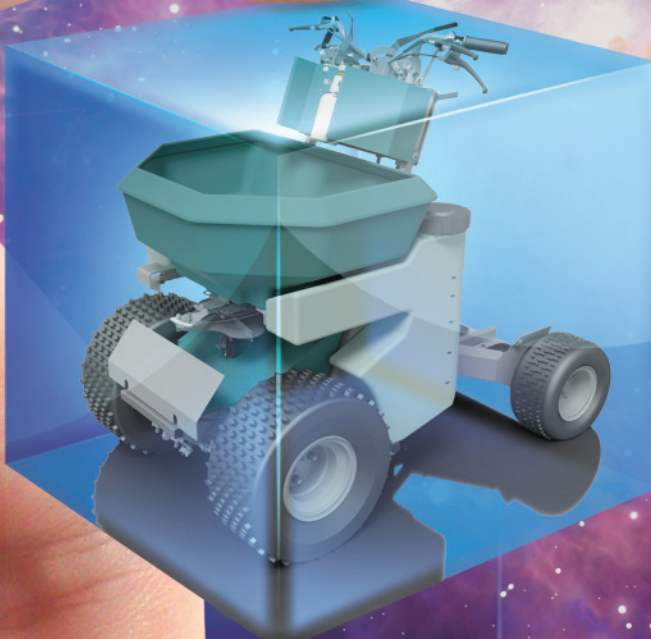


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LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

YOUR GUIDE TO GROWTH™

Hunt Davis, CEO,
Canopy Lawn Care,
Raleigh, N.C.

With a tech startup approach, Canopy seeks to shake up the residential landscape maintenance industry with a national brand.

Distributor
relationships

Culture vs.
strategy

Cleanup
equipment

THE DISRUPTOR

March 2017 VOL 56, ISSUE 3
landscapemanagement.net
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Any pest management professional or lawn care operator (PMP/LCO) licensed or certified by an appropriate state, local or tribal agency agrees to provide a service ticket with the following information should a re-treatment be necessary within the 45-day interval:

- Use rate i.e. oz concentrate per finished gallon
- The amount of finished product (gallons) per treatment per customer
- The approximate treated area (sq. ft.) per treatment per customer
- Date, time and location of the service

Proof of purchase will be required.

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Program Details

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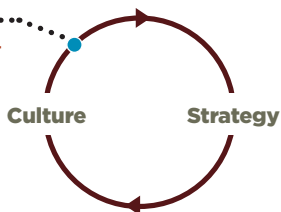
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ON THE COVER: PHOTO © JASON ARTHURS, JASONARTHURS.COM



NEW VIDEO ON LANDSCAPEMANAGEMENT.NET

COVER
STORY
EXTRA



➔ Head to LandscapeManagement.net/video to see Hunt Davis, CEO of Canopy Lawn Care, elaborate on points from this month's cover story. Take a look inside the office, the operation and the philosophy of this up-and-coming company. Meet some characters not mentioned in the story, find out what makes the company tick and learn how Canopy plans to balloon to a national brand.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI
EDITOR

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

Got the message



As I boarded a flight from Cleveland to Fort Lauderdale with my family in January, I received a text message from an unknown number. “Good morning,” it read. “We are looking forward to your arrival today. Thank you for your loyalty as a Hilton Member. Is there anything we can do before you check in? –Linda”

Yes, in fact, there were a few questions I had before I arrived. I quickly replied, asking for kid-friendly dinner recommendations and to confirm the beach was in walking distance from the hotel. It was my daughters’ first trip to the ocean. I wanted to be sure the hotel was as close as I thought it was when I booked it, so we could beeline over there when we arrived.

I had the information I requested before we even took off.

Now, could I have accomplished the same thing with a simple phone call to the hotel? Of course. But the proactive text message hours before I arrived in the state—let alone on-site—felt effortless. A phone call feels like another “to-do.”

Hospitality brands like Hilton are recognizing the benefits of texting, also known as short message service (SMS), because it’s familiar and efficient for customers. For one, it eliminates the need for users to download an additional app. It’s also ubiquitous: Three-quarters of Americans are smartphone users and nearly all of them text, according to the Pew Research Center.

Other industries are betting on SMS, too. I’ve been experimenting with a banking service called Digit over the last year to build up a rainy day fund. Digit essentially skims off the top of your checking account, saving a few dollars


here and there that you wouldn’t otherwise notice. You set it up online, but the rest of the interactions are through text messaging. If I need to know my balance, I send a text and get an immediate answer. If I need to transfer the money back into my checking account, I send a text. Voila—my money is there.

There’s even a startup called Magic that serves as a mobile concierge. Dubbed a “personal assistant on demand,” it’s a phone number you text to get anything you want, “hassle-free, 24/7.” You’re billed \$35 per hour plus a standard processing fee.

Landscape companies like Canopy Lawn Care—the subject of our cover story—that are incorporating texting into their operations from the outset are bound to get a leg up on their incumbent, slower-to-the-game competitors.

Many say messaging is the future—and not just for millennial clients. Simple and effective are two customer “wants” that know no generation.

Companies that make up the “on-demand” economy—Uber, GrubHub and TaskRabbit and their counterparts in the landscape industry—are appealing for many reasons, but they aren’t yet tapping texts as their main form of customer communications. They still rely primarily on their own web and mobile apps—and they may be missing out on customers who want to exclusively text with their service providers.

You—as an owner or manager—might be saying “my clients know they can text me anytime,” but how feasible or scalable is that? You can only handle so many messages and requests without losing your mind or dropping the ball. 



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What's the biggest barrier for companies when it comes to adopting new technology?

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do not embrace
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it comes to
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to accept
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"Bandwidth
and mentality—
meaning they
underestimate
the effort and
time required..."

"Overcoming
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pull toward
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† Important: Do not apply to Bentgrass and Floratam.
See full list of controlled weeds and use directions on peel away label.

Patent(s): www.suncor.com/patents

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A large photograph of a backyard pool with a stone wall and waterfall. The pool is filled with clear, turquoise water. A low stone wall, constructed from irregular, light-colored stones, runs along the back of the pool. Water is cascading over the wall in several places, creating a waterfall effect. The background is a steep hillside covered in dense, green foliage. The overall scene is a serene outdoor oasis.

BIG PICTURE

HEAVEN ON A HILL

LOCATION Atlanta

COMPANY Ed Castro
Landscape, Roswell, Ga.

THE DETAILS The clients wanted a large space for recreation and entertainment, including an outdoor fireplace where they could gather as a family. The steep hillside was causing drainage problems and limiting their ability to use the space.

Erosion and runoff prevention required the contractor's diligent attention throughout the project. The slope limited the access to the rear yard to a narrow corridor around the end of the home opposite of the driveway. Ed Castro Landscape's plan called for a bold solution—cutting out the steep hillside to create terraced entertainment spaces, a pool and additional gathering spaces above the patio. The shape of the hillside around the new pool terrace creates an amphitheater effect which, when coupled with the sound of running water from the pool scuppers, produces a serene environment.

The project earned Ed Castro Landscape a 2016 Grand Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

PHOTO The formerly steep hillside facing the back of the home was transformed into a secluded oasis.

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

PHOTO: ED CASTRO LANDSCAPE

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NEWS HOW-TO'S

LANDSCAPE
INDUSTRY
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VIEWS
AND TIPS

RECOMMENDER

ISSUE BRIEF

STEP BY STEP

NEW STUFF

SAFETYWATCH

CASUAL FRIDAYS

Everyone has different reasons for loving Fridays. The employees of Deep Roots Landscape Contractors in Merritt Island, Fla., like the week's bookend because it's when they tackle less daunting tasks.

"On Fridays or every other Friday, we'll go out and complete one, two or three smaller jobs," says Owner Matt Hall. "It's nice to have a little buffer between large jobs and break from the job site.

The guys appreciate being able to zone out for a little bit."

The company, which performs installation jobs for a mostly residential clientele, completes projects like property cleanups or small paver installations. These jobs typically take anywhere from a few hours to a day instead of the three-to-seven-day jobs the firm typically performs.

While these jobs offer a decent profit margin, Hall says their primary purpose is to diversify.

"I don't want to put all our eggs in one basket," he says. "At any moment, new construction can come to a halt and the nice size landscape jobs can slow down. If we don't have everyday homeowners needing work done, we're kind of dead in the water."

"I don't want to put all our eggs in one basket."



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RECOMMENDER

What cleanup equipment do you prefer and why?

Dillon Schlimme, owner of Dillon's Lawn & Landscaping in Clinton, Minn., relies on this 10-ft. homemade dethatcher, along with a few leaf blowers and mowers equipped with vacuums for cleanup jobs.



MIKE RUEGSEGGER
OWNER, MIKE'S LAWN SERVICE
GAYLORD, MICH.

"The (Grasshopper) PowerVac system works great. There's not a better collector available—even with wet leaves. By the time leaves fall in Michigan, snow is right behind it—sometimes just a couple weeks away. So there's a limited window to get them picked up. The PowerVac does the job well."



DREW STANDFUSS
PRESIDENT, GREENSCAPE LAWN
MONTAGUE, MICH.

"JRco rakes have allowed us to increase productivity dramatically while doing a quality cleanup job. We use 60-inch and 46-inch versions on our Exmark Lazer Z and Vantage mowers. It is an irreplaceable attachment in the spring. It does it all with an increased productivity level that hand labor can't match."

ISSUE >>> BRIEF




BY MISSY HENRIKSEN

The author is vp of public affairs, National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP).

ADVOCATE IN YOUR STATE

All the focus is on Washington these days, and it's easy to think that all the big, important decisions happen there. But every year, our state legislators take on thousands of issues. Much of their work occurs over a frantic six-month period. During this time frame, elected officials in state Capitols throughout our country make decisions that can have a direct impact on the lives and livelihood of landscape professionals.

Last year, NALP monitored more than 200 pieces of state legislation directly related to landscape professionals and the services they provide. Although it's still early in 2017, it appears this year our state lawmakers will consider even more legislation related to the green industry. These include bills related to pesticide bans, water use, application rules, blackout periods and similar measures.

Odds are that during this year's state legislative season (often the first half of the year, but it depends on the state) elected officials in your state will consider a proposal that directly affects you or your business. That's why it's vital for you to get involved in the state legislative advocacy process. Without your voice, decision makers in your state may make choices based on misinformation or only part of the story. We need to ensure landscape professionals are sitting at the decision-making table—and not on the menu. Lending your voice to the cause is the best way to make sure decisions about issues that affect our industry are made with us and not for us. Getting involved with government affairs committees in your state association and at NALP is a good way to learn about the issues and take action when needed. 



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STEP BY STEP

How to prepare a business for sale


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

Preparing to sell the business often isn't an owner's top priority. But all business owners will need to sell their company, transfer it to a family member or liquidate at some point in time. The need to sell a business is often triggered by unforeseen circumstances, such as a death, disability or divorce, which might add pressure and make effective planning difficult.

The complications of daily operations also may keep business owners from effectively planning for the future. Taking basic steps in advance will help facilitate a smoother process and likely produce a better financial result when the time comes to sell.

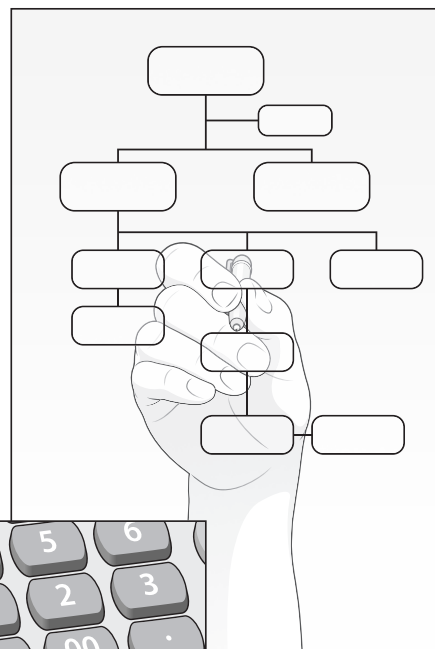
As owners plan for the sale of their businesses, it's important to assemble a trusted team of experts, including a lawyer, an accountant and a merger-and-acquisition adviser. This team will guide them through the process and help prevent mistakes. Taking steps to ready a business for sale will improve the value of the business and its marketability. Preparation can increase a company's sale price and make it more likely to sell within a reasonable time frame.

Follow these three steps to successfully prepare a business for sale. 

SOURCE: Ronald Edmonds, The Principium Group

➔ STEP 1

Begin structuring the business to thrive without the owner involved. A buyer can better imagine taking over a business with a sound management team that can retain the company's most important assets—its people and customers.



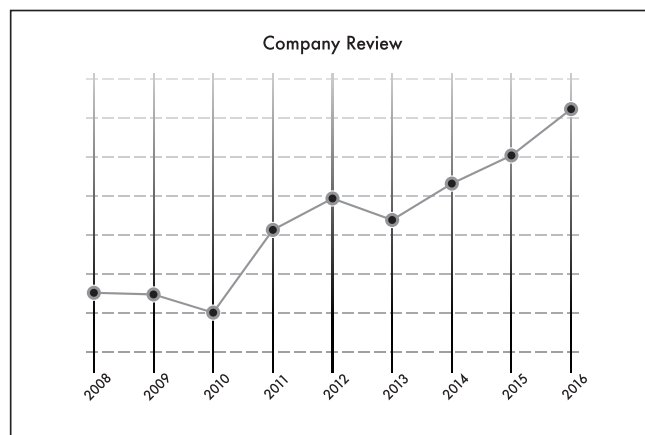
⬇ STEP 2

With an accountant, address and improve the quality and timeliness of the company's financial information. A buyer could lose interest if financial reports aren't expedient or it takes too long for the seller to answer questions.



➔ STEP 3

Focus on the health of the business while preparing it for sale. Contemplating a sale can cause a business owner to take his or her eye off the ball, but it's important to continue to focus on growth, profitability and recurring revenue.



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NEW STUFF

**CHECK OUT MORE NEW STUFF ONLINE**

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

1. POSI-TRACK VT-70

COMPANY: ASV

URL: ASVLLC.com

ASV introduced its first midframe vertical-lift compact track loader, the Posi-Track VT-70. The machine features a vertical lift loader linkage for applications requiring extended reach and level loads, such as loading pallets. The VT-70 offers best-in-class rated operating capacity, cooling systems and hydraulic efficiency, according to the company.

2. 35-HP DEBRIS LOADER

COMPANY: Billy Goat

URL: BillyGoat.com

Billy Goat's 35-hp truck loader is designed to maximize loading and debris reduction. Powered by an electric-start Vanguard engine, the new unit features Billy Goat's dual shredding system with a Piranha blade, 5,050 CFM of suction power and a 20-in. impeller with 18 cutting points. An optional highway-class trailer kit is prewired for easy towing and storage, and the optional exhaust deflector kit deflects debris for most efficient loading, the company says.

3. MASTER MANUFACTURING 200-GAL. SPACE SAVER SPRAYER

COMPANY: Valley Industries

URL: ValleyInd.com

The Master Manufacturing 200-gal. Space Saver Sprayer features a plastic-coated Comet APS41 triple diaphragm pump with Duraphragm Technology and an oversized Honda GX200 engine. It introduces Valley Industries' hose reel design with Hardcore Technology, which is made of aircraft-grade aluminum and features a chainless and sprocket-less direct drive system.

ADVERTORIAL

ESTER FORMULATIONS: THE COOL (WEATHER) CHOICE

This we know: warm weather is coming. But as winter hangs on, we still have weeds to kill. That means choosing the right herbicide for cool weather, and this is where you get to decide between an amine and an ester formulation.

In the summer heat, the choice is easier: ester formulations can be more volatile at higher temperatures, so look to an amine formulation. But in these cool spring days, ester formulations provide excellent activity because they penetrate the leaves' waxy cuticle better than water-soluble amine formulations. So weather permitting, an ester might be the best choice.

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TZone SE is a reduced-solvent ester formulation. Delivering twice the triclopyr per acre than most combination products, TZone SE provides excellent cool-weather control of 60 of the toughest broadleaf weeds, including black medic, ground ivy, clover, and wild violet. It even gives you yellow nutsedge suppression.

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SAFETYWATCH

AERATOR PROPERTY HAZARDS

Avoid running an aerator with the tines down over hard surfaces or any surface you don't want to aerate. It may damage the tines, and it may damage the ground surface.

The tines may penetrate anything on or beneath the surface, including irrigation heads and lines. Be mindful: Most irrigation heads are at the edges of lawns and gardens. Keep an eye out for the heads as you work. Sometimes the heads will be marked with flags or paint but not usually. Report any damage done to your supervisor. Walking the property prior to aerating may help you identify irrigation and other hazards.

Keeping the tines in a lowered position into the ground is a sensible way to "park" the aerator. This move will stop it from rolling on lawns unexpectedly. But lowering the tines on a hard surface like asphalt, cement or a truck's bed may damage the

tines and the surface. Some managers consider it OK to lower the tines on a medium density surface like a wooden trailer bed. Ask your supervisor what he prefers.

Be careful when turning or maneuvering near cars or other valuable property. The aerator handle can easily scratch a car or building.

The aerator will move with considerable speed and force when operated at full ground speed. Be careful when reaching the end of a row or when turning, so you don't allow the aerator to run into objects like cars or landscape plants. Slow down as you near the end of your pass.

WATCH AND LEARN

Visit LandscapeManagement.net/SafetyWatch to view a video about aerator property hazards, and use it as a training tool for your team.

SOURCE: Greenius



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MORE UPTIME

Distributor relationships
are evolving to keep
contractors efficient.

➤ PAGE 18

TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

Buying power

Incentives and industry insights strengthen landscaper-distributor relationships.

BY LAUREN DOWDLE

There's no shortage of ways to source landscape supplies nowadays. But where and how you buy has almost become as important as what you're purchasing. That's one reason why many landscape contractors have come to increasingly rely on their distributors.

Distributors have responded by focusing on becoming a landscaper's primary stop by acquiring smaller companies across the industry, expanding their footprints and providing a way for the owner to only deal with one rep for everything. Check out how a few landscapers lean on their distributors.

BUY IN BULK

It's like shopping at Costco: The more items you buy, the cheaper each one becomes. You might not need 100 rolls of toilet paper right now, but if you have the storage and cash to purchase them, you'll save more than if you bought a few rolls along the way. That's the approach Ed Castro, president of Ed Castro

Landscape in Roswell, Ga., has taken with buying from distributors—but, of course, on a larger scale.

His company offers landscape design, installation, enhancement and maintenance. Its clients include high-end residential, commercial properties for maintenance and public sites (municipalities, sports fields, etc.). The company, which has a \$9 million annual revenue, uses Site One Landscape Supply for plants, chemicals, landscape supplies and Greenworks Commercial battery-powered products—in addition to getting equipment from other dealers.

His team buys more pieces equipment at once, instead of spreading out the purchases when they're needed. They've also started rotating out their equipment more often, which gives them better benefits from tax write-offs.

From September to November, the company starts planning what to buy for the year, discussing and understanding their needs, talking to vendors and identifying what they may buy in bulk.



ASK FOR HELP

Green industry distributors often wield helpful information for landscape professionals.

This purchasing approach is partly sparked by better cash flow, Castro says, along with changes on the distributor side of things. Distributors are offering more incentives than they used to.

"If there's an opportunity to get a small discount, we'll do it," Castro says about buying multiple products at once from a distributor.

He says his company also aligns its purchases with the distributors' incentive schedules. In the South, he says, most of the deals fall around February.

Another contributor to this trend is how distributors and manufacturers as a whole have become more organized and connected to technology, Castro says. They're tuned into what and when landscape contractors are purchasing and providing better incentives.

When deciding on the best payment option for their businesses, Castro encourages other owners to base it off of their growth plan.

Continued on page 20

NEWSFEED

NEW MESOTRIONE HERBICIDE

SipcamRotam introduced Lucto, a new preemergent and postemergent herbicide

containing the active ingredient Mesotrione. Lucto controls bentgrass in some cool-season turfgrass species.

WINFIELD SATELLITE IMAGERY

WinField United Professional Products Group launched the GeoTech insight platform—a satellite imagery program. GeoTech uses satellites, airplanes and drones to

help turf managers identify and document plant health concerns, assign people to problem areas, design corrective solutions, make accurate input applications and keep track of results.

MIST SPRAYER ACQUISITION

Valley Industries acquired A1 Mist Sprayers, a Ponca, Neb.-based company that makes mist spraying applicators for U.S. and Canadian customers.



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PROFIT CENTERS

TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

Continued from page 18

"Cash isn't always the best way to buy. Just because you have the money doesn't mean you need to use it," he says. "If you're a growth company, use other people's money. Keep cash, and use a finance option. If you're not growing, you're better off paying it off with cash."



He encourages owners—especially those running smaller companies—to focus on their credit scores. And if they have questions or aren't sure about something like logistics, they can turn to their distributor for support.

"Use your distributors as a resource—not just because they are close by and convenient," Castro says. "We learn a lot from those guys."

For example, Castro and his team talk with their SiteOne rep about what tree sizes are going to be available and what they will cost so they can more accurately spec projects for clients. They can also find out when certain pieces of equipment are about to change in price or be discontinued, he adds.

“Cash isn't always the best way to buy. Just because you have the money doesn't mean you need to use it.”

—ED CASTRO

STAY STOCKED

A strong distributor partnership is also a theme with Darrin Selking, president of Landscape Illumination in Valparaiso, Ind. Landscape Illumination specializes in architectural, landscape and seasonal lighting for residential and commercial properties.

His distributor, Automatic Irrigation Supply, got him interested in outdoor lighting. And after working together for 16 years—and Automatic Irrigation Supply providing 90 percent of its products for projects—they have a solid system in place.

"They make deliveries to our facility three times a week," Selking says. "I rely on them to stock and have available what we need on a daily basis."

Although his distributor hasn't changed through the years, the way Selking and other professionals approach pricing has.

"Because a lot of items are available online these days, distributors in general I believe have to stay on top of the price they are charging for their products because contractors do shop and compare one distributor to another," he says. "We as a company sit down with our distributor on a yearly basis to review where we are cost wise on a per-item basis to make sure they're competitive."

Continued on page 22

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TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

Continued from page 20

Selking adds it's not just about getting a good price. It's also about the distributor having the product in-house and ready when he needs it.

He says he also enjoys distributor benefits like being able to warehouse products his company uses regularly, having someone with knowledge about the products they use and finding out about new products that are coming out. Distributors can give landscaping companies that extra edge they're after.

"My distributor even provides employee training and educational seminars to help us in areas that we need more knowledge in," he adds.

Just like landscape contractors are trying to stand out from the pack, distributors are doing the same to attract

and keep customers and encourage more purchases.


"Within the past few years, our distributor has started a rewards program similar to what your major credit card companies offer," Selking says. "You accumulate points based on purchases and then you can use them to purchase items, just about anything. A few years ago, I purchased a hot tub with my points I received from them. They also throw a yearly party for all of their customers as a way of saying thank you for your business."

More distributors are blurring the line between business and personal life—the same way many successful contractors do with their clients.



IN STOCK
Contractors say availability is often as important as price.

The industry is built on relationships, not just projects and results. And distributors are proving to be an important part of that equation for many.

To pick the right distributor, Selking offers this simple advice: "Find a company who provides you with a fair price, the support and knowledge of the product you need to grow your business to the level you want to grow it too," he says. 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Nashville.

PHOTO: SITEONE LANDSCAPE SUPPLY



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MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

Confusion at the pump

Gasoline blended with more than 10 percent ethanol continues to pose a risk to contractors who aren't educated about its harmful effects on landscape equipment engines. **BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER**

When consumers arrive at the gas pump, they have more fuel choices now than ever before. And while these alternatives and biofuels may be fraught with good intentions of being gentler on the environment, Kris Kiser sees a major problem with this abundance of options: It's putting contractors and their outdoor power equipment at risk.

"Most outdoor power equipment is not built and warranted to run on fuel with more than 10 percent ethanol, or E10," says Kiser, president and CEO of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) in Alexandria, Va. "But ethanol proponents want to sell E15 and higher, so they tout the benefits, rarely mentioning its negative impacts on small

engine equipment. The challenge is consumers still aren't being educated to the level required."

E15 hit the market in 2011, and has since been approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for use in flex-fuel vehicles and in light-duty conventional vehicles of model year 2001 and newer. E10 remains the limit for older passenger vehicles and for nonroad vehicles and machinery that use gasoline, such as lawn mowers, motorcycles and boats. Industry experts argue these approvals are not common knowledge, particularly among homeowners and green industry laborers. OPEI and other industry experts say this lack of education can result in improper fueling that can damage or destroy small engines.

Ethanol settles out of gasoline, attracts moisture and, in sufficient quantities, corrodes engine parts. This can leave the consumer with costly repairs or replacements that are not covered by warranties—not to mention the lost profits caused by the equipment downtime.

"E15 was put on the market without any warning," says Kim Rominger, president and CEO of the United Equipment Dealers Association in Dublin, Ohio. "The education wasn't done upfront to let consumers know that (certain fuels) aren't going to work in their units, and if they ruin their equipment that way the warranty won't cover it."

Manufacturers are also concerned about the effects E15 fuel can have on consumers' equipment. Laura Timm,

Continued on page 26

NEWSFEED

BOB-CAT ACQUISITION

Schiller Grounds Care acquired the assets of Eastman Industries' 21-in. commercial mower

family. The mower line, which features cast aluminum decks and optional three-speed transmissions, will be

added to Schiller's Bob-Cat brand of commercial mowers.

KUBOTA GAINS AUTONOMY

Kubota Tractor Corp. agreed to enter an alliance with Smart Path

Systems for its precision guidance technology products. This technology enables the use of autonomous steering of Kubota equipment through a web-based portal.

BARGAIN SHOPPING

New membership site Contractor Supply Club claims to sell parts and tools to landscape contractors at better prices than eBay with \$7.99 flat-rate shipping.

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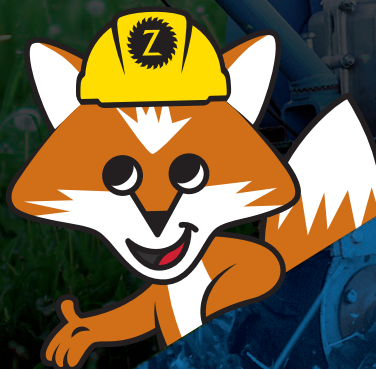
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MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

“Ethanol proponents want to sell E15 and higher, so they tout the benefits, rarely mentioning its negative impacts on small engine equipment.”

—KRIS KISER



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vice president of corporate communications and public affairs for Briggs & Stratton Corp. in Milwaukee, Wis., says research shows that Americans continue to choose their gasoline based on price and do not pay much attention to the warning labels found on pumps.

“Consumers are ill-equipped to make smart decisions about new gasoline choices entering the marketplace, such as fuel blends greater than 10 percent ethanol,” Timm says, adding Briggs & Stratton recommends contractors use a fuel stabilizer to help mitigate the risks of gasoline blended with ethanol. “When your engine isn’t running properly, that causes downtime, which means less time working. This is a big problem for contractors who are trying to earn a living cutting lawns.”

According to 2016 national polls by Nielsen/Harris and OPEI, consumers remain confused about the changing fuels marketplace. Just 31 percent of poll respondents knew that gasoline blends in excess of E10 are harmful to outdoor power equipment. Five percent knew that gasoline blends in excess of E10 are not approved for use in small engines, and 60 percent of poll respondents assumed that any retail fuel is safe for any type of engine.

“Because outdoor power equipment is so vital to any landscaping business, it’s imperative that contractors talk with their workers about safe fueling,” Kiser says. “You don’t want an expensive repair bill because someone makes a mistake and puts the wrong gas in a mower and damages or destroys it.”

Going forward, OPEI is focusing on educating contractors and consumers on proper fueling for outdoor power equipment through its “Look Before You Pump” program, a free consumer and dealer educational campaign. Launched in 2013 in response to the increased availability of higher ethanol fuel blends at gasoline filling stations, the campaign provides free downloadable resources to help educate consumers about safe and proper fueling and to encourage dealers, suppliers and manufacturers to initiate conversations about proper fueling with consumers.

The campaign is supported by several retail stores such as Lowe’s, Walmart and True Value Co., and is identifiable by a red warning hand symbol indicating “OK” for 10 percent ethanol and “No” for mid-level ethanol blends, like E15, E30 and E85. “Look Before You Pump” reminds consumers that it’s harmful and illegal to use higher than 10 percent ethanol gas in any outdoor power equipment or other nonroad product, such as boats, snowmobiles and motorcycles, with the exception of “flex-fuel” engine products. OPEI supplies additional free materials and videos in English and in Spanish at TinyURL.com/EthanolEducation.

“We want to protect our customers to ensure they are getting the best running, highest quality equipment possible,” says Timm. Briggs & Stratton is one manufacturer that has partnered with OPEI on the “Look Before You Pump” initiative. “We have been working very closely with our dealers,

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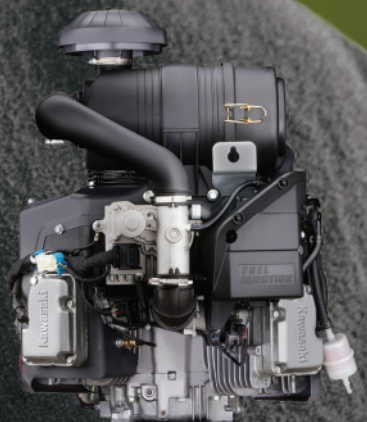
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“Consumers are ill-equipped to make smart decisions about new gasoline choices entering the marketplace.”

—LAURA TIMM

Continued from page 26

retailers and industry associations to educate consumers about the different fuel blends that are available at their local gas stations.”

Organizations and manufacturers are also involved with legislative efforts surrounding the use and availability of E15 and other alternative fuels. OPEI continues to monitor developments at the EPA and other federal organizations and to serve as a voice for the outdoor power equipment industry and its advocates. OPEI has called on the EPA to ensure American consumers are aware of E15's effects on small engines and submitted comments regarding the agency's Renewable Fuel Standard Program: Standards for 2017 and Biomass-Based Diesel Volume for 2018. Kiser says OPEI will be watching closely as the new presidential administration takes office. Timm says several bills related to the Renewable Fuel Standard were introduced by the last Congress that could have potentially changed the landscape of ethanol in the fuel marketplace, but these bills will have to be reintroduced in the new Congress in order to move forward.

“It is too early to tell yet whether there will be any legislative efforts that would potentially be able to help the situation,” Timm says. “In the interim, we will continue to work on educating and protecting consumers.”

Rominger says the legislative and educational efforts that have taken place over the past several years have made a “huge difference” in the number of landscape contractors who are aware of E15 and its detrimental effects on their equipment. While manufacturers are researching and developing equipment that will eventually be compatible with E15, there will still be countless pieces of older equipment in the field that will not be up to date. So for now, education continues to be key.

“I wouldn't say alternative fuels cause more harm than good, but it's all about education,” Rominger says. “There is good and bad in everything. But the main thing is to allow time for manufacturers to catch up with the new fuel technology and for the end user to be educated about what is out there.”

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

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Light up sales with existing clients

Insights from the fourth annual The Lighting Summit, hosted by McKay Landscape Lighting. BY DILLON STEWART

BRIGHT IDEA
Jerry McKay focuses his marketing efforts on existing clients, who account for 55 percent of sales.



When it comes to your marketing scheme, “don’t walk over dollars to get to pennies,” says McKay Landscape Lighting Owner Jerry McKay.

Marketing was the theme at The Lighting Summit, held Jan. 18-19 in Omaha, Neb. For the fourth annual event, McKay Landscape Lighting—which performs 100 percent landscape lighting services to a mostly residential clientele—welcomed 21 landscape lighting professionals from 19 companies. Educational sessions included interacting with the media, building your website into an effective online storefront and an inside look at McKay Lighting’s in-house marketing strategy.

“Marketing is kind of a focus (of this event) every year, instead of being product-centric or technical, because I think what’s happened within our industry is if you can’t market your company and sell and create a good flavor for your employees, it really doesn’t matter (what else you do),” McKay says. “If we can help these guys build their business, it’s gratifying for me.”

McKay Landscape Lighting’s market-



ing plan, which the company handles in-house, concentrates on three segments: new customers, strategic partnerships and existing customers.

While strategic partners, such as construction and design/build+installation companies, and a steady stream of new customers are essential, one area not to forget is the existing customer base, McKay says. His company draws 55 percent of yearly sales from existing or past customers. Strategic partners bring in 24 percent and new customers account for 21 percent of sales.

“It’s easy to get caught up with always chasing the new, shiny rock, but existing customers have already made the decision to spend money here,” says McKay.

“So often in business you already have the answer. There are customers right in front of you. They’re in your existing database already.”

For example, one McKay customer had halogen lights installed 10 years ago. After five years, the customer added a patio to his home and hired McKay to illuminate the space with string lighting. Last year, McKay sold the customer on the benefits of LED lights. He decided to upgrade his decade-old setup to an LED one. Satisfied, he asked McKay to look at his second home out of state. This year, McKay will tackle that project. Without generating one new lead, the company sold four projects in 10 years. Plus, with

Continued on page 32

NEWSFEED

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Continued from page 30

an upgrade, the customer essentially hired the company to maintain the system for the next several years, which brings in an extra \$5,000 a year, he says.

McKay says frequent marketing interactions and reminders drove the additional business.

"He paid attention to social media and to what Danielle (Hagemeier, the company's in-house marketing director) is doing on the blog, discussing the benefits of upgrades," he says.

The company didn't always focus on existing customers. Before it tracked sales closely, McKay Lighting spent nearly 70 percent of its marketing budget attracting new customers. Today, the company has reallocated funds, spending about 50 percent of the marketing budget on existing clients. Much of this approach

centers on social media, email blasts and producing blog content. These campaigns are often cheaper than other methods, taking little more than man-hours.

The company also produces a slew of print materials, like holiday cards and calendars featuring McKay Landscape Lighting projects. One campaign that worked well was a side-by-side photo of a home before and after it was upgraded from halogen to LED lights. The company even found success using YouTube videos to educate customers about how to fix certain elements of their systems and other customer education efforts.


"You need to at least continue to have a dialogue with your existing client and analyze where your marketing dollar goes," McKay says.

An added benefit, selling to and dealing with existing customers is much

easier, McKay says. If the company gets a bid in front of an existing customer, it's almost a sure deal.

For one, existing clients are savvier. Questions like "How long will the ground will be torn up?" are already answered. Veteran customers experience less sticker shock, as they know what lighting projects cost and understand the value they bring to their property.

On the operational side, there are few surprises. Crews already know where the transformer is and where wire is laid. In an upgrade, the project is mostly planned. It's merely a face lift, done by replacing equipment. A typical job is just a little bit of rewiring and plugging back into the existing transformer.

McKay says, "It's, honestly, probably five times easier than dealing with a new customer." 



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Simple setup

Why one irrigation maintenance pro forgoes a trailer and avoids supply-house stops.

BY MARISA PALMIERI

You might call Michael Haynes both a student of and a teacher for the irrigation industry. He and a partner built one company—All About Irrigation in Greenville, S.C.—before selling it in 2012. Soon after, he started up another, All Green Irrigation in Columbia, S.C. He's been operating it as a one-man show, and he's set to hire a few technicians this year.

Haynes also runs the website Pro Irrigation Training, and has shared his craft with 2,600 students from all over the world over the last four years.

"I do it because these guys just need help," Haynes says of his target market—irrigation maintenance professionals. "I've been trying to get some of my knowledge out because there's nothing (training-wise) in the irrigation market that can get someone off the ground."

Here, he shares his truck setup, which he says is maximized for efficiency and profitability.



BED TIME

"I have a Dodge Ram 2500, but I've seen guys even in smaller pickup trucks be able to organize efficiently," Haynes says. "I don't have a trailer. I know guys like to carry lots of stuff on them, but they're a high theft target. And the wear and tear on the vehicle over time is something to consider."



TOTE-ALLY EFFICIENTLY

"I have three large lockable totes," he says. "One is filled with tools. One is filled with PVC—99 percent of the systems here are constructed with PVC. The third one is just valves, poly parts, spare stuff, risers and expandable couplings. All my drip parts are in a tote inside of there. I keep a pretty extensive selection of drip and microsprays."

NEWSPEED

HUNTER INTROS PRO-HC

Hunter Industries unveiled the new Wi-Fi-based Pro-HC controller, built to


work with its Hydra-wise web-based software. The controller allows users to select a local weather

station and set watering triggers for predictive watering adjustments. The Pro-HC is offered in either six-, 12- or 24-station fixed indoor and outdoor units.

ASIC HONORS

The American Society of Irrigation Consultants (ASIC) will honor Brian Vinchesi of Irrigation Consulting with its Roy Williams Memorial Award at this

year's National Conference in Seattle. The award is given for significant contributions to the irrigation industry by an individual, organization or business.

"I've seen different types of homemade things work out well," he says, referring to vans with shelving, compartments and other rigs. "In my opinion, it's just a matter of how organized you are about keeping your inventory filled." 



"Inside the cab of my truck I keep the heads, timers, nozzles in a tackle box, pump parts and a wire tracker up underneath the seat," Haynes says. "There's also safety gear, bug spray, sunscreen—all the things a contractor needs."

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Neosporin			T-Shirts		2
Alcohol			Breath Mints		
Hand Sanitizer			Belt		
Sunscreen			Crackers / Snacks		
Ear Plugs			Pairs Socks		2
Extra Safety Glasses					
Mosquito Repellent			BRIEFCASE		
			Invoices		50
RIGHT SIDE DOOR			Customer List		
Paper Maps			Schedule Book		
Flashlights			Year's Receipts		
Analog Multimeter			Business Licenses		
Digital Multimeter			Insurance Papers		
			Biz Cards		50
PUMP PARTS BOX					
1/4" Steel Plug		3	MISC REPAIR BOX		
3/8" Steel Plug		2	3/4" Blow Handles		2
1/4" Tap & Die			1" Blow Handles		2
Gaskets			Worm Repair Kits		2
Other Pump Smalls			Wilson Repair Kits		2
Tube of Create-A Gasket			Eden Gaskets		
3/4" Adj Press Relief Valve		1	Cosial Crimper		
1 1/2" Brass Flow Valve		1	M & F Cosial Figs		10
Pump Start Relay		1	Coax Cable		10
MISCELLANEOUS			MISCELLANEOUS		
GPS			Yellow Jacket 20 Spray		
Phone Chargers			Greenlee 521A Wire Locator		
Napkin, Salt & Pepper			Backflow Vertical Tube		

"I keep a week's worth of inventory or more. If you have to make a stop at the parts house, know what you need before you get there," he says. "I'm kind of old school. I keep all my inventory on paper. It's printed from a document on my computer, which I update, but I keep physical lists on my truck. I put check marks on parts I used on that stop."

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Hunt Davis,
CEO, Canopy,
Raleigh, N.C.

THE DISRUPTOR

With a tech startup approach, Canopy seeks to shake up the residential landscape maintenance industry with a national brand.

BY DILLON STEWART

Ryan Winkel, operations specialist for Canopy Lawn Care, squints at his computer, straining to see a blue Post-it stuck to a contract that's been scanned into the company's system. The note was an add-on to a contract that belonged to Grass Monkey, a Raleigh, N.C.-based company Canopy recently acquired. Winkel is entering the company's former accounts into the data management software that serves as Canopy's backbone.

From what Winkel can see, only a small strip of low-tack, pressure-sensitive adhesive was keeping a vital portion of this client's contract from falling to the wayside. Not to mention, the information hardly lives in a space that will allow it to be easily communicated to a crew member serving the property.

"This is the type of thing that lives in our tech stack and is seamlessly communicated to whoever is servicing that customer," Winkel says, explaining the difference between the old way of doing

things and Canopy's way.

It's a perfect example of how the landscape industry, which has been relatively untouched by technology, is prime for disruption.

If it's up to Canopy CEO Hunt Davis, his residential landscape maintenance company based in Raleigh, N.C., will be the one to shake things up.

Canopy employs a team of software engineers, which spends each day creating, improving and refining the technology the company is built around. Davis believes if Canopy's software and operations are constructed to be "scalable" and it puts a new face on the industry for customers and employees, the company can build a national brand by consolidating the residential maintenance segment and dominating the market.

"The landscape industry is a \$76 billion industry and residential is 31 percent of that, but you only have one company focused on residential that's over \$16 million," says Canopy CEO Hunt Davis, referring to Mariani Landscape in Chicago. "It's such a fragmented industry that's ripe for consolidation. It only takes \$10 million to get into the top 150 landscape companies in the country. That's so crazy."

To the industry veteran, this 37-year-old executive might sound smug when he says he's building a national brand. But Canopy is not your average landscape firm, and Davis is not your average landscape contractor.

Continued on page 38



“WE LOOKED AT ALL OF THE
IRRIGATION CONTROL OPTIONS,
AND **WE CHOSE** HYDRAWISE.”

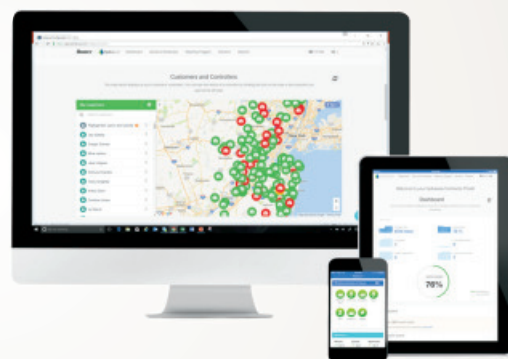
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COVER STORY

Continued from page 36

Going into its second year in business, the company is already projecting 2017 revenue at \$5 million—halfway to breaking into the LM150.

It also has \$4 million in funding from investors that include Lowe's Home Improvement; venture capitalists from New York, California and North Carolina; and angel investors including foreign billionaires—all of which have goals as lofty as Davis'.

"I don't think there's any reason why there can't be a national brand for residential maintenance," says Chris Langford, managing director, Lowe's Ventures, the retail giant's affiliate dedicated to investing in "the most innovative and disruptive technologies in retail and home improvement." "Most other industries, even some pockets of other home services companies, have national brands. I would expect Canopy to be in that same vein. I think that's what success with this looks like, and I think there is a very clear opportunity."

But opportunity alone didn't entice Davis to leave a lucrative job as an investment banker to start up a landscape company. His bachelor's in engineering from North Carolina State University makes him a problem solver, the CEO says. Looking at the industry, he sees a poor employee experience and a painful customer experience—something he and his

wife went through as first-time homeowners. Those, he says, are problems worth solving.

Who is Hunt Davis?

Canopy's headquarters is located in a two-story townhouse a few miles outside Raleigh, N.C. Inside the front door, Davis greets visitors from his stand-up desk, which fits the restless owner. Davis appears to subscribe to the "geniuses thrive at messy desks" theory. His is covered by papers; a pile of iPads in blue cases adorned with Canopy stickers; jars of peanut butter and protein shakes for his "bursts of creative energy" and two computer monitors atop coffee-can stands.

One of the screens is showing a video recap of the company's first holiday party in December. Davis is beaming and fighting back a tear.

"I've watched this, like, 50 times," he says. "We gave each employee a unique superlative, and nearly every employee in the company was in attendance. It was such a special day."

Davis' life didn't always look like this. Five years ago, he wore \$500 suits to work every day—not the blue jeans, button-down shirt and Canopy-branded Patagonia vest he wears today.

As managing director and partner of FMI Capital Advisors, an investment-banking firm in Raleigh, he used his MBA from Wake Forest University. The global firm handles deals that range from \$20 million to \$100 million. It was a lucrative gig, and had tragedy not struck, he might still be there today.

On October 14, 2012, Davis' brother George Merrill Davis III was killed in a car accident. At the time of his death, Davis III was 34 and general manager of Stone Bros. & Byrd, a century-old landscape and farm supply store owned by their father. The store is an institution in the town. Just over the left field wall of the Durham Bulls' old ballpark, the store, brandished with a funky mural of plants and insects, can be seen in the background of the

BUSINESS BREAKDOWN

COMPANY: Canopy Lawn Care

HEADQUARTERS: Raleigh, N.C.

EMPLOYEES: More than 40

REVENUE: \$5 million
(projected 2017)

SERVICE: Residential maintenance
(includes chemical application, mosquito control, aeration and overseeding and mulching)

CUSTOMER MIX: 100 percent
residential



movie “Bull Durham,” based on the minor league team.

After his brother’s death, Davis ruminated on his life. He saw the joy owning the store brought his father and his brother. He wasn’t going back to sweeping floors or stocking shelves, but he wanted more fulfilling work.

During his last year at FMI, Davis was investing in Pack Purchase, a web-based on-demand home service platform that connected local providers with customers. Davis’ roots are enmeshed in startup culture. During undergrad, he tried his hand at a few new ventures, which are prevalent in “The Triangle,” an area that’s become a startup destination thanks to the college towns that make up its three points—Durham (Duke); Raleigh (N.C. State) and Chapel Hill (UNC-Chapel Hill). Pack Purchase, though still in its R&D phase, seemed like the change of pace he was seeking.

“I loved investment banking, but it was a very bottom-line driven business,” he says. “(With Pack Purchase) I found an opportunity to create and solve this problem for people. That was really exciting to me.”

Davis became CEO of Pack Purchase in 2015. While he had a nest egg and could’ve returned to investment banking whenever, the move was a lifestyle change. He sold the BMW and started riding the bus to save money. The rides changed his perspective, he says. In his new role, he spent time researching the

service industries. He saw an injustice in how employees were paid, treated and denied upward mobility. “How could you build a career this way?” he thought.

Pack Purchase quickly evolved into Canopy, launching in its current form in 2016, but the experience taught Davis the importance of a rewarding employee experience. It also influenced his decision to build a company from the ground up—not serve as a middleman developing software.

“This industry is known for high customer churn and high employee churn,” Davis says. “We believe we can improve both of those by using technology, but technology doesn’t fix some of the fundamental problems in industry, like culture, communication and the treatment of workers.”

Canopy culture

Today, an employee-centric focus remains. Canopy field workers don’t report to a shop each morning. Instead, they depart from home, where their equipment is parked at night. Industry incumbents might question how you can foster company culture with a “lone-wolf” approach, but employees say it doesn’t hinder camaraderie. Digital communication over channels on web message platform Slack, which is built into Canopy’s tech stack, creates a richer

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Canopy’s field culture is largely forged in a digital space on its in-house app.

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COVER STORY

sense of community than any company they've ever worked for.

"If you read through that entire (Slack) channel, you would see encouragement and support," says Foster Nichols, sales manager. "All the folks in the office and our first core team of employees in the field have been intentional with fostering that environment. You will find companies with a great office culture—that exists—but to have a great field culture in our industry—that's special."

Take the story of Area Lead Brandon Juarez. Last year, his daughter fought a respiratory illness, forcing him to take extended time off. Juarez says some of his past employers would have terminated him over the missed time. At Canopy, he was met with compassion. Some fellow crew members even asked to donate paid time off or stay late to cover his routes.

Culture isn't just kindness and understanding, however. Canopy's structure offers a chance to build a career and wealth, Davis says. While he declined to share what an average production team member—known as a Canopy Pro—makes, he says the company pays at or above industry standards. Employees also

Continued on page 42

A full-stack startup

Some industry stalwarts have feared disruption by the on-demand economy—the so-called "Uber of the landscape industry." Companies like LawnStarter, Lawn Guru and Plowz/Mowz have hit the market in recent years but haven't become the transformative force some expected. Davis doesn't think they ever will be.

"It's not a good business model," he says. "None of those will end up working out. I'm willing to make that claim."

Davis should know. Prior to its current incarnation, his Canopy Lawn Care tested an on-demand home service model called Pack Purchase starting in 2014. The application served those looking for landscape, construction, cleaning and other home services.

"We spent a lot of time and money in R&D mode, and we tested an on-demand model," he says. "Strategically they don't make sense. Landscape maintenance is a recurring business."

Existing on-demand sites use an intermediary business model, which means they're essentially middlemen. They're great for adding a few extra jobs to your route, but they're nothing more than another lead-generation outlet, Davis says. You don't have control over the customer experience and you can't capture the recurring revenue.

On the contrary, Canopy is a full-stack startup, a term popularized by tech entrepreneur Chris Dixon. Rather than selling software for existing companies to implement, the full-stack startup approach is to build an end-to-end product or service.

Dixon compares Microsoft to Apple. Microsoft started out building operating systems and applications, like Office, and relied on partners' hardware to give those products a home. Apple took a different approach by building the hardware, the operating system, the apps and the retail experience, Dixon says. They built an end-to-end experience. Dixon would say the existing on-demand sites are Microsoft. Canopy is Apple.



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COVER STORY

Continued from page 40

earn performance-based incentive compensation based on metrics, like monthly customer ratings, and Canopy Pros are also compensated for upselling customers on additional services in the field. Some employees even earn stock options.

Most importantly, Davis says, employees don't have a ceiling that naturally occurs at many smaller landscape companies. For example, Juarez, a 25-year-old with eight years of industry experience, has already gone from apprentice to area lead, leading a whole network of Canopy Pros and gaining ownership in the company.

"There's pride in working for the Canopy banner," says Lowe's Ventures' Langford. "There's a legitimate career path and people are incentivized either through some level of ownership in the company or just this potential to grow within a career that has often been limited because of the fragmentation of (the industry)."

Other than the obvious business opportunity, Langford says this culture is part of what attracted Lowe's to Canopy. He also believes this factor is what will help the company grow and attract the top talent in the industry.

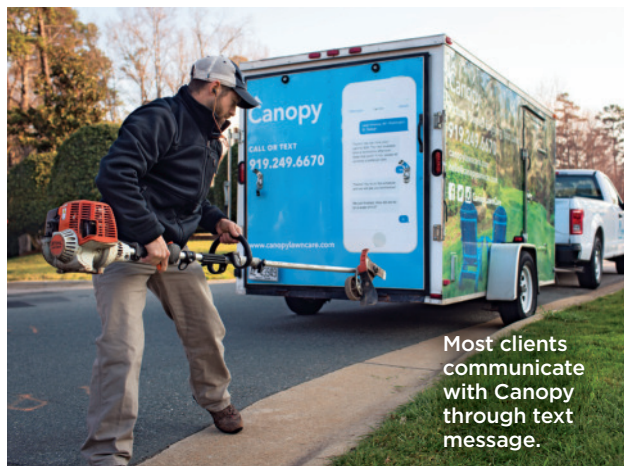
"How do you get the best people?" he says. "Well, if there are regions to manage and national accounts to manage, then there are all these other ways that you can go from the field into the office and grow within your career."

The customer experience

The technology-based Canopy experience is present from first contact by a potential customer through daily maintenance. It's not "on-demand," but it offers the expedient response modern consumers have come to expect.

In the sales and marketing office, Nichols runs point on a digital channel called Intercom, a third-party application that has been integrated into Canopy's tech stack. Think of Intercom as a shared inbox that everyone in the company can access. Someone in the sales office constantly monitors this inbox, even on the weekends. The company advertises

Continued on page 44



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COVER STORY

Continued from page 42

a 30-minute response but averages 15. Internally, they strive to be faster, and Davis awards the in-house team with a Friday lunch if the weekly average is less than 10 minutes.

Behind Nichols, salesman Brian Lattimore is preparing a quote, which only takes a few minutes. Traditionally, landscape companies perform bids on-site, in-person. Instead, Lattimore pulls public property data to outline the property, tracing around shrubs or hardscape features to measure the turf, and feeds the dimensions into Canopy's custom tool, which uses a proprietary algorithm to formulate a quote. On average, the "deluxe" plan, which includes mowing, edging, blowing, cleanup, weed control fertilization, bed maintenance, leaf removal, aeration and overseeding, mosquito control and pruning, costs \$299 a month. The company offers two cheaper packages,

and customers can also choose which service they want a-la-carte, even if it's only mowing.

"A lot of companies won't even see a request until the owner has time to check his email, which might not happen until Friday afternoon," Davis says. "Then the company has to send someone out to the property to do a bid in person. It might be two weeks before the customer gets a bid."

Once the customer signs on, technology continues to improve the daily experience. A client is notified via text message when a Canopy Pro is en route. The message includes a link to a webpage, including a photo of the Pro, a description of that day's services and a prompt to provide any requests or concerns. Customers may also text a response. After the job, Canopy Pros typically knock on the door to tell the homeowner they've completed the work and ask

if there is anything else they can do. Some customers prefer not to speak with the Pro, and if that's the case, it will be documented in the app. Even with all the technology and the ability for streamlined communication between customer and company, many Canopy customers still appreciate the human touch.

Once the job is complete, the Pro uploads photos of the work and sends a summary to the customer, who is encouraged to leave a rating out of five stars and a comment. This instant feedback is vital to the company's operations, and it makes the homeowner feel like he or she is being heard.

The Canopy experience provides a seamless customer experience, and behind the scenes, it allows the company to run lean and efficiently.

Efficient operations

At the headquarters, two large television monitors hang on the wall in an operations command center. The operations team oversees its entire fleet from these two screens.

One depicts a weather map, on which the company monitors incoming weather to quickly pivot its routes and avoid problem areas. It's also used to pull up company metrics, displayed in charts and graphs. The other monitor is a split screen. Half of the screen is a grid depicting each Canopy Pro's hour-by-hour schedule. The other half is a color-coded map that shows where each crew member is in real time and the route he or she is scheduled to hit.

"This view allows us to rearrange our schedule in a moment's notice," says Josh Nance, operations manager. "If one guy is swamped or something is taking longer than expected and it looks like another guy is going to get done a little bit early, we can drag and drop a job to tack it onto the other guy's schedule. If we see some rain is going to hit a particular area at a certain time, we can rearrange the schedule to make sure we hit that area first and then move somewhere else."

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While Canopy prefers to have the same employee serve the same customer to form a relationship, every employee is capable of doing every service the company offers. During the apprentice stage, employees ride along with an experienced Pro for no less than two weeks, and often up to several months, to learn the ins and outs of the technology and the services before going out on their own.

Furthermore, Canopy's employee-facing app gives a Pro without experience on a property all the details he or she needs to ensure there's no difference in service. Any preferences—these often include things like “don't apply fertilizer in the backyard where the dog plays”—are documented within the app, and photos of past work or problem spots are held on the customer's page within. Each time Canopy works on a yard, the client service is improving incremen-



tally through documented nuances. If the property is unfamiliar to him or her, the Canopy Pro will often shoot a quick message to headquarters through a Slack channel. This group chat is available to the operation center and all crew members. Any extra tips from either the typical crew member who services the yard or from the headquarters will typically arrive by the time the employee gets on-site.

Instead of driving into the shop, driving out to a job and then back into the shop at the end of the day, Canopy Pros depart from home each morning. The command center aims to set up routes that minimize the distance the Pro is traveling from home. The average Canopy

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Flat-screens let the ops team oversee Canopy's every move.

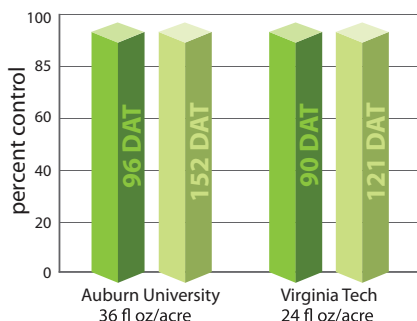


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Source: Tumbleson & Kommedahl, 1961



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employee drives no more than 2-5 miles per day.

The Pros park a company-issued Ford F-150 with a 12-foot trailer in their driveway. The fleet is managed by Enterprise Fleet Management. Each trailer contains a standardized setup of a 48-inch John Deere zero-turn mower, Stihl handheld tools, a Honda walk-behind, a sprayer, chemicals and nearly 250 other tools—everything needed to perform any task.

When the Canopy Pro starts the day, he or she simply hits a clock on the Canopy app downloaded on a company-issued iPad or iPhone. This sends the automated message letting the first client know he's on his way. It also notifies the command center that the employee is reporting for duty.

COO Keith Freeman, who spent years with TruGreen LandCare, says the traditional landscape model creates a route system that resembles a web and prioritizes the customers closest to the shop because it costs the company man-hours and fuel to reach customers who are further away. The Canopy model lets the company offer

an equivalent experience to all customers without losing efficiency.

"Now, we have someone embedded right there near the customer," says Freeman. "If we have a service call or a customer that requests a meeting, we can do it within hours, which simply delights the customer. In a branch-based model, it's a lot more difficult to pull that off when customers are further away."

How they'll grow

While the company continues to bring on new Canopy Pros, its national growth plan relies on entering new markets through two types of acquisitions. The first type is acquiring residential maintenance accounts from full-service or primarily commercial companies that are looking to divest this segment of their businesses.

Daniel Currin's Greenscape, another Triangle-area company, is an example of this first type of company. Founded in 1979 by Currin's father, Michael, the original business focused on residential construction with maintenance on the backburner.

Once Currin took over and partly due to the recession, the focus quickly turned to maintenance and commercial accounts. Raleigh came out of the recession earlier than most, Currin says, and the company ballooned by \$5 million from 2011-2016.

In 2016, Greenscape brought in about \$15 million. Still, the residential part of the business only represented about \$1 million. This side of the business was going through what Currin calls "a slow death." He wanted to sell it off, but he didn't see another company in the area that could take on the work.

"We just didn't have an exit strategy," he says. "We decided we weren't going to invest in this business anymore, but we'll still take care of the customers. It occurred to me that when you do that, the customer isn't important. You're just doing the minimum from month to month."

He started having coffee with Davis as peers leaning on each other for advice. Shortly, he realized there was an opportunity here.

"Here was this guy who's trying to do (residential maintenance) super well," he says. "You have this guy saying, 'We are going to do the best we can, with the best trained people, the best technology, the best trailer and the best equipment.' Here we are, we just want their money. It's a horrible business plan. So I thought, 'Man, my (residential) customers would be better off with the Canopy team.'"

So, Canopy acquired Greenscape's residential accounts in late 2016. The company is not disclosing terms of acquisition deals, and Greenscape's deal is unique because Currin is serving as an investor. He says the sale was a short-term risk, but a chance to focus his company in the long term.

Built to scale

Part of Canopy Lawn Care's growth strategy hinges on its structure—the foundation for which is the Canopy Pro, company lingo for a production staff member. Here's the current structure, which CEO Hunt Davis says will change as the company expands. For example, he foresees the Market Leads eventually reporting to a regional manager.

CANOPY PRO

Approximately five Canopy Pros report to each Area Lead.



AREA LEAD

10 Area Leads report to each Market Lead.



MARKET LEAD

These managers report to the Director of Operations.



"Now when we get a residential call we say, 'No problem, we will just switch you over to Canopy,'" he says. "It doesn't take much time—no visit, not even a qualifying conversation anymore. Now, we can put that time towards future sales."

Grass Monkey, mentioned earlier, represents the second type of company Canopy wants to acquire—businesses with \$1 million in revenue or less.

Davis believes Canopy can offer these companies a service. He says many landscape professionals just want to be in the field getting dirty—not in the office stressing about cash flow. His offer is this: Canopy handles equipment, capital, marketing, taxes, generating leads, hiring, training and on boarding—and you get back to what you do best: landscaping.

"We don't talk to landscape companies who need more customers; we talk to landscapers who need help running their business," says Davis. "We've created an end-to-end solution that takes the business side off the table and enables our guys to do the work that they love to do." ☐

WEB EXTRA

Visit LandscapeManagement.com/ Video to get a behind-the-scenes look at the Canopy operation.

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FIRE IT UP

A monthly employee meal sparks camaraderie and a positive culture for one landscape company.

➤ PAGE 54

BUSINESS BASICS: PLANNING

Plan your pricing strategy



BY PHIL HARWOOD

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

Think about your last major purchase. Whether it was a product like a vehicle, appliance or computer or a service like pest management, electrical work or a plumbing repair, did you purchase the most expensive option you could find, assuming it was the best overall value? If you did, you're in the minority of all purchasers. Few buyers purchase the most expensive option available.

Alternatively, did you purchase the least expensive option you could find, assuming it was the best overall value? If you did, you also are in the minority. Some buyers purchase the least expensive option available, but most do not. Most purchases are made somewhere in the middle of the price range.

Why would it be any different for landscape and snow contractors? It's not. The highest priced option and the lowest priced option fail to attract the majority of the purchasers.

Developing a pricing strategy begins with the recognition that price matters but only as it relates to benefits. Value is the difference between the overall cost of ownership and the overall benefits of ownership. Price never stands alone. The often-repeated statement of "price is all that matters these days" is simply untrue. This statement reflects a lack of awareness of the reality that exists in the buyer's mind.

Remember, the total cost of ownership includes time spent with salespeople and account managers, setup costs, installation costs, costs involved with learning, ongoing educational costs, repair costs and more. The total cost of ownership may greatly exceed



the transaction amount. Buyers will always factor the total cost of ownership into their decision-making process. Often, it's done subconsciously, without much awareness that it's happening. Similarly, the total benefits of ownership may be much greater than the obvious benefits listed. The greater the total benefit and the less the total cost, the more value.

In the landscape/snow industry, price may very well be the primary decision-making criteria for a specific property or customer segment, but it's certainly not all that matters for the market as a whole.

DEVELOP CREATIVE STRATEGIES


Within each market segment, there are rich opportunities to develop and implement creative pricing strategies with a keen eye toward achieving profit objectives. Pricing strategy is not dictated by the market or by the buyer; it's dictated by the seller.

Earlier in my career, I had some interesting experiences providing estate care services in an affluent market segment. These folks valued their time and the hassle-free enjoyment of their property. They wanted to be able to play golf, entertain friends and family and relax. The last thing they wanted to do was manage contractors. The more proactive and productive we were, the more our clients could enjoy their beautiful

properties. The less visible we were, the less we were on their minds. Price was never part of the conversation. This segment called for a unique pricing strategy to ensure we captured all the revenue we could without taking advantage of the situation or violating our client's trust.

I also have experience providing commercial landscape maintenance and enhancement services in a competitive market where price mattered immensely. We devised creative, thoughtful and intentional pricing strategies to successfully acquire and renew properties, while maximizing enhancement opportunities—without exposing ourselves along the way.

I've encountered many contractors who are discouraged when it comes to pricing. They feel the walls closing in on them by downward price pressures and rising operating costs. If they lose a contract, they assume it was because of price, but it rarely is. When you lose a contract, it often means you were outsold. Price never matters on its own. It only matters as part of the value equation. Don't buy the lie that price is all that matters.

A better option is to develop pricing strategies within defined customer segments to position yourself for success. Each market segment has its own unique value equation. Learn what it is. Understand the price elasticity that exists. Study the competition. Position yourself with a creative, thoughtful and intentional pricing strategy that reflects your cost structure, profit objectives and, most of all, the benefits offered. 

WEB EXTRA

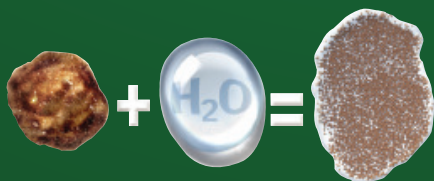
Visit the Web Extras section at LandscapeManagement.net for Harwood's list for pricing strategy considerations.

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Balancing culture and strategy



BY JEFFREY SCOTT

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

Eminent business thinker Peter Drucker is known for saying “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” He believed culture trumped all.

His words are taken as gospel. This thinking is misplaced when it comes to small and midsize green industry firms. Here’s what I’ve found to be true.

Most firms in our industry spend more time focusing on culture than strategy. A good strategy is missing.

Owners in the green industry care greatly about their people—sometimes to a fault. Many landscape and related service companies have grown organically without a particular strategy.

At least half of these companies are under performing, and many owners are greatly underpaying themselves, due in part to a lack of a good company strategy.

Even larger corporations have to balance culture and strategy to survive. Their struggle is twofold: get everyone on the same page and figure out what page that is. This topic of culture came

up when Dan Ariens, president and CEO of Ariens Co., spoke to some of my Leader’s Edge peer group members last year. “We challenge ourselves to balance our culture with a constant pursuit of perfection,” he said. “Balancing the expectations of world class performance requires a discipline to a strategic plan while we measure the accountability of the plan through our cultural eyes.”

WHICH COMES FIRST?

Many landscape business owners will tell you that having a stronger culture is their biggest challenge. A third of my clients come to me with that goal in mind. In fact, that’s the reason I published, “Become a Destination Company,” because of the need in our industry for attracting better employees and creating a stronger culture. Yet, what I find missing from most companies is a clear and compelling strategy. If your strategy is fragile, confusing or ever-changing, it will greatly weaken your culture.

Ultimately, culture and strategy reinforce and support each other. Having a healthy culture allows you to implement your strategy at 10 times the speed with a much higher chance of success. Conversely, having a targeted and well-implemented strategy allows your company to achieve more, which then attracts more successful people.

So which should you focus on first? Give priority to whichever is weakest. If your culture is weaker and unaligned, focus there to shore it up.

A SUCCESSFUL GROWTH STRATEGY

To grow in profitably, you need good

marketing, sales and service. Sustainable growth, however, requires more than just hiring another salesperson or increasing your pay-per-click budget.

You need a cohesive approach that builds and grows your entire company. Here’s my five-step business-building strategy. Follow this recipe and you will achieve more.

1. People strategy: Attract, retain and surround yourself with the right team of people; put them in the right seats, and empower them to excel.

2. Operational and systems strategy: Put proven systems in place to make your people more efficient. You need both people systems and production systems.

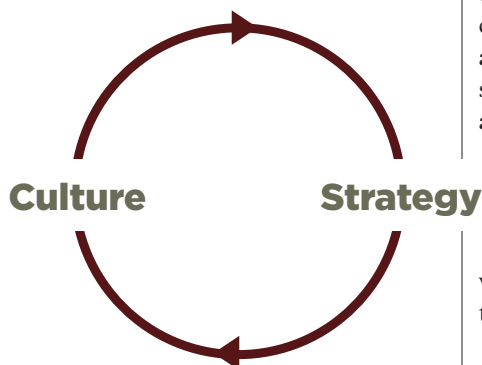
3. Marketing and sales strategy: With improved productivity, you now need to close more sales to keep up with the expanded capacity. Most companies can sell at a higher margin when they get focused on their ideal client and how to serve that client.

4. Feedback strategy: Control your business in real time with the right metrics and key performance indicators.

5. Accountability strategy: Ensure accountability and seamless execution of your systems. This is the glue that keeps everything humming. Develop daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly accountability systems for success.

Your company is like a sports car. It needs a set of balanced tires to maintain traction around sharp corners at fast speeds. The same goes with your company. If you want to win the race, make sure your strategy addresses all five points, with buy-in from all your employees. Full speed ahead—see you at the checkered flag! 🏁

Which comes first?



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CASE STUDY: OUR WAY

Appreciation celebration

Why one landscape company turned a one-time thing into a monthly event.

BY CASEY PAYTON

What started as a one-time celebration to reward the team for a job well done has turned into a monthly event for A+ Lawn & Landscape, headquartered in Des Moines, Iowa.

A few years ago after a good month, management rewarded the team with a barbecue. It was a hit—more well-received than anyone anticipated.

According to Shawn Edwards, managing partner, the feedback was, “I wish we did this every month,” which prompted the company to make team dinners a recurring event.

That was five years ago. Edwards says the monthly tradition continues, but now it’s more about showing thanks than giving a reward.

“After the success of the first dinner, we started doing it as a monthly event but for no reason—just to show our appreciation,” Edwards says. “When you start tying it to numbers or having to hit a certain mark, we decided it loses something. It’s not the same as just showing appreciation. We wanted show them how much we care.”

Each month A+ has a theme dinner—it could be hot dog night, soup night or something else—cooked and served by management for the rest of the team. When the company tried Mexican night, Edwards says they decided to have it catered since it would be complicated. Surprisingly, despite the delicious food, bringing in a caterer all but ruined the event, Edwards says.



“That was something we learned—one of the things the employees liked so much about the dinner was the managers and the owners cooking for them,” Edwards says. “(When it was catered) the interaction between management and employees just wasn’t the same. The real key is that we’re out there cooking for them.”

Employees are off the clock during the dinners, which usually start at 3:30 p.m. “Most eat and play to win prizes,” he says. Each dinner features contests (think: water balloon tosses) for a \$25 gift certificate. One requirement is employees must pair up with someone from a different department.

“With 100-plus employees, there’s not a lot of opportunity to get to know people outside of your department other than this monthly event,” Edwards says. “It’s been really great for building our team culture and having the departments work better together.”

For other businesses considering a monthly team dinner, Edwards says the key to success is “participation.” It’s easy for employees to stand on the sidelines, but it’s important that everyone joins in, he says.

“We basically say they can’t eat till they play,” Edwards says, laughing. “Honestly, the event loses

something if people aren’t getting involved, so you have to find a way to get everyone to play the games and participate in the fun.”

Overall, Edwards considers these events to be a small monetary investment—about \$8 a head. The real investment is the time involved. But that’s also what makes it special, Edwards says.

“It’s the owners and managers giving their time to cook and participate in the dinner and games that makes this event such a hit with the employees,” he says. “It opens doors—letting management get to know their people and vice versa. That’s really important to the success of your company culture.”

One of A+ Lawn & Landscape’s monthly team meals featured a dunk tank.

Payton is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.

SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY: A+ Lawn & Landscape

HEADQUARTERS: Des Moines, Iowa

EMPLOYEES: 100+

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CLIENT MIX: 80% residential, 20% commercial



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VANTAGE X SERIES

COMPANY:

Exmark

URL: Exmark.com

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POWERED BAGGER ATTACHMENT

COMPANY: Toro

URL: Toro.com

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COMPANY: John Deere

URL: Deere.com

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URL: WrightMfg.com

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URL: BobCatTurf.com

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COMPANY: Briggs & Stratton Corp.

URL: FerrisMowers.com

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COMPANY: Turfco

URL: TurfcoDirect.com

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URL: TurfExProducts.com

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URL: BackedByBayer.com

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COMPANY: Syngenta

URL: GreenCastOnline.com/Acelepryn

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TAURUS TRIO G

COMPANY: Quali-Pro

URL: Quali-Pro.com

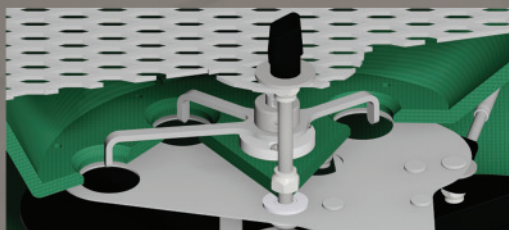
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*denotes regional advertisement

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HELP WANTED



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Large Landscape company is seeking experienced Irrigation Technicians with valid driver's license. Must have a minimum of 3-5 years of previous experience. Qualified females are encouraged to apply.

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INTERVIEWS: Tuesday's 7:00am to 9:00am

RESUMES email to: paulw@fslandscape.com

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BACKSTORY

INTERVIEW BY MARISA PALMIERI



Kelly Dowell

**BUSINESS DEVELOPER
DOWCO ENTERPRISES
CHESTERFIELD, MO.**

EDUCATION

Lafayette High School
Wildwood, Mo.
Class of 2006

Lindenwood University
St. Charles, Mo.
Bachelor of Arts
Business Management
Class of 2011

WORK EXPERIENCE

2002-2007

Dowco Enterprises
Administrative Assistant

2008-2010

Dowco Enterprises
Account Manager

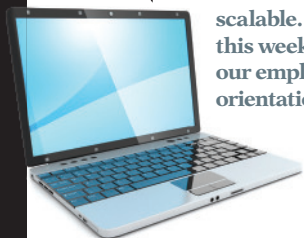
2011-2012

Director of Sales & Marketing

2012-Present

Business Developer

"My passion right now is making sure everything we do is standardized and automated, so we can have consistent results and it's scalable. Earlier this week, we put our employee orientation online."



"I worked at Dowco throughout college. I commuted—it was 30 minutes away. I had a big interest in sales. At that time, we didn't have a super strong sales machine; sales kind of trickled in. I had a passion for setting up the system."

"It's been life changing. I have a little sister who just turned 14. She keeps me young, and I'm not old. The program has been a blessing for both of us."



2015-present
Volunteer
Big Brothers Big Sisters
of America

2016-Present
Host/volunteer
National Association of
Landscape Professionals
Young Professionals
Networking Community

"Officially, we have a Facebook Group and we've done a reception. We'll have a presence at the National Collegiate Landscape Competition, Renewal & Remembrance and at GIE+EXPO. We're up to 157 (Facebook Group) members. It's a place to get together, ask questions and share best practices."



Kelly works with her parents, Dowco co-owners Maurice Dowell and Donna Dowell. She also considers her dogs—Wally, a Shih Tzu, and Broozer, a boxer/pit bull mix—to be coworkers. They go to the office with her daily.

"Before college, I worked at Bath & Body Works, Best Buy and places like that. I learned retail was not for me."

Kelly's podcast picks:

- "The Charged Life with Brendon Burchard"
- Dave Ramsey's "EntreLeadership"
- Mike Rowe's "The Way I Heard It"



"I don't know if that's the best title. I would say I'm really the brand experience manager. I'm the first point of contact for all new employees and our new clients."



"Last year, I read 18 books. It's my goal to always be reading."

WORDS OF WISDOM "As a leader, your life is full of choices. When in doubt, do the right thing. You never know who is watching." • "Always continue to learn. Your knowledge is one of the only things people can never take away from you." • "If you want to be an expert, be an expert. Don't wait for the title or the opportunity to come to you. Take it."

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