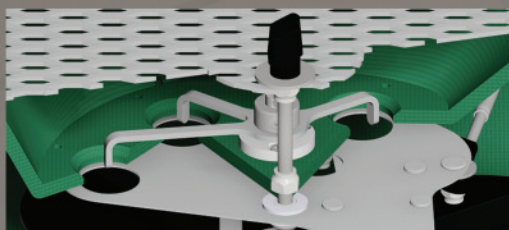


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ON THE COVER: PHOTO BY TIMOTHY DEVINE, TIMOTHYDEVINE.COM



NEW VIDEOS ON LANDSCAPEMANAGEMENT.NET

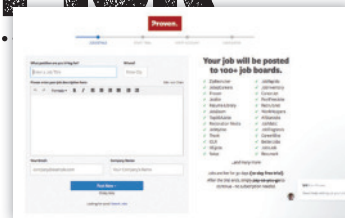


→ Head over to **LandscapeManagement.net/video** to meet the man featured in this month's cover story: Paul Wagner, founder and president of Fit Turf. Is there something holding back your team from being successful? After years of working

to create a great company culture at two different lawn care companies, Wagner has some words of wisdom. Tune in to hear his take on the importance of flexibility in the workplace, as well as a few lessons he's learned running two lawn care firms.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI
EDITOR

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Hit reverse

The term “bucket list” has made its rounds over the last decade or so—popularized by the 2007 movie of the same name starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman.

Whether it’s taking a round-the-world trip, running a marathon, writing a book or some other endeavor, the items on a person’s list of things to do before they die—or kick the bucket—are often inspiring.

I’ve heard business owners refer to their professional bucket lists from time to time. These goals are certainly more practical but no less inspirational. They’ve included hitting a certain volume in revenue, buying a competitor, entering a new market and turning the business over to family. Once or twice, I’m grateful to say, they’ve included being on the cover of *LM*.

Though bucket lists are motivating, they also can be overwhelming. They can feel like a daunting to-do list of all the things you’ve left undone.

A few months ago, I came across a different idea: a reverse bucket list.


It’s simple: Rather than writing down things you have not yet done, you compile a list of things, large and small, you’ve already accomplished. It’s a reminder of how far you’ve come and even who has helped you (or who you’ve helped) along the way.

I can imagine a few of the things that might be on an *LM* reader’s list: Creating X number of jobs. Donating services to someone in need. Landing a high-profile account. Improving the outdoor environment in your community.

A reverse bucket list is essentially an exercise in gratitude, which research shows we all can benefit from.

Positive outcomes from a simple, regular gratitude ritual like writing down things you’re grateful for include more optimism, better relationships, improved health and a whole lot more.

Here are some ways to cultivate gratitude on a regular basis, according to the *Harvard Mental Health Letter*:

- **Write a thank-you note.** Make a habit of sending at least one gratitude letter a month.
 - **Thank someone mentally.** No time to write? It may help just to think about someone who has done something nice for you.
 - **Keep a gratitude journal.** Write down your thoughts about the gifts you’ve received each day. You also can count your blessings by picking a time every week to sit down and reflect on what went right or what you are grateful for. Sometimes it helps to pick a number—such as three to five things—that you will identify each week.
 - **Pray.** People who are religious can use prayer to cultivate gratitude.
 - **Meditate.** Practicing mindfulness meditation involves focusing on the present moment. Although people often focus on a word or phrase (such as “peace”), it’s also possible to focus on what you’re grateful for (the warmth of the sun, a pleasant sound, etc.).
- The esteemed entrepreneur, speaker and life coach Tony Robbins is credited with the quote, “Trade your expectation for appreciation and the world changes instantly.”
- A reverse bucket list can help you make this trade. 



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it or it will
eventually
leave you in
the dust."

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"Get
comfortable
with being
uncomfortable;
change is
inevitable."

"Change or
die a slow
death."

"Change is
sometimes a
scary thing, but
if you're smart,
you can always
use it to your
advantage."

"If you want
to retain
customers and
people, instead
of resisting,
you should be
anticipating
change."

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foundation of
your future
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WATER WISE AT HERITAGE HILLS

LOCATION Lone Tree, Colo.

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THE DETAILS Heritage Hills is a gated community of luxury homes located south of Denver. In 2013, the community's Metro District began a renovation project to reduce overall water use. Designs by Sundown sought to educate residents that water-wise and sustainable landscapes didn't mean that lush, green streetscapes, medians and monuments were being replaced with sparsely planted mulch beds.

The team produced designs that included green yet drought-tolerant turf areas and attractive xeric planting beds.

It redid the planting beds, reused existing rock and preserved mature evergreen and deciduous trees. The firm ensured that pop-up sprayheads were converted to high-efficiency rotating nozzles and that subsurface and drip irrigation were used where appropriate.

The project earned Designs by Sundown a 2017 Grand Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

PHOTO Instead of just grass and trees (as before), the new landscaping features a combination of planting beds, turf and trees.

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

PHOTO: DAVID WINGER



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NEWS HOW-TO'S

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RECOMMENDER > LEADERSHIP ADVANTAGE > STEP BY STEP > NEW STUFF > SAFETYWATCH

AN APP FOR THAT



Beginning in 2015, Toledo Lawns in Toledo, Ohio, streamlined almost all its processes using a collection of Google applications.

"It's really changed the way we do things," says Joe Eide, vice president of the \$1.3-million company. "It ties a lot of our pieces and parts together using that entire suite of apps."

The best part, he adds, is it's free.

Eide says Google Sheets and Google Forms have made the biggest impact on Toledo Lawns, which employs up to 30 people during peak season.

The company uses Sheets to input and share customer lists internally.

Crews use Forms to check in and out of properties and to report on-site details. Toledo Lawns also uses Forms as a time clock and to generate payroll. Time stamps are automatically added to Form submissions, which are then fed into Sheets spreadsheet.

By tracking where crews have been and how long they have been at a site, the company is able to more accurately price its services.

"It keeps us all connected in real time and makes life a lot easier because we can all communicate within one space," says Eide.

The apps also have helped with customer service, he adds. Using the data in Sheets, managers verify that all accounts were serviced at the end of each week.

"If we miss anything, we can catch it right then and go back and take care of business," Eide says.

Toledo Lawns uses other Google apps, including Google Photos to share pictures while performing landscape estimates; Google Docs for client presentations and compiling property information; and Google Maps to plan routes and verify the time spent at properties.

"It keeps us all connected in real time and makes life a lot easier."

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JOHN DEERE

RECOMMENDER

What grub control product do you recommend and why?

Clients don't want a grub-damaged lawn. Thankfully, there are various insecticides LCOs can use preventively.



LARRY TAYLOR
ORGANIC TURF SPECIALIST,
NATURAL TREE & LAWN CARE
AVON, MASS.

"I use Acelepryn for my grub control. It tends to be a bit more expensive than the other products, but the low toxicity to humans and the fact that it doesn't have any effect on pollinating bees helps to be able to sell the product to the client."



BRIAN WIESE
TURF MANAGER, SUNCO
OMAHA, NEB.

"We currently use Merit as a preventive grub control in a combination product attached to slow-release fertilizer. We have been using this for the past seven or eight years and love it. Rarely do we ever have callbacks for breakthrough. It seems like grub activity is starting a little bit later in the past few years—mid-September into early October—and even applying this product in June, it still maintains its control."

LEADERSHIP ADVANTAGE



BY KEN THOMAS

The author is principal of Envisor Consulting. Reach him at kenthomas@envisorco.com.

RECOVERING WITH HEARD

Service recovery is when a service failure has occurred and the problem has been corrected to the customer's satisfaction.

Great companies understand that effective service recovery satisfies an upset client and creates a greater sense of loyalty.

Our search for best practices in service recovery led us to Disney's training arm, The Disney Institute, which has implemented a standardized approach. Bruce Jones, senior program manager for the Disney Institute says, "Customers will care as much or more about how they are treated as the outcome itself."

For that reason, Disney created an acronym, HEARD, to remind team members how to respond when things go wrong.


Hear: Let the customers tell their complete, uninterrupted stories.

Empathize: Connect with your customers by letting them know that you understand their frustrations.

Apologize: Sometimes that's all a customer wants. If the situation isn't your fault, it's OK to apologize for the situation without accepting blame.

Resolve: Work with your client to come up with an equitable solution to the problem. If the problem is serious, some atonement, such as a refund or future discount, may be necessary.

Diagnose: Once the service failure has been resolved effectively, work with your team to determine the root cause and build a plan to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

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STEP BY STEP

How to evaluate a new franchise opportunity

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

Investing in a franchise is an important decision that requires in-depth research and reliable information. While it's not always easy to evaluate newer franchise opportunities, there are ways to get the information you need to make an educated decision on whether to move forward. Usually, the most valuable thing an entrepreneur can do is interview and visit franchisees. In the case of newer franchise opportunities, this may not be possible because there aren't many franchisees to talk to or they may not have enough experience to provide valuable information. In this case, it's important to spend productive time with the founder of the franchise.

When gathering research, be sure to determine how the founder went about franchising the business. There are two main ways to do it. Founders can hire a franchise attorney to draw up the legal documents required to turn an independent business into a franchise, or they can hire a franchise development firm to turn an independent business into a franchise. This firm can help write the operating manual, set up and create marketing and sales programs and establish a franchisee training program. Keep in mind, if the franchisor only invested in the legal part of franchising a business, it may not be enough to ensure long-term success.

Follow these steps to successfully evaluate a new franchise opportunity. 

SOURCE: U.S. Small Business Administration



← STEP 1

Arrange an in-depth call with the franchise founder to get a feel for how well thought out the idea is, if it's been tested and if it's proven to work.

→ STEP 2

Arrange a two- or three-day trip to the franchise headquarters for one-on-one time with the founder and the staff. Come prepared with thoughtful questions and use the opportunity to see the team in action.



← STEP 3

Trust your gut. After determining a franchise concept's financial viability, the decision to buy in ultimately comes down to trust and feel. Do you trust the founder and the leadership team members? Does the opportunity feel right?

SELLING TIPS

HIGH-QUALITY GRUB CONTROL

Learn how one lawn care operator sells premium services and makes product selections by asking the following questions.

Michael Toft and the team at Simply Safer Premium Lawn Care in Wrentham, Mass., are proud to provide high-quality lawn care with the lowest risk products available.

That's just one of the reasons the company combats turf-damaging white grub species with Syngenta's Acelepryn insecticide.

"We're very picky about the products we use, and we're heavily focused on customer service," Toft says. Simply Safer switched to Acelepryn about eight years ago after learning about its effectiveness and its status as part of the Environmental Protection Agency's Reduced Risk Program. Acelepryn contains the active ingredient chlorantraniliprole, which is part of the antranilic diamide class of chemistry. "It's right in line with our philosophy of providing excellent control with low-risk products," he says.

When considering which grub control products to use and how to incorporate them into their sales and marketing story, LCOs can ask the following four questions to arrive at their decision.

A May or June application of an effective grub control product helps both acquire and retain clients, Michael Toft says.



Michael Toft

#LawnSellingTips

IS IT EFFECTIVE?

"Acelepryn is an easy choice for us because it's low risk and controls the three main types of grubs we're concerned with, plus other surface-feeding insects we need control over," Toft says.

One application helps provide season-long control of caterpillars, including black cutworms, sod webworms and fall armyworms, plus excellent control of billbug and annual bluegrass weevil.

Simply Safer performs one preventive application of Acelepryn in April or May on a granular controlled-release fertilizer product for season-long white grub control. It's so confident in the product's effectiveness that it offers a guarantee on this service.

"Because it offers nearly 100 percent coverage, we don't have any added costs on our end of repairing something because we used a product that's less adequate," Toft says.

IS IT SAFE?

"We put a lot of thought into what comprises our product mix," Toft says. "We always want to focus on newer, safer products."

In particular, he is pleased with Acelepryn's lack of a signal word on the label and its effect—or lack thereof—on beneficial organisms, including earthworms and honeybees.

"There's a lot of information in the media right now that pollinators are under attack and pesticide usage may be affecting pollinators," Toft says. **"We're very proud Acelepryn can be used without impacting pollinators and earthworms, which is another reason we made the switch. We're very conscious of nontarget organisms, and we try to be as respectful and safe as possible."**

IS IT A GOOD VALUE?

There are other products out there that control the same pests for less money, Toft acknowledges, but his company believes Acelepryn's efficacy and safety make it the right choice.

Using a low-risk product helps with both customer acquisition and retention. "When we speak with clients, we're confident in knowing we offer the most progressive mix of products out there, which in turn gives our clients confidence," Toft says. This approach—including the guarantee on grub control—helps with both getting and keeping customers, he says. Plus, it justifies a premium price.

Not to mention, Simply Safer controls costs by buying strategically, taking advantage of promotions and early order programs offered by manufacturers and distributors.

"We're ordering in a larger quantity, so if we can save a dollar or two per bag, it makes a large impact to the bottom line," he says.

ARE CLIENTS SATISFIED?

"Customers want their lawns to look great and their kids to be safe, and they want the decision to get to that point to be easy," Toft says.

For that reason, he doesn't bog customers down with technical details, but he says it's nice to have a product in his mix that's a good example if clients are looking for those details. Acelepryn is one he's happy to share with clients because he can say it's a reduced risk product, it doesn't affect honeybees or earthworms and it's nearly 100 percent effective.

With grub control, the best way to know if clients are satisfied is to know if they're satisfied with the overall performance of their lawn, Toft says.

"The best news is no news," he says. "If customers aren't calling and technicians aren't identifying late stage grub problems, the product is working, which is great."

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. AVANT E5 LOADER

COMPANY: Avant Tecno USA

URL: AvantTecno.com

The Avant e5 is a fully electric, battery-powered articulated loader. The machine releases no emissions and has a minimal noise level. The loader features an auxiliary hydraulics flow of 8 gpm, fits all standard Avant attachments and can be operated while charging, with a full charge taking about five hours. It comes with an in-machine charging unit, a 240Ah lead acid battery and two electric motors—a 2kW motor and a 6kW motor.

2. HSA 25 GARDEN SHEARS

COMPANY: Stihl

URL: StihlUSA.com

Stihl added the HSA 25 garden shears to its Lightning Battery System line. Weighing 1.8 lbs. with the battery, the shears include a lithium-ion battery and charger, a rubberized handle and double reciprocating blades in a laser-hardened finish that can cut at 2,000 strokes per minute. A 4.3-in. grass blade and 6.7-in. shrub blade are included and interchangeable without tools. The shears have a run time of 110 min. on a single charge and a low noise output, according to Stihl.

3. WORKSITE PRO ROLL-OUT BUCKETS

COMPANY: John Deere

URL: Deere.com

John Deere's new roll-out buckets come in three width offerings: the 72-in. RB72, the 84-in. RB84 (pictured) and the 96-in. RB96. Optimized for G-Series compact track loaders and K-Series compact wheel loaders (RB84 and RB96 only), these buckets provide an additional 34 in. of dump reach when fully extended and 114 degrees of roll-out for improved material spillage control. The buckets also feature high-strength, large-diameter pivot pins and the self-cleaning Quik-Tatch easy-attachment system.

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push the snow as high as possible on the pile.

When you become comfortable with it, you won't need to use the brakes to stop the machine and pile the snow high.

Remember, this tactic should be done carefully and is all about technique. If you approach too fast, you can damage the plow or machine. Ask your supervisor or an experienced operator to help you get it right.



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Visit LandscapeManagement.net/SafetyWatch to view a video about using the rolling stop when plowing and use it as a training tool for your team.

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PAGE 31

Talk, text or email?

Three lawn care operators share their preferred methods for automated prenotifications. **BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER**



In the late 1990s, Jim Zylstra received an automated call from his dentist reminding him of an upcoming appointment. The owner of Tuff Turf Molebusters in Byron Center, Mich., was so impressed by this service that he quickly began researching how to incorporate it into his own business.

"The system I bought was actually designed for schools to notify families about snow days," Zylstra says. "It was a big box that you plugged into a phone jack and then into a computer. It was clunky, cumbersome and not easy to use, but I was a one-man company and didn't have time for call-aheads or reschedules."

While the technology has certainly improved since then, prenotifying customers of their appointments is more important than ever—and is even mandated in some cases. Lawn care operators (LCOs) are using automated calls, texts and emails to prevent last-minute cancellations and to keep their technicians' routes on schedule.



Jim Zylstra

PLANNING AHEAD

At Tuff Turf Molebusters, customers can choose to be contacted via call, text or email. Most prefer email. Zylstra uses Real Green Systems software for his prenotifications and says it costs him 7 cents per call, or about \$225-250 per month. Tuff Turf Molebusters has revenue of \$2 million and offers 50 percent lawn care services and 50 percent pest control services to an 85 percent residential, 15 percent commercial clientele.

"If technicians can find out in advance that a customer's street is under construction, they're having a neighborhood garage sale or they're doing a home construction project, (the notification) kind of pays for itself," Zylstra says.

The firm gives its customers a two-day window for technicians to complete their appointment. While Zylstra says this approach gives the company some flexibility if there is an issue such as inclement weather, an ill technician or an equipment malfunction, it also can make schedules more complicated if the unforeseen problem persists.

"On Monday, we call everyone for Wednesday appointments and say

if we can't make it because of weather or an illness, then we will come on Thursday," Zylstra says. "But when it rains for three days or if someone is sick for several days, it can start problems because then we have to start recalling everyone and giving new dates."

This is the first time Zylstra has utilized a pay-per-use prenotification service. He recommends that LCOs purchase their system outright if they can find an affordable way to do so because there are other ways to use it. For example, in the past, he has done blasts promoting special deals or new services.

"I don't know how anybody doesn't utilize technology to let their clients know when they are coming," Zylstra says. "We promote our call-aheads as a benefit to hiring us."

ACCESSIBILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

Senske Services first implemented an automated call service in 2008 and added text and email options in 2013.

Continued on page 22

↑ A HEADS-UP

Prenotification calls or emails can be a helpful line of communication for you and your clients.

NEWSFEED

ENGAGE AGRO RENAMED

On Jan. 1, Engage Agro USA became Belchim Crop Protection USA. The buyout of Engage

Agro USA in May provided a platform toward global expansion of Belchim Crop Protection's agro-

chemical and bio-based product portfolio and corporate brand, the company said. The new company headquarters will be located in Wilmington, Del. Tom Wood will serve as general manager.

GRAHAM'S NEW UNIT

Graham Spray Equipment added the GSE 600-gallon spray unit. The spray unit features a 400/200-gallon compartmented tank that enables one spray rig to service multiple

grass types requiring different chemical treatments. Dual pumping stations allow two technicians to apply different treatments at the same time. The unit comes with lifetime support.

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Continued from page 20

When new customers come on board, they choose how they would like to be contacted, says Chuck Williams, the company's customer experience manager.

Most clients prefer text or email, he says, adding that a few still prefer an old-fashioned phone call from a Senske representative. The company even has a few customers who ask to receive a postcard in the mail, a request Williams says the company is happy to accommodate. Senske Services, headquartered in Kennewick, Wash., is a \$34-million company that provides 55 percent lawn/tree care, 20 percent maintenance, 20 percent pest control and 5 percent holiday décor to a 70 percent residential, 30 percent commercial clientele.

"We are noticing that there is a higher customer demand for communication and accessibility," says Williams. "We want to make sure we're taking care of our customers on their terms and that they are being prenotified in the way that works best for them."

Senske's text and email notifications are automated and integrated into the company's customer relationship management system. The company uses a third-party service to manage its automated calls. Williams says the service costs "pennies on the dollar" and that the more automated the process, the less it costs. He says some contractors believe a drawback to providing prenotifications is that it gives the customer more control over the way the company



Chuck Williams

does business. Williams adds that cancellations and rescheduled appointments can make it trickier for technicians to complete their predetermined routes in

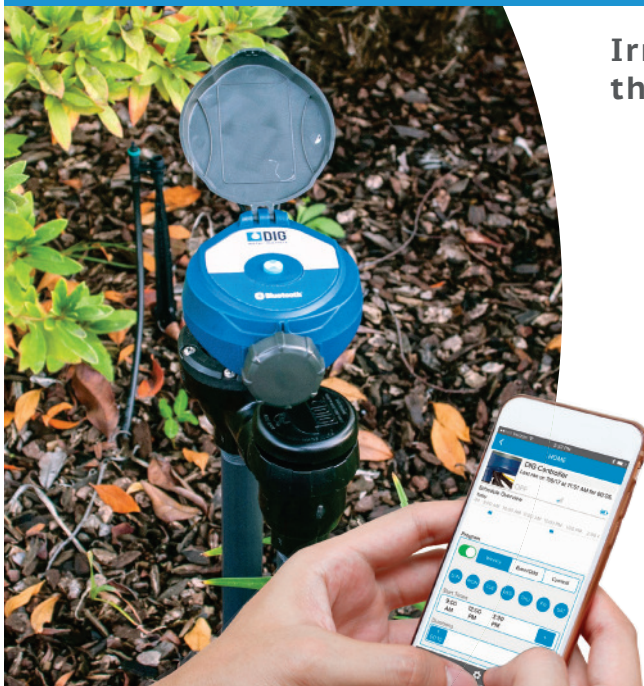
a timely manner.

"When we have a perfect route built and a few customers decide that this week doesn't work for them, it can complicate things," he says. "But we understand that will happen when you're being flexible for your customers."

For LCOs interested in offering automated prenotification services, Williams urges them to customize the program to fit their needs. For example, when the firm first launched its text notification service, the messages were not long enough to specify what service the client could expect to be performed.

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Williams says the company worked with its text provider to expand the character limit for its messages so the customer could receive all the relevant information.

“Don’t just settle for what is out there,” Williams says. “Work with these companies to get what your customers deserve.”

LINE OF COMMUNICATION

Jesse Smith, president of Royal Greens Professional Lawn Care in Frederick, Md., has always offered call-ahead services upon request. But in the past year, Smith switched from phone calls to emails because he says they’re easier to track. Another benefit of email, Smith says, is the company can convey the necessary information in a clear and concise way. Royal Greens is a \$1.1-million company that provides 80 percent lawn care,

15 percent pest control and 5 percent tree care services to a 90 percent residential, 10 percent commercial clientele.

“We know when we send the emails and when they are opened by the customer,” Smith says. “Phone calls can be hearsay and require too much back and forth.”

Royal Greens’ automated emails are integrated into the company’s Real Green Systems software. Smith says it costs 15 cents per email, and 10-15 percent of his clients opt to receive them. Most of the customers who receive the prenotification have a specific reason they want to know when a technician is going to be on their property, such as a locked gate or a dog in the yard. Smith says the biggest drawback to offering the email service is making sure they have the customer’s most accessible email address on file.

For example, he says some customers who provide their work email address don’t see messages sent after business hours until the next day. However, he was pleasantly surprised to see customers using the emails as a way to stay in touch with the company in between their services.

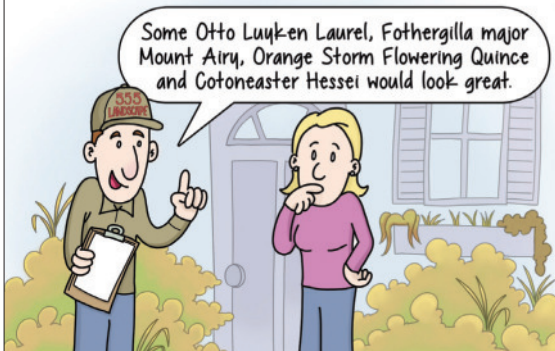
“We have found that customers tend to keep the email and use it as way to reach out and ask us questions about their bill or about additional services, which was unexpected,” he says. “It has become an open line of communication with the customer that we didn’t have before.”



Jesse Smith

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

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MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

Train to retain

An onboarding program, including in-the-field training for all team members, is part of LandCare's new staffing philosophy. BY SARAH WEBB

ONBOARD

As part of its onboarding process, LandCare requires new hires at the corporate level to spend about three days in the field.

As good employees become more difficult to find—and keep—LandCare, a commercial landscape maintenance company with more than 50 locations across the U.S., has adopted a new philosophy: train to retain.

"It's never been harder for our industry to find great people," says Dana Christenson, director of employee development at LandCare, which employs more than 4,000 people nationally. "We want to make sure that when we do get great people at our organization, we do everything we can to get them into a position of success."

In its attempt to improve employee retention, LandCare revamped its onboarding process and now requires every new hire in the support staff and management departments to spend about three days in the field for a hands-on training, regardless of previous green industry experience.

"It becomes critically important to give (new hires) that orientation to our industry and an appreciation for the work," says Christenson, who oversees the program for branches in the east-

ern U.S. "It also gives our new hires a connection with the field."

Additionally, it offers them a taste of the company's culture, says Christenson.

Since LandCare made the change about 12 months ago, Christenson says the company has made significant strides in employee retention.

The program, which was initially geared toward new hires who didn't have prior green industry experience, provides a basic, ground-level understanding of the landscape industry. On the other hand, for those hires who already have industry experience, the redesigned orientation provides a more robust, in-depth look at LandCare's operations.

"Part of being successful in a management role is to understand what we do day in and day out," says Christenson, who has been in the green industry for almost 27 years. "It's really hard to get that understanding without going out in the field, meeting the people who do the work every single day and doing the work yourself."

A LOOK INSIDE

On their first day, LandCare's newest team members are paired with a branch

that's close to their office location. They're given safety gear and instructed to wear suitable attire—such as pants and a long sleeve shirt—and report directly to the crew leaders.

A newcomer to the green industry and a new hire at LandCare, Communications Specialist Isidoro Balistreri experienced the onboarding process firsthand when he started in July.

He says initially he was surprised that he would be spending his first week in the field, but he soon understood the program's purpose.

"Being new to the industry, it was very helpful to see the operational side of it," says Balistreri. "It's a good takeaway to realize what industry you're in and center yourself a bit more with the ground-level tasks."

His first day, he underwent a safety training relevant to the tasks he would be performing and shadowed the management staff at the company's San Diego branch. He began the next three mornings with a 15-minute stretch and flex before heading out with his designated crew for the day.

Continued on page 26

NEWSPEED

OREGON ADDS SAW CHAIN

Oregon Products released the Power-Cut 70-Series EXL, an evolution of the LGX

3/8-inch professional saw chain for 50-100cc chainsaws. It features proprietary multiaxis grind technology and

precision-ground cutters to help the saw power through timber.

NEW KAWASAKI DISTRIBUTOR

Turf Care Products Canada, headquartered in Ontario, will now handle

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Milwaukee Tool updated its M18 Fuel

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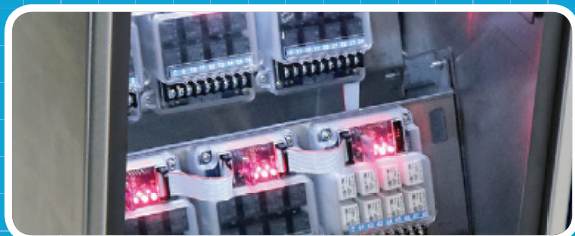


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Continued from page 24

During his three days in the field, Balistreri shadowed a maintenance crew, a single-site supervisor and an enhancement team, performing tasks like pruning, cleaning and cutting

plant material. He also learned how to operate some equipment, such as leaf blowers and hedge trimmers.

In addition to gaining basic industry knowledge, Balistreri says the experience has helped open up lines of

communication between branch and corporate levels, enabling corporate to gather feedback and crews on the ground to give suggestions.

“Getting to know the crews and getting to know the branch better allows me to put faces to names when I’m communicating with them on a day-to-day basis,” he says. “We know each other already. If I had just started in the office, I wouldn’t have known the people that I’m calling or emailing, even though they’re right down the road.”

He says the orientation also showed him how the branches communicate with customers, giving him insight into the types of marketing materials the branch might need to best appeal to its customers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For landscape companies who want to revamp their onboarding processes, Christenson says it’s critical to partner the new hire with someone who is willing and able to train that person in the field.

“It’s not just about jumping in a truck and being handed a trimmer all day or asking them to pick weeds,” she says. “It’s really about showing them the work and giving them the full understanding.”


She says that creating a culture of training is also important.

“We, as an organization, are always looking to increase the amount of training and development we offer our employees,” Christenson says. “At its core, it’s about offering opportunities for people to grow, and the only way that you can do that is to retain the people that you have.”

It’s also crucial for the new hire to undergo safety training before being out in the field, she adds.

Balistreri says that selecting an appropriate length of time and relevant job sites is key.


“I think it’s important to choose job sites to best showcase the type of work that each crew does on a regular basis,” he says. “Don’t pick job sites that don’t represent the full scope of work the crews do.”




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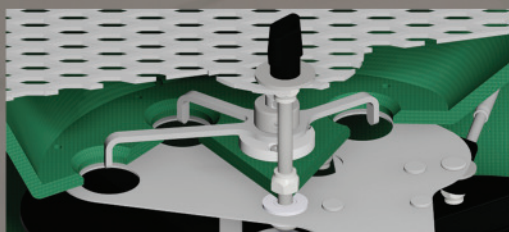
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DESIGN/BUILD+INSTALLATION

In the trenches

Using proper safety protocols around trenches is literally a life-and-death matter. Read on to ensure you're following the guidelines. BY MARISA PALMIERI

← PROTECT
Ensure the safety of employees by following regulations around trenches and excavations.

Last month, New Jersey landscape company officials pleaded guilty to criminal charges of failing to properly shore up a trench that caved in, suffocating two laborers.

The charges against the company and two individuals are punishable upon conviction by up to 18 months in prison and a hefty fine. The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) already fined the company \$77,000, following an investigation that uncovered the men were installing a French drain system, working in a trench between 9 and 13 feet deep, which had no cave-in protection.

OSHA requires all trenches and excavation sites 5 feet or deeper be protected against sidewall collapses. Here's a checklist of trench and excavation site regulations and safety precautions, provided by the National Association of Landscape Professionals.

EMPLOYERS' AND SUPERVISORS' CHECKLIST

✓ Conduct all trenching and excavation activities in accordance with federal

OSHA, state and local regulations. See federal OSHA requirements at 29 CFR 1926.651 and 1926.652.

- ✓ Even if your company didn't open the trench or excavation, follow regulations.
- ✓ Verify the location of all underground utility lines prior to digging.
- ✓ Protect, support or remove underground utility lines as necessary while a trench or excavation is open.
- ✓ Provide a protective system when employees enter trenches/excavations that are 5 or more feet deep, unless the excavation is made entirely in stable rock.
- ✓ Have a competent person inspect shallower trenches and excavations to determine if a protective system is required. OSHA defines a "competent person" as someone capable of identifying hazards or working conditions that are hazardous, unsanitary or dangerous to workers, soil types and required protective systems. This person is authorized to take prompt, corrective measures to eliminate hazards and conditions.
- ✓ Have a competent person determine soil type using at least one visual and

one manual test. Soil type is based on cohesion—how well the soil sticks together. Type A is highly cohesive, Type B is minimally cohesive and Type C offers no cohesion.

✓ Implement an appropriate protective system based on soil type and other factors, including cut depth, water content of soil and area drainage and other nearby operations. Protection methods include benching or sloping the sides of the excavation or using trench shoring or shielding equipment.

✓ Follow guidelines for benching, sloping and use of shoring/shielding equipment. Benching protects workers from cave-ins by creating horizontal levels or steps, usually with vertical or near-vertical surfaces between levels. Benching cannot be done in Type C soil. Sloping involves angling the trench wall away from the excavation. Shoring uses aluminum hydraulic or other types of supports to prevent soil movement. Shielding protects workers with trench boxes or similar types of supports.

✓ Ensure a competent person supervises the work and inspects trenches and excavations, adjacent areas and protective systems daily and as conditions change (after rain, for example). This must be done before crew members enter.

✓ Provide proper access and egress to trenches and excavations. Federal OSHA requires ladders, steps, ramps, runways or other means of safe exit from trenches/excavations 4 feet or deeper. These devices must be located within 25 feet of all workers.

Continued on page 30

NEWSFEED

FATHER NATURE FRANCHISE

Father Nature Landscapes, a Birmingham, Ala.-based landscape design, construction

and consulting firm, launched its nationwide franchise program, beginning in the southeastern U.S.

DITCH WITCH PARTS LOOKUP

Ditch Witch added the Ditch Witch Parts Lookup, an advanced version of its web-based tool designed to help customers find service parts.

Customers can use Parts Lookup to find service parts by serial number, part name, equipment model or keywords. They also can add all their fleet equipment by serial

number for easy reference to manuals, part diagrams and future service part needs. The tool is compatible with all web browsers and is responsive to mobile devices.

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Continued from page 28

- ✓ Train crews to work safely in and around trenches/excavations and wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE).
- ✓ Provide walkways or bridges with standard guardrails where people or equipment are required or permitted to cross excavations deeper than 6 feet and wider than 30 inches.
- ✓ Protect crew members from loose rock, dirt, materials and equipment that could fall into the excavation or trench. Spoil piles and other materials must be kept at least 2 feet from the edge of the excavation, and/or retaining devices must be used to prevent material or equipment from rolling into excavation.
- ✓ Test for atmospheric hazards such as low oxygen, hazardous fumes and toxic gases when a trench/excavation is more

than 4 feet deep. Prevent crew members from being exposed to low oxygen levels and other hazardous atmospheres.

- ✓ Keep emergency rescue equipment, such as breathing apparatuses and a safety harness and line, readily available where hazardous atmospheric conditions exist or could be expected to develop.
- ✓ Don't allow crew members to work in excavations where water has accumulated or is accumulating, unless adequate precautions have been taken. Possible precautions include the use of water-removal equipment and safety harnesses and lines. A competent person must oversee these operations.

CREW MEMBERS' DO'S AND DON'TS

Do:

- ✓ Keep heavy equipment as far as possible from trench and excavation

Did you know?

- On average, 54 workers die in trench or excavation cave-ins each year, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Cave-ins are far more likely than other excavation-related accidents to result in fatalities, and many people are unaware that soil has the power to crush and suffocate a person within a few minutes. One cubic yard of soil can weigh more than 3,000 pounds, as much as a small car, according to federal OSHA. One cubic foot of dry soil weighs approximately 85 pounds, and a cubic foot of wet soil weighs around 100 pounds.
- An excavation is any man-made cut, cavity, trench or depression formed by earth removal. A trench is a narrow excavation. In general, the depth is greater than the width.
- Other potential hazards of working in and around trenches and excavations include falls, falling objects and materials, hazardous atmospheres and incidents involving machinery.
- Almost all accidents related to trenches and excavations are preventable through safe work practices and protective equipment.



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edges. When equipment is operated near a trench/excavation, and the operator does not have a clear, direct view of the edge, use a warning system as developed by your company. This could include barricades, hand or mechanical signals or stop logs. If you don't know the warning system, consult a supervisor.

- ✓ Before entering, make sure no loose rock, dirt, materials or equipment is located within 2 feet of the edge. If it is, notify a crew leader or supervisor.
- ✓ Wear a hard hat and required PPE.

Don't:

- ✗ Enter an unprotected trench or excavation. Trenches/excavations 5 feet deep or deeper require a protective system unless made entirely in stable rock.
- ✗ Work underneath digging equipment or under suspended or raised loads.
- ✗ Place excavated soil (spoils) or other materials within 2 feet of edges. If you see materials or equipment in this area, tell a crew leader or supervisor.
- ✗ Stand in the vicinity of any vehicle being loaded or unloaded. (U)

IRRIGATION+WATER MANAGEMENT

Let's connect

Today's irrigation controllers are driven by data and technology. Contractors who embrace these advancements are seeing the benefits. **BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER**

Technology has infiltrated every aspect of modern life, and the irrigation controller is no exception. The devices are more connected and data-driven than ever before, and contractors who are embracing the trends are seeing the advantages these advancements can bring.

"We are living in a data-driven world, and the use of outdoor water is highly scrutinized due to scarcity and cost concerns," says Troy Oster, irrigation category manager with SiteOne Landscape Supply, headquartered in Roswell, Ga. "The demand for data and the need to conserve water are closely related. To efficiently save water, we need data analytics that intelligently indicate water usage and guide us in water management practices."



Troy Oster

GETTING CONNECTED

As Wi-Fi, local area networks and cellular communications become universally affordable and available, consumers are growing accustomed to constant connectivity and instant information. The

irrigation system controller is just one more gadget that can now be managed from anywhere with the use of a smartphone or a computer. For landscape professionals, the ability to remotely monitor and manage large numbers of clients is literally money in the bank, says David Shoup, senior product manager for controllers and sensors for Hunter Industries in San Marcos, Calif.

"Connectedness is definitely the leading trend," Shoup says. "Homeowners, contractors and maintenance organizations want mobile internet connectivity to even basic irrigation controllers."

Irrigation experts say contractors benefit from controller connectivity in several ways.

The ability to provide remote water management assistance is one potential billing opportunity that can add to a contractor's revenue stream. Connected controllers also reduce operating costs because many situations that used to require a physical visit to a property can now be handled with a few clicks of a button. These controllers can increase customer satisfaction and retention because the contractor is visibly engaged with the client's landscape at all times. In

fact, a connected contractor can know about a system problem before the customer does. In addition, the reporting capabilities of the more advanced systems allow contractors to not only save water, but also to demonstrate those savings to their customer base, which Shoup says enhances their value to the customers.

"These trends are allowing contractors to provide a greater level of service to their customers, while reducing labor costs, water consumption and liabilities associated with improper watering," says Oster.

Robert Brown, owner of Robert Brown Landscape Irrigation in Santee, Calif., says the advancements in controller connectivity have been a "game changer" for his business. The ability to adjust a client's irrigation system from his phone or computer has decreased the need for on-site visits. Getting alerts about problems, such as a broken pipe or a faulty electrical wire, allows Brown to stay on top of issues before they worsen. Robert Brown Landscape Irrigation is a

GET CONNECTED
Mobile connectivity—even to basic irrigation controllers—is a leading trend among customers, irrigation experts say.



NEWSFEED

NEW EWING LOCATIONS

Ewing Irrigation & Landscape Supply recently opened two new Florida locations

in St. Petersburg and Naples. Dwight Forde is the branch manager of the full-service St. Petersburg location,

and Tim Haskins is the store manager of the Naples branch.

IA FLY-IN EVENT

Registration is now open for the 2018 Irrigation Association

Washington, D.C. Fly-In on March 6-7. This event is being held in conjunction with the National Ground Water Association and the Water Quality Association during

the Water Resources Congressional Summit. Key discussion topics will include the farm bill, WaterSense and water infrastructure, specifically efficient technologies.

IRRIGATION+WATER MANAGEMENT



Robert Brown

\$200,000 company that provides 90 percent irrigation and 10 percent lighting services to a 75 percent residential, 25 percent commercial clientele.

“These controllers are much more proactive,” Brown says. “If a client calls me and is seeing a certain issue with his landscape, such as it’s looking too wet or too dry, I can pop on my phone and change the account without having to do a site inspection to make adjustments.”

GO WITH THE FLOW

While flow sensors have been around for years, Shoup says sales of these components are increasing in the residential and light commercial markets. He says flow sensors used to be perceived as “rather exotic” accessories, partly because they required expensive communication options to retrieve their information. But with the rise of low-cost internet, the information is now more accessible. Additionally, the availability of intelligent cloud servers can do more with the information, including alerting homeowners and contractors to potentially wasteful situations. Hunter’s newest line of flow sensors includes factory-calibrated and sealed visual dial indicators, in addition to the electronic output, which Shoup says makes the experience more visually reassuring and familiar to homeowners, who are used to these displays in their municipal meters.

“There is increasing interest in flow sensors, even at the residential level,” Shoup says. “One of the good things about all the connectivity is the enhanced awareness of water usage, and the flow sensor data, in turn, drives more attention to water conservation.”

Oster agrees that water conservation and flow management are growing trends in the irrigation industry.

“The data and information being generated by monitoring flow, along

with the advanced diagnostic capabilities that continuously monitor a system for leaks, breaks and electrical issues, all help increase system efficiencies and water conservation,” he says.

Brown says he is gaining experience with flow sensors as more clients express interest in water conservation. With flow sensors, Brown receives an alert if there is a problem with water flow, and he can quickly reach out to the client to schedule a service call, which he says allows him to take “better, closer care” of his customers.

“Flow sensing and soil moisture sensors are starting to really pop up and get incorporated into irrigation systems to save water and make them more efficient,” Brown says. “Having these in a system generates more service calls, which is good for me. Plus, I live in San Diego, so it’s good for water conservation.”

LEARNING CURVE

Adapting to all of this new technology can be a challenge for contractors. Oster urges contractors to take advantage of the training and resources provided by manufacturers and distributors to learn how to operate all aspects of these new controllers.

“Those not utilizing these capabilities to improve operating efficiency will increasingly be at a competitive disadvantage,” he says.

Establishing an internet connection to the controller location is another challenge for some contractors who aren’t familiar with the process. Shoup says the typical household or business wireless router intended to provide connectivity for printers, televisions and other common devices is not typically in the optimum location to connect with an irrigation controller located in a garage or on an external wall. Cellular communications are usually more expensive, and even they can have connectivity challenges, given that an irrigation controller is a fixed object that cannot easily be moved to a spot that receives better coverage.

MONITOR

Sales of flow sensors, which help contractors monitor water usage, are up.



Brown agrees that it’s imperative for the client to have a strong Wi-Fi signal in order for the new controllers to work. He’s had a few instances where he attempted to install a connected controller, but ended up having to go with a traditional version instead.

“One client had a very long house and a bad Wi-Fi signal,” Brown says. “We tried Wi-Fi boosters to improve the signal toward the house, but it just didn’t want to work.”

Shoup also suggests contractors use the resources available to them. For example, manufacturers like Hunter have customer support call centers staffed with networking experts who can help contractors navigate these waters. The company trains and assists contractors with connectivity procedures on an hourly basis at the height of the busy season.

“The connections keep getting simpler and more reliable, and each contractor can work with us to build their own knowledge base as they go,” Shoup says. “It’s just one more thing to learn to stay current with a truly great opportunity, which is on the way to becoming the norm for almost all irrigation systems.”

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.



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Paul Wagner,
president,
Fit Turf,
Centennial,
Colo.

SECOND TIME AROUND

To make Fit Turf a success, Paul Wagner counts on the wisdom of his past and remains open to new ideas.

BY MARISA PALMIERI

As he was selling Detroit-area lawn care company Masters Green to Trugreen in 2008, Paul Wagner said he felt like he was losing an old friend.

In no time, he started laying the groundwork for his next venture, Fit Turf, because he wasn't ready to retire, and lawn care wasn't *not* going to be a part of his life.

"I felt like there were still a lot of challenges and unfinished business, and that makes it a lot of fun," he says.

Today, Wagner is "a young 57." With more than three decades of industry experience under his belt, he plans to tackle those challenges for the long term at Fit Turf with a team that includes his 30-year-old daughter, Dayna Macbeth, operations manager, and his wife, Stephanie Wagner, CFO.

With Wagner's experience and a growth mindset, the \$6.1-million company with four branches in two states is positioned for further success.

TALE OF TWO COMPANIES

Wagner's foray into lawn care was spraying lawns for a small company called Accu-Spray during college.

"They paid more than everyone else, and I needed to work full time in the summer," says the Ferris State University alum.

After graduating in 1982, he took a sales job at Trugreen, which he says had only 11 locations at the time.

"The economy was fairly weak," Wagner says. "I'd taken sales and business classes, and I knew about lawn care."

Slowly but surely, Wagner became a top sales rep, eventually rising to sales manager in the new Toledo, Ohio, office. He was recruited to work for Orkin's lawn care division in Atlanta in the mid-1980s, before getting out of the industry for a few years to work in the cabinet industry.

BUSINESS BREAKDOWN

COMPANY: Fit Turf

HEADQUARTERS: Centennial, Colo.

BRANCHES: Wixom, Mich.; Macomb, Mich.; Westminster, Colo.

FOUNDED: 2008

REVENUE: \$6.1 million (2017); \$7.5 million (projected for 2018)

SERVICE MIX: 100% turf+ornamental care

CLIENT MIX: 93% residential; 7% commercial

In 1989, he found himself back in Michigan with a young family and no job. Masters Green was born. His plan was to sell a few lines of cabinets and fertilize lawns on the weekends.

He committed himself to selling lawn care for 12 weeks starting in January with the goal of getting to 600 accounts—the number at which he determined he'd be profitable—by spring.

"I knew I had to make 50 lawn care program sales per week—and I'd literally stay on the phones until I had at least 10 sales per day," Wagner says.

He met his goal and went full time in his first season. Masters Green did \$120,000 in revenue that year with about \$30,000 in profit, which Wagner put back into the company. He recalls it lost money the following year when he hired a couple technicians and "got the train rolling."

Over the course of 19 years, Wagner built Masters Green to a company with more than 18,000 customers in Metro Detroit, eventually selling to Trugreen in 2008.

He quickly got Fit Turf off the ground, having purchased the domain name two years prior. During the process of selling Masters Green to Trugreen, Wagner began scouting new potential markets, one of which was Denver.

He liked the area's demographics, the potential for tree care sales and the small lawns. The average Fit Turf client in Denver has a 3,500-square-foot lawn.

"If I was smart, I would have waited a year," he says. "I tend to just make decisions and go for it."

Go for it, he did. This year, Fit Turf turns 10 and is projected to gross \$7.5 million. Wagner sounds nostalgic as he reflects on his first company—and how it was different from Fit Turf.

"Believe it or not, I started Masters Green with \$3,000," he says. "You couldn't do that today."

Wagner says the first seven years of a lawn care company are the most

difficult as you build up your customer base and develop your processes.

He also says starting your second company in the same industry isn't necessarily easy.

"I could make 50 sales a week back then by myself," he says. "There wasn't caller ID or voice mail. People were excited when the phone rang. Nowadays, people are so busy; it's harder to get their attention."

It's also difficult to enter a new market with different agronomic conditions. Plus, your expectations are high and the concerted effort to set up systems and processes takes time and energy, though it's ultimately worth it.

"I'd have to say it's equally as stressful as starting your first company," Wagner says.

Ultimately, he's pleased with the results the second time around.

"I think Fit Turf is a better company than Masters Green," Wagner says. "We have more structure now than we did then. I felt like I shot from the hip a lot more then."

Many good things occurred naturally at Masters Green, but it wasn't necessarily by design.

"I had a vision of how I wanted Fit Turf to be," he says, adding it's always evolving. "You have to keep putting more paint on the canvas."

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Being open to change is vital, Wagner says. Changes that make things easier for customers are what gets him excited.

"If you make it easy for them, they'll want to do business with you," he says.

With this in mind, the Fit Turf team has rolled out several changes the past few years that are improving the customer experience and streamlining operations.

For example, about 65 percent of customers are now on credit card autopay—up from zero four years ago.

The company now asks all clients to provide a credit card number to be charged the day after a service occurs.



Fit Turf has four locations in two states: Colorado and Michigan.



DYNAMIC DUO
Paul Wagner's daughter Dayna Macbeth, who grew up in and around the lawn care business, helps lead Fit Turf as its operations manager.

"There's usually no questions asked," Macbeth says. "It's easy for the customer, and it's easy for us."

It also saves Fit Turf time and money, not having to follow up on unpaid accounts or send accounts over 90 days to collections.

"I like not having to send people to collections," she says.

The transition with existing customers has been gradual but beneficial, Macbeth says, noting the office staff simply called through a list to notify customers about the change in policy and add credit card numbers to their accounts.

The company also automates most of its client communications, including "call-ahead" notifications and service summary notifications.

"Call-aheads" are now "email-aheads." About 90 percent of clients have email addresses on file.

The night before treatments are scheduled, Fit Turf sends an email to clients who've requested prior notification, including a photo and short biography of their technician.

"It's a nice way to be transparent, and it makes it easy to reply," Wagner says.

The messages are dispatched through Fit Turf's software provider, Real Green Systems.

It was a change not everyone was willing to make at first.

"A lot of technicians hated the idea of sending emails to people rather than calling them," Macbeth says. "They were worried dogs were going to be out in the yard or gates were going to be locked, and that just wasn't the case."

The email is convenient for the customer to reply to, and it prevents

example, customers in Denver are more open to digital and automated messages, Wagner says.

"Metro Detroit is more blue collar than Denver, and they're a little more old-fashioned, so not everybody has email or wants it done that way," he says. "They want to get an invoice and write a check."

For now, the Fit Turf team is happy to accommodate some clients, but it

“We’re not perfect, but we’re always trying to make ourselves better.”

—DAYNA MACBETH, OPERATIONS MANAGER

the deluge of calls the office used to receive when it sent out a prerecorded phone message to "call-aheads."

"Our phones would blow up because all the calls went out at the same time," Macbeth says. "Now, people check their email at different times of the day, and they can reply back to info@fitturf.com."

To respond to these client queries, all support team members can access the shared email account. Fit Turf uses a flagging system to communicate the email status internally.

Despite the changes, the company is flexible to clients' preferences. For

would prefer to continue pursuing the most modern forms of communication—for clients' convenience and efficiency—rather than doing things the way they've always done them.

"Pretty soon, most of our customers are going to be millennials, so we have to think 10, 15 years down the road and make sure we're changing along with the types of customers we're servicing," Macbeth says.

Fit Turf is also piloting a few new initiatives this year that it hopes will pay off.

One is tracking the results of customers' lawns with photo



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GAME OF SQUARE FEET

Small lawn sizes were one thing that attracted lawn care veteran Paul Wagner to the Denver area to start Fit Turf in 2008. Customer lawn sizes in the Denver branch average 3,500 square feet.

"A lot of people think the money's in big properties, but it really isn't," Wagner says, noting a key metric he tracks is how much the company is earning per square 1,000 square feet. Each Fit Turf branch is different, but Wagner estimates his company's lawn care program makes about \$15-\$17 per 1,000 square feet in Colorado compared with about \$10 for the same area in Michigan.

He recognizes it's tempting for lawn care firms to lower the price of their core lawn care program because they're making money on ancillary services like aeration and perimeter pest control. But he warns against going this route, saying it devalues the service they're providing.

"The most service calls are going to be on lawn care," he says, explaining why it's unwise to drop the price of the program. "You have weeds, color, rain, diseases, insects and more to worry about. I'd rather have fewer customers at the right prices, so we can give them the best service."

documentation. Technicians will begin taking photos of clients' properties during round one fertilizer applications in April. The images will be recorded via Mobile Live, a component of their software program.

"With homeowners, it's hard for them to remember what your lawn looked like in the spring if you're not really paying attention," Macbeth says. "So this is a good way for us to have that documentation."

Vehicle accidents posed a challenge for Fit Turf last year, which has prompted the team to consider how it can minimize risks and maximize safety. For example, the company is planning to implement bonuses for technicians who remain incident-free, and it's decided not to allow managers to take home their vehicles like they used to.

Macbeth is also turning to technology, such as truck-tracking reports available via Mobile Live to incentivize drivers who don't speed. And she's investigating other services, such as in-truck devices that detect collisions, monitor risky maneuvering and track driver behavior (like texting while driving) in real time.

It's all in an effort to run a better company with better results for employees and customers.

"We're not perfect," says Macbeth, "but we're always trying to make ourselves better."

Along these lines, Wagner says a focus at Fit Turf is making the company people-centric.

"We're paying attention to treating employees really well," he says. "I think that's the root of success in business. If you don't treat them well, they're not going to do a good job for the customers."

Fit Turf treats employees well by trying to create a positive environment—one new initiative is a "praise board" to recognize employees—and above-average perks and benefits.

Another recent boon is an improvement to the health care offering in 2018. For employees with five or more years of tenure, Fit Turf covers medical premiums at 100 percent, up to \$400 for individuals and up to \$800 per month for families.

"If somebody's been here for five years, you can bet they're a darn good employee," Wagner says. "I want them to stay here, and I'll pay for that."

Everyone has access to the company's snack station, which is stocked with items like Gatorade, healthy snacks and Emergen-C.

"It doesn't cost a fortune, but those are nice things to have," Wagner says.

"It's hard to get great people, so when you get them, you have to keep them." ☺

WEB EXTRA

To see Paul Wagner talk about his approach to buying equipment (think: used) and learn about Fit Turf's bonus structure, visit the Web Extras section at LandscapeManagement.net.

KAWASAKI ENGINES SALUTE TO HEROES

POWER OF ONE

Joe Chiellini leads more than 120 team members as president and CEO of Ameriscape Services in the Tampa, Fla., area. He's also a captain in the Hillsborough County Fire Rescue, a career he pursued after high school.



When and why did you get involved in public service?

The fire department always interested me when I was in high school. The local firefighters at the station would come in to the store where I worked. I asked a lot of questions and liked everything they said. The job was competitive but with a lot of camaraderie. I graduated high school on June 6 and was in the fire academy June 26. My brother, Chris, now an Ameriscape team member, made the connection that helped me secure a spot in the class. The rest is history.

Who supports you so you can commit to public service?

First and foremost, my wife, Audra. She allows me the time to concentrate on two careers, while she maintains a full-time career and our home, and cares for our three children, ages 7, 11 and 13. Next would be my directors, administration staff and the operation team that make every day that I'm at the fire department seamless.

What advice do you have for others looking to balance business with public service?

A strong spouse and team are the keys to a balanced life, even without two careers.

Who is your hero?

My mother. My parents raised five boys on blue collar salaries. Sometimes my father, a printer by trade, was out of work. We never went hungry, always had a great and clean house, but more importantly, we never felt needy.

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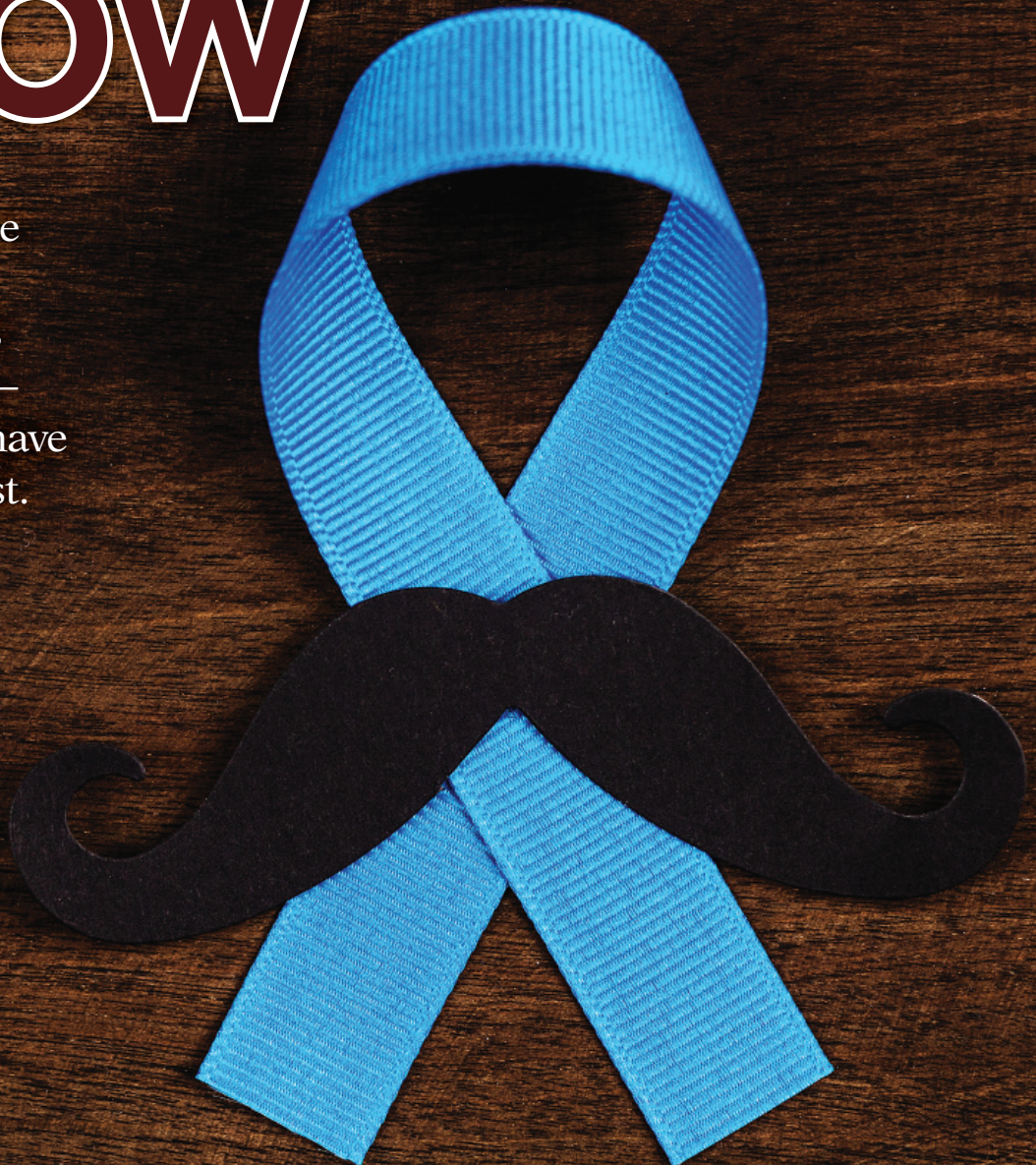
LET'S GROW

CASE STUDY: OUR WAY

LET IT GROW

Why and how one
landscape firm
launched a men's
health initiative—
including a no-shave
November contest.

▶ PAGE 51





BY DANIEL GORDON

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

The new tax law: What you need to know

The most sweeping tax reform act since 1986 has been signed into law. Here's a rundown of the most relevant provisions affecting members of the landscape and lawn care business.

THE "MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN" PROVISION

The C corp rate is lowered from a maximum of 35 percent to 21 percent. Lawmakers believe this change will cause large corporations to reinvest the savings into creating jobs. Others believe big corporations only will buy back stock or pay dividends to shareholders. Either way, a buyback will increase the value of stock, and dividends paid to stockholders will make stockholders feel wealthier, creating an income effect, such as in the late 1990s when 401(k)s and other pensions were at high valuations, average Americans felt wealthier, spent more and our domestic economy was up. If you prop up large corporate valuations, you charge up the economy. I believe the tax cut on C corps will be good for the U.S. economy and make it more competitive globally.

That said, this decrease in corporate tax rates is irrelevant to our industry because it doesn't lower taxes for small businesses, most of which are organized as pass-through entities.

HOW IT AFFECTS PASS-THROUGH ENTITIES

Currently, pass-through entity taxation is based on individual tax rate brackets. Under the new law, pass-throughs are still taxed at the individual level, but there is a deduction allowed for



20 percent of pass-through income. To prevent owners of pass-throughs from reducing their W-2 wages, a limitation on the deduction is phased in based on W-2 wages above a threshold of taxable income. Generally, the deduction is limited to 50 percent of the W-2 wages paid by the business. The pass-through exclusion is available for service industry firms. Therefore, you may want to think about organizing your company as a pass-through for 2018.

HOW IT AFFECTS EQUIPMENT PURCHASES

- **Bonus depreciation.** The new law extends and modifies bonus depreciation, allowing businesses to immediately deduct 100 percent of the cost of eligible property in the year it's placed in service, through 2022. The amount of allowable bonus depreciation will then be phased down over four years: 80 percent will be allowed for property placed in service in 2023, 60 percent in 2024, 40 percent in 2025 and 20 percent in 2026. The new law also removes the rule that made bonus depreciation available only for new property; therefore, used equipment now qualifies.
- **Sec. 179 expensing.** The new law has increased the maximum amount a taxpayer may expense under Sec. 179 to \$1 million and increased the phase-out threshold to \$2.5 million. These amounts will be indexed for inflation after 2018. The definition

of Sec. 179 property has expanded to include any of the following improvements to nonresidential real property: roofs; heating, ventilation and air-conditioning property; fire protection and alarm systems; and security systems.

• Interest deduction limited.

Business interest used to finance equipment, A/R and credit lines will be limited to business interest income received plus 30 percent of EBITDA. This will limit a firm who is marginally profitable or shows a loss to borrow to bring that business back to health or grow the business.

• Net operating loss (NOL)

deduction. Under prior law, a business that sustained a NOL could deduct 100 percent of that loss against future income (up to 20 years). The business could also carry it back two years, amend those tax returns and get an immediate refund of taxes. The new law removes the ability to carry back a NOL and only allows an 80 percent reduction of income for future years; but, the loss may be carried forward indefinitely.

- **Estate tax.** Currently, estates become taxable at the \$5.6 million level (\$11.2 for husband and wife). The new law doubles those amounts. This could be a large tax savings to family businesses who are passing ownership to the next generation or selling their business and passing the proceeds on.

Based on what I'm seeing, most of our clients will not be saving much under the new plan and may even see a rise in their taxes. However, there are many tax-planning opportunities that should be put in motion now to save on taxes in the future.

WEB EXTRA

For details on how the new tax law will affect you personally, see the online version of this story at LandscapeManagement.net/newtaxlaw.

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BY KEVIN KEHOE

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

Resolve to raise prices

Everything is going up: the stock market, gross national product, the cost of labor, your overhead expenses. Yes, everything is going up except your pricing.

Resolve that this year, you will raise your prices. This simple act doesn't require a big announcement with balloons and confetti and letters to customers. You don't have to raise prices everywhere and all at once. But, resolve to increase them slowly and consistently throughout the year, job by job.

When you consider that the most recent inflation numbers suggest a 2-3 percent annual rate of cost increases, it's likely your overhead is increasing more than this rate.

You need to increase your prices to guarantee—at a minimum—no erosion in your profits.

How do you do this? Pricing is one part “psychology” and one part “financial.”

Labor burden calculations

Budget			
Revenue	\$ 2,000,000		Projected revenue including new sales
Labor	\$ 600,000	30%	Projected labor (hours times wage rate)
Material	\$ 300,000	15%	Projected materials (guesstimate)
Direct Job Cost	\$ 1,100,000	55%	
Gross Profit	\$ 900,000	45%	
Overhead	\$ 700,000	35%	Projected expenditures for everything else
Net Profit	\$ 200,000	10%	
Average Wage Rate	\$ 15.00		
Hours	40,000		

Overhead Allocations			
Labor	Labor Burden	Burden Rate	
90%	\$630,000	105%	The rate is burden divided by budgeted labor
Material	Material Burden	Burden Rate	
10%	\$70,000	23%	The rate is burden divided by budgeted material
Total	Total Overhead		
100%	\$700,000		

Selling Price			
Labor Average Wage	Profit Margin	Price	
\$15.00	10%	\$34.17	Cost times (1 + burden) divided by 100% less margin (10%)
Material Dollars	Profit Margin	Price	
\$1.00	10%	\$1.37	Cost times (1 + burden) divided by 100% less margin (10%)

PRICING PSYCHOLOGY

What does a price increase communicate to customers and prospects? And what will “the market” bear? These are two essential questions to address.

First, done correctly (with a sales effort), a price increase can communicate strength to customers and prospects. It can say, “We are growing, and we are busy,” and by extension, “Many people want us because we deliver.”

Second, “what the market can bear” isn't determined by the low-priced provider; it's determined by the higher-priced provider. Yes, it does require courage to price lead, but can you think of anything you purchase now that's not going up in price? Why should landscape or snow pricing stay the same?

THE FINANCIAL ASPECT

You must cover your overhead cost increases in your pricing. Resolve to review your burden rates this year. At least that way, should you decide not to raise your prices, you will know how much profit you're sacrificing. (Yes, that was sarcasm.)

Here's how you check your labor burden rates. (Also see the sidebar, “Labor burden calculations.”)

1. Start with a budget. Identify labor, material and overhead costs. Yes, these may not be exactly precise, but they are close enough to use as a plan. This is what a budget is for.

2. Calculate burden rates. Determine where to recover overhead between labor and material. Since you're in a labor-based business, I suggest that the majority of overhead gets recovered on labor. In my example, 90 percent is recovered on labor. In a construction business, materials may cover a higher percentage.

3. Calculate prices. Apply the burden rate and the profit margin to the base labor and material costs. Use the average wage rate as the labor base and \$1 as the material base to arrive at unit pricing.

In life, you either lead or follow, react to events or create events. It's the same in pricing. Sure, it takes courage to lead, but the alternative isn't good for anyone—not for you, your people or, ultimately, your customers. Price management is the key to the success of market leaders. Happy New Year! 🍷

CASE STUDY: OUR WAY

A matter of health



Gachina Landscape Management created a men's health initiative to drive awareness and encourage employees to get wellness exams.

BY CASEY PAYTON

After Gachina Landscape Management Founder and President John Gachina died from prostate cancer in 2015, men's health became a greater focus for the Menlo Park, Calif.-based company. Company leaders launched a multipronged effort to encourage the company's employees (94 percent of which are male) to be proactive with their health care. There have been several women's health efforts as well.

The company has chosen Movember—a social movement that encourages men to grow facial hair during the month of November to raise awareness for men's health issues—as a key focus of its efforts. November 2018 will be the third year Gachina participates in Movember. Activities include focusing on healthy living tips, such as nutrition and exercise, during weekly “tailgate talks” and having a “No Shave November” contest. There were prizes for four categories, says Denise Ritch, Gachina's human resources director. Categories included longest beard, most creative, fullest and newest growth. Winners were awarded gift cards

and recognized at the company's annual Christmas party.

“It was just a small thing, but you could tell it was something everyone really enjoyed, and that's what we were aiming for,” says Ritch. “It created conversation—including conversation at home. People would ask ‘why aren't you shaving?’ and that opened the door to talk about it.”

Stacie Callaghan, Gachina's marketing manager, adds that female employees were encouraged to participate by creating a “Mo Challenge” to get active. For instance, Callaghan created a challenge to move at least 150 to 200 miles via biking, swimming, running or hiking in memory of her father who passed away from lung cancer in 2016.

Besides raising awareness about men's health, the ultimate goal is also to encourage men to follow through on scheduling their wellness checkups.

“We do offer health insurance, and if our employees choose our plan, we want to see them follow through on the free wellness checks each year,” says Ritch. “And even if they have a different insurance plan, we still want to know that they're going for those checks. Early detection is the key to survival when it comes to cancer.”

Ritch says the company decided it was too invasive to verify if employees followed through on their wellness exams, so it opted to provide encouragement only. Based on feedback from employees, she believes it's been a worthwhile effort, and men are becoming more comfort-

able with talking about health issues and following through on exams.

Instead of feeling embarrassed or a stigma about health concerns, they're recognizing the importance.

Overall, Ritch says the effort has been a small investment of time and money. Costs have included matching \$610 from employee Movember fundraising and purchasing gift cards for prizes. She says it's something other landscape companies could easily incorporate to raise awareness about important health issues their employees may face.

“Sometimes simple really is better,” Ritch says. “This does not have to be an elaborate effort to make a difference. And even if it just makes a difference in one life—maybe one person who goes in for a wellness exam and finds something early—then it was absolutely all worth it.”

Payton is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.

Gachina recognized the winners of its “No Shave November” contest at its annual Christmas party.

BUSINESS BREAKDOWN

COMPANY: Gachina Landscape Management

HEADQUARTERS: Menlo Park, Calif.

REVENUE: \$32.5 million

EMPLOYEES: 418

SERVICE MIX: 56% maintenance, 35% construction, 9% irrigation/water management

CLIENT MIX: 84% commercial, 13% residential, 3% government

FERTILIZERS

PHUSION LIME

COMPANY: Plant Food Co.

URL: PlantFoodCo.com

Plant Food Co.'s pHusion Lime is a calcitic limestone that's reacted with an organic acid. When the product is dissolved by moisture, the pHusion organic acid—a combination of calcium lignosulfonate and lignosulfonic acid—accelerates the release of available calcium. The organic acid also converts the calcium of the limestone into a more soluble form, readily available for plant uptake or pH adjustment, faster than conventional limestone products at similar application rates, said the company.



POLYWORX

COMPANY: Howard Fertilizer

URL: HowardFertilizer.com

Polyworx is a slow-release fertilizer that features GAL-XeOne, a polymer-coating technology. GAL-XeOne allows water to seep into the fertilizer prill and carries nutrients out through a semipermeable membrane into the soil, promoting root growth and durability, enhancing plant maturity and disease resistance and minimizing leaching, Howard said. The fertilizer comes in six nitrogen urea formulations and three potash formulations, performs effectively in a variety of weather conditions and soil types and can deliver nutrients for up to 18 months, according to Howard.



PROSCAPE 25-0-5 1% FE 51% MESA

COMPANY: LebanonTurf

URL: LebanonTurf.com

ProScape 25-0-5 is a premier fertilizer that uses Lebanon's Mesa technology. Mesa, a nitrogen source, combines the benefits of methylene urea with ammonium sulfate in a single, homogeneous granule, while Meth-Ex slows down the release of the ammonium sulfate. This combination provides brilliant color, a quick initial response and long-term feeding all without excessive surge growth, with iron adding an additional color benefit, Lebanon said.



GREENTRX

COMPANY: Anuvia Plant Nutrients

URL: AnuviaPlantNutrients.com

GreenTRX is a homogenous, enhanced-efficiency plant nutrient that slowly releases nutrients to lawns when needed most. The Organic MaTRX delivery system, using reclaimed organic materials, mimics organic matter in soil to provide nutrients in an effective way that reduces leaching and volatility. The product is environmentally friendly, easy to use and safe on all types of turf, Anuvia said.



» STRING TRIMMERS

BTR250PL STRING TRIMMER ➔

COMPANY: RedMax

URL: RedMax.com

The BTR250PL is part of RedMax's battery-powered lineup. Powered by a 40-v lithium-ion battery, the zero-emission, straight-shaft trimmer offers an ergonomic design and reduced vibrations, allowing operators to run the machine longer, and the brushless motor delivers a high and consistent torque throughout, RedMax said. It provides 40 to 80 min. of run time on a single battery charge and comes with a two-year warranty.



⬆ 60V MAX STRING TRIMMER (DCST970X1)

COMPANY: DeWalt

URL: DeWalt.com

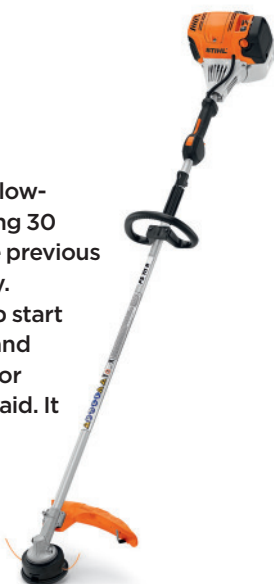
The 60V Max string trimmer features a 15-in. cutting swath accepting 0.080-in. or 0.095-in. lines and a gear-drive transmission providing amplified torque that maintains cut speed under load. Optimal for cleanup and maintenance, the product allows users to leave the gas tank behind and expand their DeWalt power tool and battery systems, said the company.

FS 111 R TRIMMER ➔

COMPANY: Stihl

URL: StihlUSA.com

Stihl's FS 111 R trimmer features a low-exhaust emission engine, providing 30 percent longer run times than the previous model, according to the company. The trimmer includes a three-step start procedure that saves users time and a vertical pleated paper air filter for extended service intervals, Stihl said. It also features a rubberized loop handle, providing a comfortable grip of the product.



⬆ ST120VX STRING TRIMMER

COMPANY: Oregon Products

URL: OregonProducts.com

The ST120VX string trimmer is part of Oregon's newest line of battery-powered equipment for landscaping pros. The trimmer offers a 16.5-in. cutting swath and a four-hour run time. It's powered by a 120-v battery pack offering more power than a comparable gas unit, according to Oregon. Like all tools on the 120V line, the string trimmer offers a patented Stealth Mode, allowing operators to run it at full speed without violating noise restrictions. The product is engineered for use in any weather and comes at an MSRP of \$459.

GT 160 STRING TRIMMER ⬇

COMPANY: Greenworks Commercial

URL: GreenworksCommercial.com

The GT 160 String Trimmer combines an 82-v lithium-ion battery with brushless motor technology, which provides high torque, zero maintenance and zero exhaust all while decreasing vibrations by five times and noise levels by 50 percent, according to the company. The trimmer easily starts by pulling the trigger and features an aluminum shaft for low weight, a 16-in. cut path and a variable speed trigger. It provides power equivalent to a 32cc gas engine.



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To submit your company's details,
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LM150**.

Contact LM Editor Marisa Palmieri
with questions at 216-706-3764
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Salesperson
Nashville, Tenn.

1996-1998
WKRN
Nashville, Tenn.

1998-1999
WOWL
Florence, Ala.

1999-2002
KFSS
Fort Smith, Ark.

2002-2004
WFMY
Greensboro, N.C.

2004-2015
KSDK
Sports Anchor/Reporter
St. Louis

2015
Osborn Barr
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2017-present
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"They let me fill in for the sports guy. When he left, I went to my general manager and said, 'Why don't you give me 90 days as the sports director?' And that's how I got my first on-air sports job."

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2015-2017
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