Feeling Doing

Buyers want answers to basic questions, and your online media should address those. They also want all employees with customer contact to be able to answer the following questions without hesitation:

- Do you want our business?
- Can you handle the work?
- Will it be enjoyable working with your team?

They want an amazing customer experience from start to finish, with the understanding there's no finish line if the experience is exceptional.

#### **MAPPING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE**

From the moment you walk into an Apple Store, you're greeted by smiling, trained representatives, who make you feel at ease. They answer your questions and know exactly what to say and do next. For example, they've learned never to say, "You have a problem." Instead they simply comment

The key is to see the world from the clients' perspective and to take the necessary steps to know them well, remove typical buying obstacles and nurture relationships.

a problem." Instead, they simply comment, "It turns out that ..." People intuitively recognize their attention to detail for creating a favorable experience, and it doesn't depend on employees' skills. Rather, the plan shapes the brand.

If you want to stand out and attract the right clients, then in addition to working on your equipment in the off-season, make breaking down and improving your customer experience an annual ritual. This concept is known as mapping the customer experience. It's a comprehensive analysis of what buyers are seeing, thinking, feeling and doing at every single touchpoint with your business.

The customer experience used to start with a referral, and sometimes still does, but now more than half of those first touches are likely the result of digital and social media. Online is where you can have a significant impact on the future of your business. Here's how to get started.

Map the customer experience. Divide a page into four equal quadrants, and name them (in no particular order) seeing, thinking, feeling and doing. Use sticky notes to jot down ideas within each quadrant for all the major customer

Continued on page 86



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#### **BUSINESS PLANNER 2016**

Continued from page 84

touchpoints with your business, such as when they visit your website, speak with the office, meet with a designer, receive a contract, start and finish a project and pay an invoice. This will sharpen your awareness of what's important to your customers at every stage of the experience. You'll be reminded of the many questions you answer repeatedly, including and especially after the final payment is made. Take the time now to address these questions for next year.

List and answer the most relevant questions.

After mapping the customer experience, you should have a list of 50 questions that, when properly addressed at the right time, will make your process for creating amazing customer experiences come to life. Customers want answers, but instead of boring FAQs, they prefer memorable stories. Curate a list of your best customer-success stories. Write them down and share them. This can be fun training for the entire staff. Most importantly, know when to use these stories throughout the buyer's journey.

Personalize your business media. Rewrite the About Us, Our Story and History pages on your website to make them more personal, relatable and memorable. People relate to where you went to school, as well as your hobbies, interests and family, first. Industry experience and expertise comes later.

Complete your personal social media profiles, especially LinkedIn, which is essentially

**Wikipedia for those who aren't famous.** LinkedIn is an opportunity to tell your story on a safe and respected social media channel where many people conduct research about other people and companies. Include a friendly profile photo, and make your summary more about the benefits of working with you than job skills.

Brand the experience. Choose a few words you want your business to own. Use them to describe your process and how it works to deliver exceptional customer experiences consistently. You might wish to name and brand your process formally as Fred Peratt of Environmental Enhancements in Sterling, Va., did. His company's Enhanced Landscape Process (eelandscaping.com/our-process) distinguishes his business in a highly competitive region by highlighting its core values and collaborative approach for working with clients.

These are just a few ways to improve the experience customers have with your business. The key is seeing the world from their perspective and taking the necessary steps to know them well, remove typical buying obstacles and nurture relationships. Good luck!

Korhan, author of "Built-In Social" and host of "This Old New Business" podcast, helps companies adapt traditional business growth practices to a digital, social and global world. Connect with him on Twitter @jeffkorhan or reach him via JeffKorhan.com.



# Assess three areas of your finances as you finish each year. BY MONICA MUIR



uring your offseason, review what's worked and what hasn't. One area you should review is finances—both your numbers and your software.

The software contains information that guides many of your business decisions, as well as your taxes. Mistakes using that software can be costly,

so reviewing your numbers tells you where you're profitable and where you're not as profitable. After the review, you may decide it's time for a change. After all, profitability is the bottom line. So, review these three areas of your finances: accounting software, reports and other software.

#### **ACCOUNTING SOFTWARE**

Does your accounting software meet your needs? If not, where does it fall short? There may be several reasons why you're not happy with it.

- **Capability.** Does your software have the capability to do what you want or need it to do? It's worth asking someone who really knows the software. Sometimes you need to change, and it can be painful, but the results can make it worthwhile.
- **Version.** Many times, a different or newer version of your software is all you need. There's no costly conversion and you benefit from extra features that make your life easier. Again, you can find consultants and salespeople who can tell you if a different or new version would solve some of your problems.
- **Setup.** Perhaps your problems aren't the software but the setup. It may be that whoever set up the software didn't know how to use it—or at least not for the green industry. Or perhaps your needs have changed, which requires tweaks in the setup.
- **Training.** Maybe your software is adequate and setup is fine, but you just need to train your staff. You can find training from consultants and software vendors in person and online.



Reports are critical for your business. After all, you base most of your decisions on them.

on them.

If you're producing reports in Excel, will simplify your marketing.

it could indicate something's missing from your accounting software. I frequently find setup and lack of training as reasons owners aren't generating the reports they want or need from their software; hence, they're using Excel to generate reports.

How long does it take to generate these reports? While it's always good to review your numbers at the end of a job, if it's a large job you want to see reports along the way to know if you're running over budget or under budget. And while larger businesses may have someone running the reports, I like when owners can view their own company's dashboards any time they want.

Have you reviewed the profitability during the past season for the following?

- **Service line or division.** You should be able to compare your different divisions easily—and gross sales aren't your only indicators. You want to compare after your direct expenses (cost of goods).
- **Customer type.** If you review your customer list and start looking for client type patterns, you may find you really like some and would love to drop others. Your numbers would support your decision. Some ideas for client types could include residential, commercial, builder, homeowner associations, property management companies, government agencies or ages. You also

Continued on page 90

QUICK TIP:

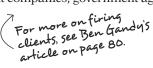
Your software may be able to help you

track client types.

of customers you like—and those who

pay quickly—

Identifying the type





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#### Continued from page 88

may find your accounting software can help you track client types easily. Identifying the type of customers you like—and those who pay quickly—will simplify your marketing.

- **Location.** Are you finding a certain municipality, county or subdivision hasn't been profitable? Or maybe one area has been a gold mine for you. Perhaps it's time to consider moving to a new location so you're more centrally located, or maybe it's time to consider a second location.
- Job type. Over time, you'll find there are certain types of jobs you enjoy, ones that are more profitable and ones that are easier to estimate. Maybe you decide there are certain types of jobs you'll no longer do because you lose money on them, just don't want that type of work or they're too small or large. Many owners are often afraid of turning away projects, but if you underestimate your costs or the crews are inefficient, you aren't helping your business. When you narrow the type of work you do, it's easier to estimate and your crews will be more efficient. It also will be easier to market and sell.

#### OTHER SOFTWARE

Are you entering some data twice—once in one program and then again into your accounting system? Accounting software won't run your entire business because you need to track leads, schedule crews and more, but double data entry is costly in terms of time and potential mistakes. It may be time to look at products that integrate with your accounting software. Maybe the time-tracking software you use in the field can sync to time sheets in your accounting software. Perhaps the leads in your customer relationship management system can become customers in your financial software; or maybe your in-the-field estimating can connect to estimates in your accounting program.

So, is your current software and its setup a good fit for your business? What type of work and clientele are the best fit for your business? The offseason is an ideal time to review this data, so when the spring rush begins, you'll be ready and confident your accounting system is set up just right. Then you can pursue the clients and jobs best suited for you.

Muir is a green industry accounting expert with Muir & Associates. Reach her at mmitchmuir@muirassoc.com.

# WHAT WE SAY TO CUSTOMERS Some Otto Luyken Laurel, Fothergilla major Mount Airy, Orange Storm Flowering Quince and Cotoneaster Hessei would look great.



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# EVALUATE PERFORMANCE PROPERLY Look beyond the balance sheet to dial in success. BY TIM SMITH

n the fourth quarter of this fiscal year, landscape contractors must plan for 2016 and critically evaluate their success in 2015. This planning and evaluating goes beyond the balance sheet. Contractors need to break out of the pattern of creating a plan, letting things happen, reviewing what happened at year's end and hoping for improvement next year. Meaningful and measurable change can't be achieved if contractors are using just a balance sheet to determine business performance. The approach must include three critical steps:



- **1.** Create a plan;
- 2. Manage the plan; and
- **3.** Achieve results.

To create a plan for 2016, contractors must look back at 2015 first and analyze key indicators.

#### **FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE**

There's more to understanding a company's financial performance than bottom-line numbers. Start by analyzing sales volume. How does your revenue compare to your sales activity? Were your sales generated proactively or simply via inbound, reactionary customer activity? What was the average transaction size? Did you generate work that was an even mix of project and recurring services? Understanding these factors will help you best understand how to make adjustments and plan for next year.

Just as importantly, a business owner needs to know what's flowing out. How does your balance sheet compare to your fixed assets? What's your debt load? If your company operates with a credit line, do you know how much of it has been spent? Look at your year-over-year balance, and pay attention to how much of that is financed. In certain cases, contractors are simply just servicing the debt load.

#### THE HUMAN ELEMENT

Just as the human element is a crucial part of your ability to provide service to customers, understanding its impact on your strategic and financial plan is just as important. Looking back at the year, you should be able to determine revenue per

Continued on page 94



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TEL SAVINGS

\* Based on 3600 RPM per SAE J1940
\*\* Savings will vary based on cutting conditions and operator usage

Continued from page 92 man-hour generated by your operations crew. Looking at those numbers more closely, be sure to understand what the crew's capacity is compared to what was delivered. More specifically, look at the crews' skill sets and distill capacity in that way. Are your crews busy with project work or recurring services, which, given their repetition, yield more efficiency?

Analyze compensation, and make sure it's aligned with the defined roles within your business. Does compensation match effort and output?

Not to be overlooked on the human side is safety. In 2015, what was employee downtime due to injury or sick days? Ensure your company remains vigilant about a safety-first culture and you're in alignment with the Occupational Safety & Heath

## Every employee needs to understand your standards and how you measure success. ••

Administration and insurance provider requirements. Just as importantly, offer all the necessary tools for employee success by training your team and providing safety equipment.

#### STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

Finally, create your own scorecard to accurately evaluate your company's performance. Where do you stand compared to where you should stand? Where are the gaps between the two? Most importantly, what's the standard for each element? The standards are the leadership-mandated performance levels necessary to achieve success. Certainly,

you can look to the industry norms as a way of determining standards and where you might fall short. But a better place to start is by looking at business performance standards. There are business-driven benchmarks that are often more accurate in terms of what you should expect of your business than simply looking at your industry peers alone.

While reviewing past performance, don't make the mistake of basing standards on history. It shows consistency of performance and improvement, but it doesn't necessarily yield a realistic baseline against which you can set expectations. For example, let's say you increased profit 6 percent during this past year, a marked improvement compared with the previous year's results. But despite that increase, your company still may be losing money and isn't profitable overall. So, while history shows how well you've performed, you don't want to use this past year's results as a company standard because you still need to improve to achieve a higher level of business performance and your desired baseline.

Measurement is the only way for your company to achieve continued growth and success. Every employee needs to understand your standards and how you measure success. They also must be part of the measurement itself. It's not possible for an owner to be the only person managing and measuring a business. If your crew is aligned around a common goal, it's a much easier task for everyone to look back at this past year's performance, critically evaluate results and build on those efforts to be successful in 2016. (4)



Smith is president and CEO of LandOpt, a business systems technology company. Reach him at tim.smith@landopt.com.



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# DETERMINE YOUR COMPANY'S WORTH

Manage the key risks that affect your company's value before pursuing a transaction. BY PETER HOLTON

> s the year closes, it's important to understand the value of your business. Agreeing on your company's value will make or break a potential merger or acquisition transaction.

Ultimately, a company is worth only what someone is willing to pay for it. There are four key elements that impact every valuation: the buyer, cash flow, risk and you.

#### THE BUYER

Owners scare off

buyers or hurt value

by window shopping,

When corporations buy small businesses, they usually achieve economies of scale. They can realize stronger margins by controlling wholesale purchasing decisions, streamlining back-office



functions, expanding market share or through other methods. As a result, they create enough value to their own enterprise to break even on the investment in three to five years.

Don't enter a deal assuming a corporate buyer will pay more because it has deep pockets. Instead, learn how a corporate buyer's valuation criteria differs from an individual buyer's. This knowledge will help you understand how to align your objectives with potential buyers' objectives. And it may help you develop a better understanding of the differences between a buyer who will pay the most and a buyer to whom you prefer to sell.

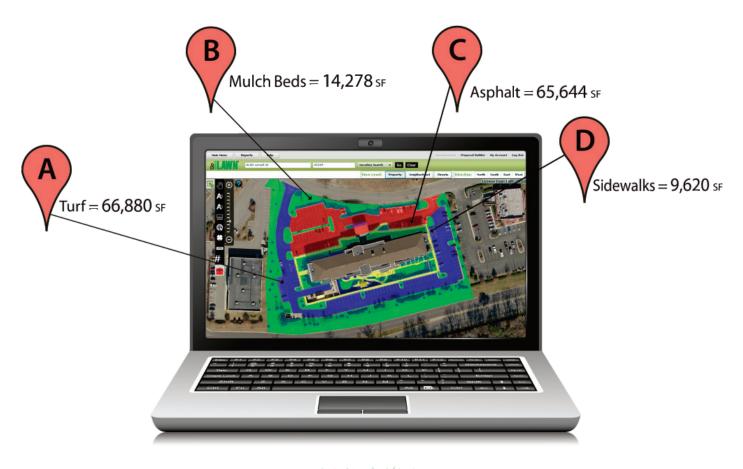
#### **CASH FLOW**

Cash is king. At the end of each year, after all expenses are paid, only so much is left. Buyers require a minimum return on investments. Therefore, cash flow dictates value more than any other component. Your business needs to generate enough cash to cover operating expenses, debt required to complete the transaction and a return for the buyer. If cash flow can't cover all three (at the price you expect to sell), your pricing expectations aren't aligned with your company's profitability.

For example, measuring profitability at three times EBITDA (earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortization-a common profitability measure), cash flow still weighs heavily on the valuation. If you're unprofitable and don't meet criteria, you're likely to be valued at less than three times EBITDA. The buyer type is critical in such an example. Three times EBITDA, or any revenue multiple, is relevant only for corporate/ strategic buyers who are attempting to consolidate

Continued on page 98

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Continued from page 96

an industry and capitalize on economies of scale. For those targeting individual or private equity buyers, cash flow drives the valuation, and revenue multiples are irrelevant.

#### RISK

Risk, which can make two otherwise identical companies worth very different amounts, comes in all forms:

- Losing key employees, customers, suppliers or referral sources;
- An economic downturn or the emergence of a disruptive technology;
- Financial and legal matters; or
- A departing owner.

Some of these factors are uncontrollable and apply to all businesses. Others, however, are in your control. Consider two companies that generate \$1 million in revenue and \$200,000 of EBITDA. The first company has a diverse customer and supplier mix; its key employees have been with the company for years, have signed noncompete clauses and perform at or above industry benchmarks for their position; and the owner isn't active in the daily operations. The second relies primarily on two large customers, and the owner generates more than half the revenue. Assuming the industry and market sizes are the same, the first company will capture a much stronger valuation because many key risk factors are absent.

#### YOU

As the owner and seller of the company, your actions and decisions significantly affect the transaction value. If you're a key contributor to the business, a buyer has to figure out how to maintain sales volume and cash flow when you leave. You can choose to be a part of the solution by facilitating a transition or agreeing to continued employment

after the sale, which can help preserve value for the buyer. As a result, you can achieve a stronger valuation. But if you decide to be a part of the problem by refusing to help, expect your valuation to drop and some buyers to walk away.

Owners also can scare off buyers or hurt value by their actions during the sale. The three most common are window shopping, making unrealistic demands and failing to present the business properly.

If you enter a sale process without being 100 percent committed to selling, soliciting offers with no real intention of closing a transaction unless someone overpays for your business, you risk annoying and offending buyers. This is especially true in a consolidating industry where there's a limited pool of buyers offering strong valuations. These buyers will stop taking you seriously, and when you finally decide to commit to selling, they'll remember their interactions with you and value the business conservatively, reluctant to make a fully valued offer.

#### STRONG VALUATION

Numbers don't lie, and nothing can improve your company's value as much as revenue growth and strong margins. That aside, since valuations are always expressed as ranges, it's important to understand why companies skew to certain ends of the range. Many of the differences between companies that achieve strong valuations and those on the lower end of the scale are factors under the owner's control. While you may not be able to control which buyers will be interested, you can control your actions and many of the key risk factors that impact valuation. So focus on these points to drive the necessary change, and you'll be rewarded with a stronger valuation when you exit. (19)

Holton is managing director of business brokerage Caber Hill Advisors, which is based in Chicago. Reach him at peter@caberhill.com.



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#### Daniel S. Gordon, CPA

As an Owner, Manager, CFO and Industry Consultant, Dan has been involved with the development of several service companies from inception to \$15 million in annual sales levels and beyond.

#### What Others are Saying:

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Matt Jesson President, Green Lawn Fertilizing, Inc.

# MUST-SEE PRODUCTS

Check out these offerings from landscape industry suppliers.

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# Arctic Snow & Ice Control Products



#### **HD Sectional Sno-Pusher for Heavy Equipment**

Designed for equipment weighing more than 18,000 pounds, HD Sectional Sno-Pushers attach to wheel loaders, backhoes, skidsteers and tractors. The HD includes a sectional moldboard with 32-inchwide, spring-loaded, trip-edge sections. Its hardened-steel cutting edge removes snow and ice with a single pass, which greatly reduces salt usage and eliminates follow-up plowing. The HD's bolton mechanical side panels and durable hardened-steel shoes add longevity. Arctic's Slip-Hitch<sup>TM</sup> system automatically adjusts the pusher to the pavement grade for enhanced productivity, increased pushing efficiency and fuel savings.

The HD pushers are available in six sizes, from 12-foot to 26-foot models, to accommodate a variety of equipment.

#### **LD Sectional Sno-Pusher**

Compatible with lighter-duty equipment, Artic Snow & Ice Control Products' LD Sectional Sno-Pushers attach to backhoes, skidsteers, compact loaders and tractors. A sectional moldboard with 32-inchwide, spring-loaded, trip-edge sections combines the precision of a small plow with the capacity of a large pusher. The Sno-Pusher's hardened-steel cutting edges contour to the surface to scrape snow and ice out of dips and recessions, all while moving up and over raised objects. Bolt-on mechanical side panels and durable hardened-steel shoes add longevity. Arctic's Slip-Hitch System™ automatically adjusts the pusher to the pavement grade for enhanced productivity.

The LD Sno-Pushers come in four sizes, from 8-foot to 14-foot models, to accommodate a range of equipment.

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# **Briggs & Stratton** Commercial **Power**

#### Vanguard™ introduces BIG BLOCK™ Engine equipped with EFI Technology

Briggs & Stratton Commercial Power recently introduced its Vanguard™ air-cooled V-Twin BIG BLOCK™ EFI engine, which gives landscape contractors the unmatched power and durability only BIG BLOCKs offer with the increased fuel efficiency of a closed-loop electronic fuel injection system.

BIG BLOCK engines are designed for the toughest mowing jobs, powering commercial mowers with 54-inch cutting decks and larger.

The new EFI technology is available in its 33 and 37 gross horsepower<sup>1</sup> BIG BLOCK engines. It features an automotive-based closed-loop EFI system for up to 25 percent better fuel economy compared to the already-efficient carbureted BIG BLOCK engines.

Visit www.vanguardengines.com for more information.

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**ff** Typically, in early spring, when the ground warms up, we get a lot of callbacks from customers complaining about dandelion and clover issues. After applying Defendor, we didn't get one single callback. It was very exciting for us, because we all know a callback is money out of our pocket. Defendor gives us more options. It allows us to be more proactive and avoid customer complaints. We are able to do it right the first time."

-DAVID GIBSON, OWNER ULTRA-LAWN, POST FALLS, ID



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Sonny Haywood visits all new accounts to measure and determine what products to use on the property. He develops a "recipe" of control measures tailored to each situation. Lately, his "go-to" postemergence product has been Solitare® herbicide from FMC Professional Solutions.

Solitare gets the job done right the first time," says Haywood. "It controls the whole gamut of weeds we find in our customers' bermudagrass and zoysiagrass turf, including crabgrass, sedges and broadleaf weeds like Virginia buttonweed."

— SONNY HAYWOOD, DIRECTOR, TURF MANAGEMENT, ALTERNATIVE ENVIRONMENTS, VILLA RICA, GA

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—TOM GROSH, OWNER GROSH'S LAWN SERVICE, CLEAR SPRING, MD



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#### **About FX Luminaire**

FX Luminaire is an industry-leading manufacturer of landscape and architectural lighting products with a focus on the advancement of LED technology and digital lighting control with zoning, dimming and RGBW color creation. We have earned a reputation as a leading producer of high-quality lighting products through our deep commitment to advancing LED efficiency and durable material combinations. FX is a wholly owned subsidiary of Hunter Industries, one of the world's leading manufacturers of irrigation products.

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**ff** I have used GPS Insight for roughly five years now and would never go without it. This software is saving me hundreds of dollars per month on gas and saves me a lot of time as well. I print out reports on a weekly basis to determine how much gas the trucks actually used and compare that against my gas receipts. My time is saved by knowing exactly where all my vehicles are at any time, whether I am in the office or out in the field."

-ROB PATON, ROB PATON LANDSCAPING INC., NORTHVALE, **NEW JERSEY** 

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Healthy Grow 10-3-2 with Holganix is a non-burning, organic-based fertilizer rich in carbon, organic matter, essential minerals and trace minerals that naturally enhances any soil type and effectively promotes root, shoot and overall turf quality. The natural nutrition of Healthy Grow and the added biology of Holganix provide a superpowered granular fertilizer already in use in some of the finest turf areas in the U.S.

The Healthy Grow line of granular fertilizers has been produced by Pearl Valley Organix at the same location with many of the same people for 20 years. This experience gives you a product unmatched in quality, performance and value. With us, "The Way It's Made Matters"™ and we wouldn't have it any other way.

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Healthy-Grow.com

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# Honda Power **Equipment**



The Honda HRC Commercial Series offers two models: the selfpropelled, hydrostatic drive HRC216HXA and push-type HRC216PDA - both offer the best combination of features and durability for the professional landscaper. The legendary performance of the HRC Series is enhanced by offering Honda's exclusive MicroCut® twinblade mulching technology. Twin blades produce finer clippings for mulching, and finer clippings means less bagging.

Honda HRC lawn mowers are designed with a number of standard features and benefits:

- · Dome-shaped deck design that facilitates both bagging and mulching while delivering finer clipping particles.
- Offset twin blade MicroCut® system (the only 2-blade 21-inch commercial lawn mower):
- Hydrostatic Cruise Control Shaft Drive transmission for increased durability. (HXA model only).
- Front guard provides lawn mower deck and engine protection; also allows for convenient transport tie down.
- Durable, lightweight NeXite® wheels with axle protectors.
- Cast-aluminum valve cover for optimum protection in commercial environments



4900 Marconi Drive, Alpharetta, GA 30005

678-339-2600

PowerEquipment.Honda.com/

GIE+EXPO booth #3118 (Honda Engine), booth #6046D (Honda Power Equipment)

# Husqvarna



#### LC221Ai Walk-behind Mower

The new 21-foot deck from Husqvarna LC221Ai integrates the latest advancements in technology and development with traditional design, providing a hi-tunnel mower intended to meet the highest expectations in cutting performance. Equipped with engineered tread and All-Wheel Drive with the added benefit of improved unit balance, this mower is sure to please from the postage-stamp yard professional to the rural weekend warrior. In addition to All-Wheel-Drive, this unit is equipped with a high-capacity, 2.3-bushel bag for additional capacity, 15-gauge steel high-performance cutting deck for superior cutting capability, all-in-one blade, InStart bail starting system that ensures easy starting with no prime or choke, and integrated vertical handle storage for optimized storage.



9335 Harris Corners Parkway, Suite 500, Charlotte, NC 28269

704-597-5000

Husqvarna.com

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## Suzu





#### Isuzu Low Cab Forward (LCF) Trucks: Ideal for landscaping businesses large and small.

Running a landscaping business is no easy task — moving from home to home, project to project or business to business. That's where an Isuzu LCF can help. Being a Low Cab Forward design, the driver has exceptional visibility, and it's easy to maneuver and park. Another asset, Isuzu offers regular cab models with three-across seating, and crew cab models that seat seven. Buyers also can choose gas with CNG/LPG capable or choose from two diesel engines. Add that to a variety of wheelbase and GVWR ratings, and you've got the perfect work truck to tame the toughest landscaping challenges.





# John Deere



#### **ZTrak™ 900 Series with MICHELIN® X® TWEEL® TURF™**

The new MICHELIN XTWEELTURF is an airless radial tire sold exclusively for John Deere ZTrak 900 Series models with 54-, 60- and 72-inch deck sizes. Unlike traditional pneumatic tires, the XTWEELTURF virtually eliminates tire downtime and is nearly maintenance free. Landscape professionals can experience greater performance, increased uptime and a lower cost of ownership with the XTWEELTURF.

Now is your chance to be on the cutting edge of mowing. Be among the first to buy a John Deere ZTrak™ 900 Series mower equipped with the MICHELIN XTWEELTURF at GIE+EXPO in Louisville on Oct. 22-23, 2015.

The guys that had those tires would not let those machines go. One, because the ride of it was actually smoother. With pneumatic tires they tend to be a little harder, you get a lot of bouncing up and down; while you're riding the mower with Tweels, it actually softened that ride a little bit for them. With the Tweel tires, they can run over nails all day. They can really run anything over and not have to worry about getting a flat tire. I think it is the future of the land-scaping industry. Absolutely."

—SHAWN DATES, FLEET MANAGER MAINSCAPE INC., FT. MYERS, FL



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GIE+EXPO booths #1110, #7834-D

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# **Kohler Engines**



#### **New Confidant EFI Series from KOHLER Engines**

KOHLER® Engines is expanding its Confidant™ product offering with the integration of the company's closed-loop Electronic Fuel Injection (EFI) technology. The new KOHLER Confidant EFI product line, which includes four engines ranging between 20 and 27 hp, offers enhanced fuel efficiency and reliability as well as easier starting. The new engines are ideally suited to ZTRs, stand-on mowers and residential riders and will deliver an estimated 25 percent in fuel savings when compared to Kohler carbureted engines under comparable load conditions. The new line also encompasses an option with recoil starting - the very first engine to offer recoil starting in combination with EFI technology.

#### **KOHLER**, Engines

444 Highland Drive, Kohler, WI 53044

920-457-4441

(IIII) KohlerEngines.com

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GIE+EXPO booth #7176, #7626 (outdoor)

# **Kubota Tractor** Corp.





#### **Z723KH-48 Series Kommander Mower**

Completely designed and manufactured in the USA, the heavy-duty, commercial-grade Kubota Z723 takes on tough jobs with a 694cc Kohler Command air-cooled gasoline engine, 48-inch, fully welded, 6-inch-deep mower deck. With these impressive features, the Z700-Series lineup reaffirms Kubota's reputation for distinct excellence in quality and reliability at a competitive price.

4301 Del Amo Blvd., Torrance, CA 90503

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# **KYMCO**



#### **UXV 500i G**

The UXV 500i G is the ultimate mobile power station with a fully integrated 5kW generator – combined with an integrated safety system, a KYMCO exclusive, including a GFCI safety circuit breaker – delivers all the power you'll ever need right to where you need it. Fire up your power tools, security lighting or service equipment on the job site during the week or any electrical appliance to make the most rustic campsite or hunting spot a civilized weekend retreat. Full digital monitoring and industry-leading automatic electrical load compensation gives you smooth power delivery under the most demanding conditions. The UXV 500i G's reliable, powerful DOHC 499cc liquid-cooled EFI engine fires to life at the push of a button in any climate or altitude, promising consistent, efficient power. Check out your vehicle's status at a glance with the backlit multi-function digital display.

KYMCO's Automatic CVT transmission with low, high, neutral and reverse gears is easy to operate and puts instant power and torque to the maintenance-free, sealed-shaft final drive. Shift on the fly 2WD to 4WD traction helps conquer tough off-road conditions while rear Differential Lock is a flip of a switch away for the most extreme off-road conditions.

With class-leading independent front and rear suspension and a wider more stable stance, the UXV 500i G can take you anywhere you'll need to go with comfort and confidence. The ultimate solution when you need a multi-passenger, multi-purpose vehicle on the job site or riding the weekend trails, this UXV 500i G is packed with all the features you demand, but without the price.



(I) KymcoUSA.com/showroom/utvs/uxv500ig/index.html GIE+Expo booth #225

# LandOpt



LandOpt specializes in working with independently-owned landscape contractors across the U.S., enabling them to manage their businesses more systematically for increased profitability, cash flow and revenue. Via ongoing coaching and training, our whole-business approach provides proven systems and processes designed to make your business run smoothly and grow consistently, while returning net profits that far exceed industry averages.

As part of the LandOpt Contractor Network, Powered by LandOpt Contractors also have the opportunity to connect and share best practices with peers who operate their businesses in exactly the same manner, all of whom exist in non-competing, protected territories.

Before LandOpt, my biggest concern was that my business couldn't survive without me. Everything (billing, designs, etc.) was in my head or on a yellow tablet. I bottlenecked everything. After LandOpt, these responsibilities are spread out among assigned roles. Now, I can actually be gone and things still happen. There are clients who I have never even met. Yet, when I open the mailbox, there are checks or thankyou letters waiting. That's how I know that the LandOpt processes work. I now work on my business every day and not in it for the first time in 17 years."

—GREG SHAW, OWNER AND GENERAL MANAGER SOUTHERN SCAPE, HUNTSVILLE, AL



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# Lebanon Turf





#### **ProScape® 20-0-10 1% Fe with 40% MESA®**

Prepare your turf for winter by applying ProScape 20-0-10 1% Fe and 40% MESA. MESA is an innovative nitrogen source that combines the benefits of methylene urea with ammonium sulfate in a single granule. Our exclusive process utilizes methylene urea for slow release and longer feeding. The ammonium sulfate is immediately available to the plant for fast response. The sulfur, iron and nitrogen all combine to maximize color. The result is a fertilizer that delivers a brilliant rich green color, fast response and extended feeding, while the higher levels of potassium prepare your turf for the harsh winter months.



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GIE+EXPO booth #5025

# LMN





The best just got better. LMN introduces a whole NEW interface for budgeting, estimating, and sales + leads. With brand-new features and updates such as a budget analysis tool that notifies the user whether or not your budget is set according to industry average, and a whole new customer database so you can track your leads from the first initial point of contact to the end of the project.

As an added bonus - LMN is soon to release its LMNTime APP in Spanish. These great features complement the existing tools offered by LMN in its mobile estimating and timesheet software built for landscape contractors, by landscape contractors.

**LMN** helped deliver an incredible year for my business. Not only are revenues up almost 70 percent from last year, but my profits have also more than tripled. I am winning the work that my company is best-suited to deliver in a profitable way. The software makes estimating a breeze, as estimates that used to take hours are completed in less than 20 minutes. The foreman bonus system provides a huge advantage in hiring, and allowed me to attract a foreman I normally wouldn't have had a chance to hire."

---ROB MOREL, PRESIDENT MOREL LANDSCAPING LLC, BRECKSVILLE, OH



425 Whitevale Road, Whitevale, ON LOH 1MO

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GoLMN.com

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# MultiOne USA







MultiOne USA is a high-quality, multifunctional compact miniloader distributed all over the world and manufactured in Italy. MultiOne has established itself as the European leader in this sector and are proud to introduce this innovative machine to the U.S. market. With 30 years of valued experience we offer the latest technical solutions for ease of use in a variety of applications. Over 180 specifically engineered attachments can be quickly changed on the machine with the multi-connector. Parts and service will be available in each geographic part of the U.S. Our machine and parts distribution headquarters are centrally located in Springfield, Missouri.

Engine sizes are available from 20hp and 25hp with Kubota engines, to the larger sizes with 30hp, 40hp, 50hp and 60hp Yanmar engines.

#### **Machine Solutions**

#### **Snow Removal**

MultiOne snow removal attachments provide four solutions for tackling winter. The machine efficiency can handle the large volume or a smaller unit can maneuver in tight places such as sidewalks.

#### **Landscaping and Nursery**

MultiOne offers countless solutions for work applications and is the most versatile machine in its class. One machine paired with numerous attachment choices will increase productivity and streamline unique capabilities.

#### **Municipalities / Maintenance**

Possibilities include grounds, streets, parking lots, alleys, driveways

#### **Property Management**

With MultiOne, your investment of a single machine will reduce your capital overhead costs.

#### Farming / Horse Industry

MultiOne is a great asset around the farm with the multiple attachments and low operating costs, but powerful enough for the tough jobs.



# MultiOneUSA.com GIE+EXPO booth #496, #7735D

# Nufarm



#### Make Last Call™ Your First Stop at GIE+Expo

Exclusive to Nufarm, Last Call™ contains a proprietary formulation of fenoxaprop, fluroxypyr and dicamba - making tough mid-summer weeds easy to conquer.

Last Call premium herbicide offers selective, post-emerge control of more than 40 grassy and broadleaf weeds such as dandelion, clover and crabgrass - even in the stubborn mid-tiller stage. Last Call may also be used for the removal of bermudagrass from cool-season turf. Plus, it works in the height of summer when many other herbicides struggle to deliver.

Since Last Call is labeled for most managed areas in cool-season turf including residential lawns, commercial lawns and sports fields, there's no reason to feel the heat next summer. Learn more about Last Call at GIE+Expo, Nufarm Booth #9215 or visit www.nufarm. com/USTO/LastCall.

11901 S. Austin Ave., Alsip, IL 60803

800-345-3330

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# PBI-Gordon Corp.



#### TZone™ SE: Formulated for Speed!

Delivering twice the triclopyr per acre as most combination products, TZone™ SE Broadleaf Herbicide for Tough Weeds is the fastest triclopyr combination product on the market. TZone SE controls more than 60 of the toughest broadleaf weeds, including wild violet, ground ivy, black medic, oxalis, clover and spurge. TZone SE even provides suppression of yellow nutsedge. The reducedsolvent ester formulation of TZone SE offers excellent cool-weather performance and offers visible activity in hours, including rapid leaf and stem curl, twisting, yellowing and browning.



1217 W. 12th St., Kansas City, MO 64101

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GordonsProfessional.com

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GIE+EXPO booth #1104

PermaGreen Supreme Inc.





#### One Machine. All Properties. Every Day.

PermaGreens come closest to the money-making goal of one machine, all properties, every day. They work perfectly on small 1,000-square-foot postage stamps, as well as, sprawling multi-acre complexes.

With fixed speeds and spread and spray patterns, PermaGreens take the guesswork out of the job. Your customers will be happier with more-accurate applications and fewer service calls, and your employees will be happier with less fatigue and better job security.

Based on over 100 years of combined, on-the-job turf care experience, the PermaGreen was the first and remains the premier way to apply turf products in today's market.

#### PermaGreens Feature:

- 5.5 HP Honda Engine with Wet Clutch
- 150-pound Hopper
- 12-gallon (approx. 1-acre) Spray Tank
- Exclusive Patented Features:
  - SmartSteer Power Steering
  - Low-Volume Spraying
  - Drop-Down Handlebars
  - Articulated Frame

PermaGreens are backed by a 60-day, 100% money-back

guarantee and a 15-month warranty, plus 24 months on the frame against corrosion.

Stop by our booth to enter the hourly drawing for \$100 cash, plus enter the 2016 Triumph Giveaway.

permagreen

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800-346-2001

PermaGreen.com

Twitter.com/gopermagreen

GIE+EXPO booth #1030, #7436-D

# Quali-Pro





#### **Strobe T**

Quali-Pro® of Control Solutions is proud to launch its newest Azoxystrobin formulation. Strobe T is a combination of Azoxystrobin and Tebuconazole in a suspension concentrate product containing fungicides with multiple modes of action. Strobe T provides broadspectrum preventive and curative control of all major turf diseases that injure cool- and warm-season turf on golf courses. Strobe T also can be used for disease control in field, nursery and container ornamentals, and commercial and residential landscapes.

#### Strobe® 2L

Strobe® 2L is a new liquid formulation azoxystrobin fungicide that contains 2 pounds of active ingredient per gallon. Strobe 2L is a broad-spectrum fungicide with protectant, curative, eradicant and systemic properties. It is specifically formulated for use on golf courses, commercial and residential lawn and landscape areas, parks, recreation areas and athletic fields, and is an excellent addition to fungicide resistance management program rotations. Strobe 2L is a companion product to our Strobe 50WG, a wettable granule formula of azoxystrobin.



5903 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Pasadena, TX 77507



Quali-Pro.com

f Facebook.com/qualipro

Twitter.com/QualiPro

GIE+EXPO booth #4005

# The Toro Co.



#### Product Information: MyRIDE™ Suspension System

The all-new MyRIDE™ suspension system is now available on select Toro® Z Master® zero-turn mowers. Built for maximum comfort, the innovative MyRIDE suspension system features a fully suspended operator platform that delivers 3.6" of travel and isolates the operator from the rest of the machine. This design reduces impacts, bumps and vibrations for a superior ride experience and increased productivity.

The MyRIDE suspension system also features adjustable rear shocks, which allow each operator to choose his or her own personalized comfort setting. The system is quick and easy to adjust, and it offers a wide range of ride preferences from soft to firm. Best of all, new Z Master mowers with MyRIDE deliver maximum comfort and ride quality without compromising the performance, durability, reliability and unmatched quality of cut of the Z Master mower.

8111 Lyndale Ave. S. Bloomington, MN 55420

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Toro.com

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# **Turfco**



#### **T3100 Spreader Sprayer**

The Turfco T3100 Spreader Sprayer features an industry-leading spray system, unmatched hill stability, hands-free speed control and the industry's most accurate hard trim. With coverage up to 132,000 square feet and the ability to fit through a 36-inch gate, the spreader sprayer is ideal for both residential and commercial properties. This is Turfco's most durable, productive spreader/sprayer yet, with hands-free speed control, easy-to-use controls and up to a 33-gallon capacity that can cover up to 132,000 square feet. The T3100 is built to last, with a rugged, all mechanical drive, sturdy axles and added guards. No electronic components reduces corrosion and downtime.

1655 101st Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55449



Turfco.com

**f** Facebook.com/Turfco-Manufacturing

GIE+EXPO booth #7040

# TURFCO

# Walker Manufacturing Company



#### Walker Model S

Walker has always been relentless in our quest to provide for the discerning landscape specialist – whether contractor or home owner – the best lawn mower on the market. We've never been one to cut corners or take the easy way out when it comes to designing and manufacturing our products. It's this reason that we meticulously craft our mowers by hand in Fort Collins, Colorado. Because of this "On-Purpose Design," our mowers have earned the reputation of providing a beautiful cut unlike any other. We approached the complete redesign of our Model S with the same uncompromising passion and thought that we put into everything we do.

The Results? Excellence you can see. Excellence you can feel. Best Walker price point ever.

5925 E. Harmony Road. Fort Collins. CO 80528



(#) WalkerMowers.com

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# Western Products Wilbur-Ellis



#### **Maximize Material Control**

The all-new WESTERN® Striker™ stainless steel hopper spreader is designed to reduce waste and maximize control. Available in six sizes from 7' 1.5 cu. yd. to 10' 6 cu. yd., the Striker stainless steel hopper spreader features an innovative chute design that directs de-icing material out and away from the truck. Protect nearby surroundings with the unique shutter deflector. Enhanced dual-variable speed control allows you to precisely match material delivery and spread patterns to conditions. Two instant-start, 12-volt electric motors provide quiet, reliable and independent control over the conveyor and spinner. Gas and hydraulic options available.



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GIE+EXPO booth #5042



#### **FOUNDATION®** TURF HERBICIDE



FOUNDATION® Turf Herbicide, brought to you by Wilbur-Ellis, is formulated to deliver the best-possible efficacy in cool-season turf management. With broad spectrum weed control, FOUNDATION has superior performance on sedge species and tough, woody plants.

FOUNDATION's exclusive, four active ingredients allow for multiple modes of action when combating problematic weeds. The fast-acting DEA 2,4-D amine formulation allows herbicide applications where esters are restricted, and delivers more knockdown power than competitive DMA amine formulations. Sulfentrazone provides excellent residual control of ALS and triazineresistant weeds and suppression of nutsedge species. Dicamba provides selective pre- and post-emergence control of a wide variety of broadleaf weeds, while Triclopyr controls tough, woody plants with excellent turfgrass safety. Due to the high concentration of active ingredients, ground applications of FOUNDATION require lower use rates while maintaining powerful performance.

FOUNDATION is optimized with Moisture Lock® Technology. This unique chemistry promotes humectancy, reduces burning and crystallization, and allows FOUNDATION to be more effective in dry

Ask your local Wilbur-Ellis representative how FOUNDATION Turf Herbicide can work for you!



2275 E. Locust Court, Ontario.CA 91761-7666

909-930-5440

Pro.WilburEllis.com



### **RISE Grassroots Network**

When issues about pesticides and fertilizers pop up in your neck of the woods, you don't have to address them alone. Join the free RISE Grassroots Network at **pestfacts.org/grassroots** or scan the QR code below. Access resources you can use on the local, state and federal levels with customers, neighbors, community leaders and policy makers to communicate the benefits of your

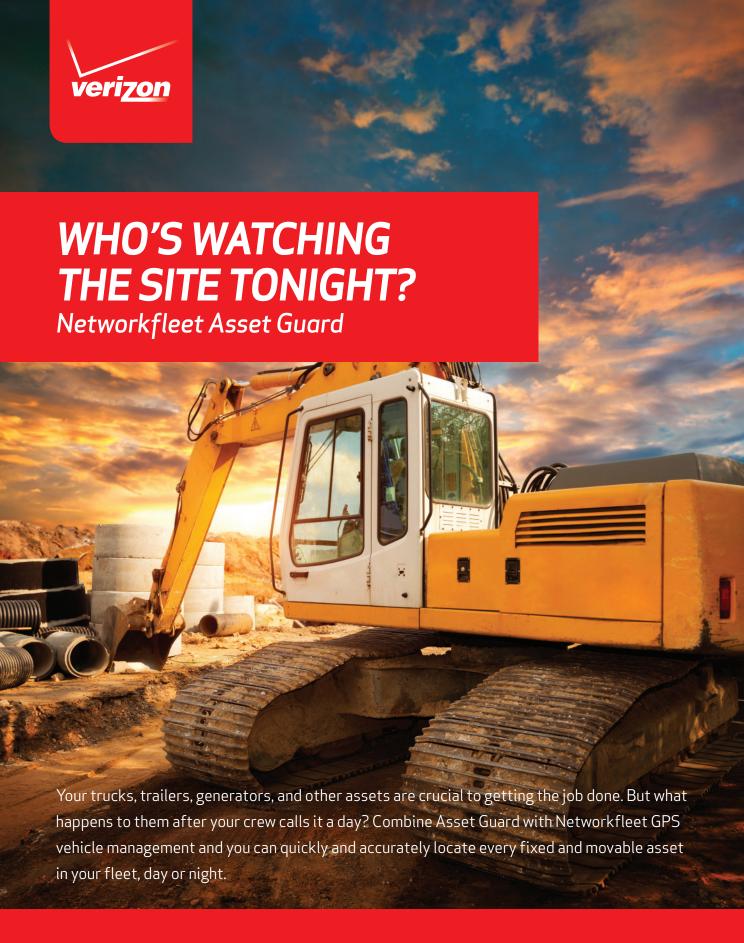
services and the products you use. Keep up-to-date on policy and regulations running the gamut from private and public pesticide property bans to specific restrictions on sales, use and display of fertilizers and pesticides. RISE is a national trade association of pesticide and fertilizer suppliers serving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

grassroots@pestfacts.org / pestfacts.org/grassroots / DebugTheMyths.com

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PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR RUNNING A PROFITABLE COMPANY

**BUSINESS BASICS: PEOPLE** 

**LET'S GROW** 

**CASE STUDY: ADD-ON BIZ** 



#### **BUSINESS BASICS: PEOPLE**

# 2 tools for better hiring



BY MEL KLEIMAN

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

ost business owners and hiring managers have had the frustrating experience of making a bad hiring decision. And it's no wonder. Most applicants tell you only what

der. Most applicants tell you only what they think you want to hear, while doing their best to make a great first impression. Plus, the deciding factor for too many interviewers is: "Do I like this person?"

These are two reasons why employers end up hiring the best *applicant*—instead of the person who will do the best job. So, here are two tools you can use to make better hiring decisions.

#### 1. INTERVIEW RATING FORM

Make a list of the traits that are most important to get the job done right. Define the required mental and physical capacities, attitudes, personality traits, skills, education and experience. Traits many employers look for are:

**Appearance:** Did the applicant present a satisfactory appearance for the job in question?

**Physical capacities:** Consider the job functions and the applicant's physical ability to perform the duties.

**Mental capacity:** Did the applicant demonstrate the cognitive and analytical skills needed?

**Attitude:** Did the applicant give you specific examples of being a good team player, taking responsibility, etc.?

**Personality traits:** Waiters and librarians both need great customer service skills, but only one of them needs to be personable and outgoing.

#### **Experience/job knowledge:**

Consider the applicant's work history. Does the person have the minimum experience required?

**Skills:** Does the person have the requisite skills? (But, whenever possible, it's preferable to hire for attitude and train for skills.)

Your list may look something like my example or nothing like it at all. It depends on the job you're filling.

Next, rank the needed attributes in order of importance and give them weights. If you have five required attributes, the most important one would be worth five, the second most important worth four and so on. Then put a one-through-five rating scale next to each, where five is highest. Then, after each interview, rate the applicant in each category and multiply the attribute's weight times the rating you assigned. And add up the numbers. (See "Interview Rating Form," below.)

Make sure you fill out the form as soon as the interview is over. If you wait even an hour, your recall will be less than accurate. The results give you an overview of the applicant's standing compared with all viable candidates.

#### 2. COMPATIBILITY MATRIX

Another way to figure out how well applicants will perform on the job is to ask them to complete a "compatibility matrix" before you start the

interview. This tool is a list of the skills or competencies needed for the job. It might include things like "maintaining and repairing machinery" and "working outdoors."

Once you've listed the skills, add three columns to the side of the list with the following headings: "How

much do you like doing this?" "How often have you done this?" and "How good are you at this?"

#### **WEB EXTRA**

To see an example compatibility matrix, visit the Web Extras section at LandscapeManagement.net or email info@humetrics.com with "Comp. Matrix" in the subject line

Each column contains the numbers one through five, where one means "not at all or not very much" and five means "a lot or very good."

Some things employers put on a compatibility matrix for frontline, hourly employees are: working with numbers, working with tools, working alone, working as part of a team, keeping things organized, working long hours, taking inventory and operating machinery.

The applicant's completed form will help you decide whether or not it's worth your time to interview this person and, if the answer is yes, how to develop your interview questions.

#### **Interview Rating Form**

Skill or Trait	Weight	Rating (5 = highest)	Weight x Rating				
Physical stamina	5	1 2 3 4 5	15				
Dependability	4	1 2 3 4 5	16				
Safety consciousness	3	1 2 3 4 5	15				
Skill set	2	1 2 3 4 5	2				
Experience	1	1 2 3 4 5	5				
Applicant's Name: Total: 53 of 75							

# It pays to tend to your flock.



Aflac can help protect your employees with cash to cover their bills in the event of a covered sickness or injury. And now employees' claims can get paid in a day with Aflac's One Day Pay<sup>SM</sup> when they submit online.<sup>2</sup>

Small businesses like how easy it is to add voluntary coverage to their benefits at no direct cost. Especially when it is from Aflac, the number one provider of worksite/voluntary insurance sales for 13 consecutive years.<sup>3</sup> Aflac may even be a pre-tax deduction, so when we say it pays to tend to your flock, it just might.

Call your local agent and visit aflac.com/smallbiz



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

# How remarketing can drive results

ave you ever felt like someone was watching you online? It was just a few hours ago that you were checking out the latest sneakers on Amazon, and boom! There are the shoes you were debating in an ad on ESPN.com. Coincidence? Not a chance.

If you've ever experienced this scenario, you've been exposed to the relatively new world of "remarketing." This form of "pay-per-click" advertising does exactly what it sounds like: It remarkets your products or services to people on other websites, after they've left your website.

#### **HOW REMARKETING WORKS**

What sounds like a super-complicated product is a surprisingly simple concept based on "cookies." No, not the delicious kind that grandma used to make but snippets of code that attach themselves on a web users' browser (e.g., Internet Explorer, Chrome, Safari, etc.) for a period of time. Once a visitor arrives on your website, your browser stores that visit's information into its cache, including this snippet of code. Then once the user leaves your page and arrives on a website that has remarketing advertisement space, your ad is shown and will continue to follow the user around on different sites for 90 to 180 days (based on the platform and tools used).

#### WHERE IS IT HAPPENING?

While there are several platform choices for remarketing, the two best platforms to use are Google and Facebook. Google remarketing is built directly into its AdWords platform, allowing marketers to install coding on their entire site, or individual pages, to create a variety of ad opportunities.



Facebook's remarketing product features fewer ad sizes, but it allows you to use Facebook's powerful insights options to limit which consumer sees your advertisements based on demographics and interests.

The two platforms give your company a "full-court press" option that allows you to deliver ads to people who visited your website both online and on social media.

#### **HOW YOU CAN USE IT**

Remarketing was designed for suppliers who have a longer sales cycle or for products that aren't an impulse buy. While landscapers may be looking for a quick sale, most know their services fit into a longer sales cycle. So someone who may not be ready to invest in a paver patio today could be "gently" convinced after several weeks of seeing your ads.

So how can landscape pros use remarketing to their advantage? There are several options that can make it a valuable part of your sales process. I'll share my two favorites:

**1.** Lead form abandonment ads
Every time I look at my landing page abandonment rate, I stress about the consumers who left before filling out my form. Was it something I said?
Was my form too long? Did my pictures not do my product justice? Or was it simply the wrong time for the consumer to take the next step?



BY SHAUN KANARY

The author is director of marketing for Weed Pro in Sheffield Village, Ohio, and adjunct professor of marketing at Baldwin Wallace University.

With remarketing, you can simply target the consumers who reach individual pages and reengage them after they leave your website. This tactic allows you to "sweeten" the offer or test other changes to try to reacquire the lead that left.

One of my best performing remarketing ads simply follows the user to different websites and serves as a "reminder" of my service. By reminding consumers at a later date that my product is still the solution to their problems, I see an 8 percent conversion rate of consumers who failed to fill out my form the first time.

**2.** Targeted product/services ads
Have you ever wanted a product or
service but just can't talk yourself
into the purchase? Of course, we all
do. Then, by some cosmic force, we
can't help but notice that product in
several other stores, eventually wearing us down to the point of making
the purchase. Using remarketing for
your landscaping company can have
a similar effect on your consumers.

By simply setting up remarketing ads featuring products or services prospects have looked at on your website, the probability that they'll eventually take the next step increases. For example, you can deliver beautiful patio pictures to consumers who visited the patio section on your website. Using customized product photos based on their interest can help sway the consumers who may be contemplating moving forward with a landscape project.

No matter what tactic you employ with remarketing ads, a variety of platform options and settings can help keep consumers engaged with your brand, product and services long after they leave your website. (4)

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#### CASE STUDY: ADD-ON BIZ

# Fall haul

When leaves fall, profits rise for a Delawarebased landscape company. BY CASEY PAYTON

y offering leaf clean-up as a stand-alone service. Kevin Shackleford, president of Shackleford Landscape Group in Bear, Del., attracts new customers. Some aren't necessarily interested in year-round landscape work but need occasional help on bigger projects.

"Right after Labor Day, we start really pushing the leaf clean-up service so our name is fresh in peoples' minds," says Shackleford, who markets his leaf clean-up service using postcards, local magazines and his website. "As soon as summer is over and school starts up, people start thinking about fall. That's when we also want them to think about us."

In most cases, Shackleford says. one or two crew members can knock out a leaf clean-up in an hour with a backpack blower plus a tarp or a vacuum sucker.

If the job isn't big enough to require a second crew member, Shackleford's team may use a mower to bag leaves. He aims to be as efficient as possible so multiple clean-



ups can fit into a day's schedule.

In addition to a Shackleford Landscape nice profit boost in Group. the fall. Shackleford says the added business has been a valuable learning process. The biggest lesson has been how to properly price a job.

Leaf clean-up service stands

alone at

"When I first started doing this 10 years ago, one of my biggest mistakes was having a set price for leaf clean-up work," says Shackleford, who started his company as a teenager with a push mower. "Now, I look at the number of trees and the lot size using Google Earth before pricing the job."

Whether a client is new or existing, Shackleford prices leaf clean-up as an independent or add-on service. Depending on factors like the number of trees on the property or its size, the service can cost from less than \$100 for a small property to a few hundred dollars for a larger one.

Hauling leaves to a dumpsite can drive up costs. Finding a site locally and following regulations often makes dumping the most challenging aspect of the job. While a lot of his leaf clean-up clients maintain their own properties, the hassles involved with leaf clean-up lead them to him. From the clients' eyes, he says, hauling the waste is the most valuable part of his leaf clean-up.

"Even if a client is willing to put in the work to clean-up the leaves, hauling them away becomes the challenge," Shackleford says.



"Admittedly, that can be a challenge for us, too," he says. "Early on, we made the mistake of hauling leaves too far away or into unknown territory, where we don't really know much about the dumpsite or its requirements. Both of these are easy ways to lose efficiency, and efficiency is how we stay competitive."

Payton is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.

#### **BUSINESS BREAKDOWN**

**COMPANY:** Shackleford Landscape Group LOCATION: Bear, Del.

SERVICE: Leaf clean-up

**ANNUAL REVENUE: Not disclosed** 

WHY? Client demand

**BIGGEST CHALLENGE:** Logistics, including knowing where to dump the leaves and efficient routing, prove to be the most difficult part of the leaf clean-up service. "There are so many new regulations about where you can put yard waste, and that has driven people to seek my services," Shackleford says. "We work out where we're going to bring the waste in advance so that we can be efficient. But our biggest challenge is making sure we're not driving too far from our sites to dump the waste."

BEST TIP: "Know when to say no," he says. "Some jobs just aren't worth it."

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# PRODUCT FOCUS

#### **GIE+EXPO PREVIEW**



#### **EFI MODELS**

**COMPANY:** 

**Kohler Engines URL:** KohlerEngines.com

**BOOTH: 7176 Kohler Engines is** expanding its electronic



ogy with the new Confidant EFI (pictured), Command PRO EFI CH440 and Command PRO EFI 999cc. All three models feature enhanced fuel efficiency, reliability and easier start. These closed-looped EFI engines will deliver an estimated 25 percent in fuel savings when compared to similar Kohler carbureted engines under comparable load conditions, the manufacturer said.



**COMPANY:** Hustler Turf Equipment **URL:** HustlerTurf.com **BOOTH: 5064** 

The Vanguard Big Block V-Twin engines will soon power the Super Z HyperDrive and Super 104 models. In addition to an exclusive Hustler five-year engine warranty,

features will include low vibration, emissions and noise levels; improved valve life; fuel economy; added power; advanced debris management; and quick, dependable starts, according to Hustler.

#### **HSS SNOWBLOWERS**

**COMPANY: Honda Power Equipment** & Honda Engines **URL:** PowerEquipment. Honda.com **BOOTHS: 3118, 6040D** Made in North Carolina, 10 allnew HSS snowblower models

are replacing the existing HS Series.

Features include fingertip steering control, hydrostatic transmission, joystick electric chute control, LED headlight, offset blower shear bolt, impeller shield, reversible skid shoes and a three-year warranty.

#### **COMPACT-DUTY SECTIONAL SNO-PUSHER**

**COMPANY: Arctic Snow** & Ice Control Products **URL:** SectionalPlow.com **BOOTH: 9068** 

**Compact-Duty Sectional** Sno-Pushers attach to small

tractors, skid steers and wheel loaders for clearing lots, sidewalks and driveways. The Sno-Pusher features a sectional moldboard with 24-in.-wide, spring-loaded trip-edge sections. Its cutting edge and bolt-on mechanical side panels ensure precision pushing, and the Slip-Hitch system automatically adjusts the pusher for enhanced productivity.





#### **VECTORWORKS** 2016

**COMPANY: Vectorworks** URL: Vectorworks.net/2016 **BOOTH: 8188** 

The release of Vectorworks 2016 includes more than 100 updates and features for its computeraided design (CAD) and building information modeling (BIM) programs, including Vectorworks

Designer, Architect, Landmark, Spotlight, Fundamentals and Renderworks. Beyond streamlined project sharing, graphical scripting and point cloud support, its new Landmark Site Modifier and Hardscape Tool Improvements features help landscape professionals be more creative with pavements and walkways, including sloping hardscapes, Vectorworks said.

#### 72-IN. STANDER **ZK MOWER**

**COMPANY: Wright** Manufacturing URL: WrightMfg.com **BOOTHS: 3094, 7624-D** Three Aero-Core deck sizes-52-, 61- and the new 72-in.—are available

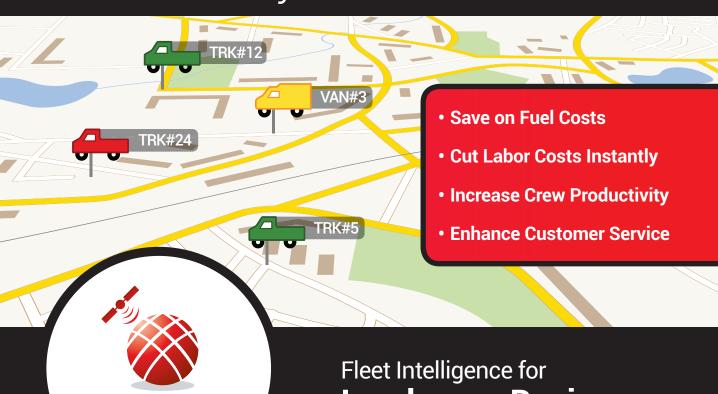


for Wright's line of Stander ZK zero-turn mowers. The 72-in. Stander ZK's wider cut, push-button deck lift, powerful engine options, mowing speed of 12.5 mph and fully independent left/right hydro systems all contribute to the mower's improved productivity, the company says. Reinforced wheelie wheels and elastomer bumpers for progressive ride control help the mower hug the ground on all terrain.

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#### **United States Postal Service** STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 USC 3685)

13. Publication Title: Landscape Management 14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: August 2015

Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Free to Qualified

1. Publication Title: Landscape Management
--

- Filing Date: 09/22/2015
- Issue Frequency: Monthly
- Number of Issues Published Annually: 12
- Annual Subscription Price: Free to Qualified
- 7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Public ation (Not Printer): North Coast Media LLC, 1360 E. 9th St., Suite 1070, Cleveland, OH 44114-1754

Contact Person: Antoinette Sanchez-Perkins Telephone: 216-706-3750

- Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher (Not Printer): North Coast Media LLC, 1360 E. 9th St., Suite 1070, Cleveland, OH
- Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor Publisher. Bill Roddy, North Coast Media LLC, 1360 E. 9th SL, Suite 1079, Cleveland, OH 441H, Editor: Marias Palmieni, North Coast Media LLC, 1360 E. 9th SL, Suite 1070, Cleveland, OH 44114, Managing Editor. Dillon Slewart, North Coast Media LLC, 1360 E. 9th SL, Suite 1070, Cleveland, OH 44114
- ner Full Name: North Coast Media LLC, 1360 E. 9th St., Suite 1070, Cleveland, OH 44114
- Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: None 11.
- Does not apply

	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date	
Total Number of Copies (Net press run)	61,738	61,467	
Legitimate Paid and/or Requested Distribution (By mail and outside the mail)			
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(3) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid or Requested Distribution Outside USPS®	250	234	
(4) Requested Copies Distributed by Other Mail Classes Through the USPS (e.g. First-Class Mail®)	0	0	
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- Electronic Copy Circulation
- 17. Publication of Statement of Ownership for a Requester Publication is required and will be printed in the October 2015 issue of this publication.
- Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner Antoinette Sanchez-Perkins, Senior Audience Development Manage.

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions and/or civil sanctions.

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[from page 20]

#### SafetyWatch list of hazards

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

- Operator should cease blowing when a pedestrian walks by;
- Lack of hearing protection; and
- Lack of eye protection.

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.

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT (ISSN 0894-1254) is published monthly by North Coast Media LLC. IMG Center, 1360 East 9th Street, Suite 1070. Cleveland, OH 44114. Subscription Landszuher innaheretter (dash dosen-fleze) is published infollution by robid to the relate Store year (see flexe) with the relate Store year (see flexe) with the relate Store year (see flexe) is published infollution on year \$87, two years \$246 (all other countries) and the xico and on the year \$156, two years \$246 (all other countries) and the xico and one years \$246 (all other countries) and the xico and see flexe years \$246 (all other countries) and \$350 (all other countries) and \$450 (al



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# Mike Mason

VICE PRESIDENT/COO THE LAWNPRO LOUISVILLE, KY. "I started in accounting and moved over to finance. It just fit the way my mind works."

Mason with wife, Dana, and kids: Mackenzie, 20, and Brady, 11. "I like to play golf and hang out with my kids."

"My brother-in-law and father-in-law started the company in 1994. It was probably '98 or '99 when I realized I enjoy this and I o want to stay here."

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#### EDUCATION

Jeffersontown High School Louisville, Ky. Class of 1993

University of Kentucky 1993-1994

University of Louisville
Louisville, Ky.
Bachelor of Science in Business
Administration & Finance
Class of 2003

#### **WORK EXPERIENCE**

Laborer
The LawnPro
Louisville, Ky.

#### 2000-Present

Vice President/COO The LawnPro Louisville, Ky.

#### 2010-Present

Board Member (2010-present) Board Chair (2012-2013) Snow & Ice Management Association

#### 2011-Present

Trailblazer National Association of Landscape Professionals

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A Louisville local, Mason serves as site champion for NALP's Community Service Event, which coincides with the annual conference and GIE+EXPO in Louisville in October.

"We've grown the top line by acquiring some small companies. The owners and employees that came along have helped fuel our growth and knowledge base."

"The best way to show appreciation for what you've learned is to give it to someone else. Hopefully, the Trailblazer program will give me the opportunity to do more of that."

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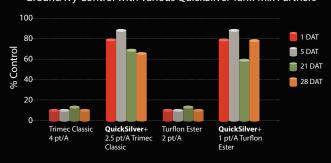


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