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Kurt Bienmueller, vice-president and part-owner of Four Square Landscaping Co. in Dallas, TX, says quality, not price, was the issue when he began his business five years ago.

"We wanted to get better and larger pieces of equipment to keep crews to a minimum," says Bienmueller, whose accounts are mostly commercial with 65% of services devoted to maintenance and the rest to design. "We bought mowers that would have a minimum amount of breakdowns and would be easy to repair. Also, their parts had to be easily available, and they had to meet or exceed voluntary safety standards."

"We also looked at the weight of the equipment so it didn’t wear people down, varna, for example, they offer “credit card/revolving charge plans, deferred financing plans and leasing options.”

"We encourage our dealers to consider return on investment when discussing solutions to end users. A solution, then, may sometimes require a greater investment, but the return will also be greater," says Taylor. "The initial cost of a unit is not the greatest an end user will face. Losses related to a downed unit, productivity, etc. may, in fact, be greater."

According to Gregg Breningmeyer, marketing manager for commercial mowing at John Deere, Triangle Park, NC, they have found that interest rates have not been an important consideration in a customer’s buying decisions.

"What is important is cash flow — how much money is needed as a down payment and how much money it’s going to cost on a monthly basis," says Breningmeyer.

The value of dealers
In many industries, including the Green Industry, consolidation is an economic fact of life. Consolidation by mower manufacturers is paring down the number of dealers and, therefore, places to get equipment serviced. Manufacturers are responding by either making their dealers stronger, helping them service equipment more profitably or making mowers easier for contractors to fix themselves.

“We’re consistently selling our product through the dealer channel only — avoiding the temptation of internet..."
"It's also important to belong to ALCA and some of the other landscape organizations out there to see what their members are using and what conclusions they have drawn about a particular piece of equipment."

— Bienmueller

and whether or not it was self-propelled," he adds. "We looked at the deck to see if it floated and how accessible it would be to change a belt or a blade."

Bienmueller says a lot of his equipment purchases are based on what his crew members are telling him. "I'll try out a piece of equipment in the field and get input from my guys. We have a very close relationship with our employees, so we make our decisions as a family."

For mowing, Bienmueller uses walk-behind for turf and "around-a-pool" areas, riding mowers for open cutting areas and push and hand mowers for up-close work around decorative islands.

For Four-Square Landscaping employee Jose Sanchez will give boss Kurt Bienmueller input on how this blower is running once through with the task.

The right equipment has been only one factor in the 35% a year growth rate of Bienmueller's business. Doing a quality job with that equipment, he says, advertises itself. "Dallas is a very competitive marketplace," he says. "Still, word-of-mouth has grown our business tremendously."

"How well you take care of your customers and your employees is what counts, too," he adds.

Communication, Bienmueller says, is key in making sure crew members aren't putting themselves in dangerous situations. "We're in touch constantly with our employees," Bienmueller says. "I make sure I see them throughout the day."

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Circle No.127
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selling and big box stores," says Walker. "If you don’t do that, you will not have a viable service system to take care of your customers."

"Finding reliable dealers who will even service mowers purchased at big box stores is becoming more difficult for landscapers," adds Carol Dilger, marketing services manager at Gravely, an Ariens Company in Brillion, WI that makes riding and walking lawn mowers. "Also, as the number of dealers continues to decline, it becomes even more difficult to find someone who will service the unit."

According to Kadel, manufacturers who go to big box stores are after quick sales numbers with a short term plan. "They end up ignoring the value of the independent dealer and the role he plays in keeping equipment going," says Kadel.

As a manufacturer of walk-besides, Bill Shea, vice-president of sales at Ferris Industries in Munnsville, NY, says "manufacturers have to partner with those commercial dealers who put the commercial cutter at the highest priority on their customer list."

Taylor adds, "At the same time we must understand the challenges the contractor is facing and make sure we are responding with solutions to address them. For instance, is it the actual price that is driving the contractors to the big boxes or the convenience factor?"

"Some of the ways we work with our dealers are by identifying the buying habits, shopping patterns and what drives key decisions of contractors," he adds.

Ease of servicing goes hand-in-hand with productivity. Not only does an equipment owner want servicing to be fast so he can spend more time mowing, but he also wants servicing to be easy and convenient so it actually gets done.

According to Warfel, the following are specific design features that make self-servic-

"Manufacturers must work with dealers to help them understand that service is a key factor to continued business success. While we are working to build equipment that will require less daily maintenance, dealer training is essential."

— Dilger

To mulch or not to mulch

Mulching is a hot subject among professional these days. According to Cuddihe, Great Dane is testing new designs so their customers have the best mulching capabilities available.

"We don’t believe mulching has been perfected yet, but we think our mulch systems are the best there are," says Cuddihe.

Kilgas says many people have a misconception of mulching. "Yes, it’s good for the soil and grass. However, most people want things done right now — they don’t want the job to take any longer than it would if they were to use a side discharge mower," Kilgas says. "The only way to improve the mulching system is to provide a secondary chamber where the mulching process takes place."

Cloutier has his own ideas about the perfect mulching system. "It’s not just closing off your discharge chute," he says. "It truly is a system of combining flow control baffles with the placement of mulching baffles, mulching blades and discharge cover."

The safety factor

Breningmeyer says watching a contractor disconnect the safety switch in a seat makes him cringe. "Safety is of paramount importance with us," he says. "It costs more money to test and make sure products meet certain safety requirements which are voluntary, and few of our competitors meet that standard. Maybe they don’t think they can compete from a financial standpoint and consider themselves suitproof."

Whurr says manufacturers need to pay more attention to legislation as it relates to noise pollution and alternative fuel systems. "We have to make sure we design our products to meet the various standards of the marketplace today."

“We believe professional landscape contractors are also concerned about safety, and while everyone wants to go faster, safety is foremost,” adds Cuddihe.
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Country clippin’
Country Clipper’s zero-turn mower Zeton comes with either a joystick or conventional twin stick steering. Seven spindles and cutting width of 12 ft.; 9180RD with nine spindles and cutting width of 15 ft.; and 9204RD with nine spindles and cutting width of 17 ft. Mowers can cut up to 8.8 acres per hour. For more information, contact Woods Equipment Co. at 815/381-6028 / Circle no. 272

Get a load of this
Walker Manufacturing Co.’s loader bucket attachment works with the Quick-Change Implement Hitch System on the Walker tractor. It lifts 180 lbs. and 2-1/4-cu. ft. of material with 14-in. ground clearance. For more information, contact Walker at 970/221-5614 / Circle no. 273

Cut wide and fast
Woods Equipment Co.’s rear discharge Turf Batwing line features three models — 7144RD with

Cut everything
Woods Equipment Co.’s new BrushBull line of single spindle cutters are available in cutting widths of 48 to 84 in. The series includes rotary cutters, standard-duty utility cutters, medium-duty machines for mowing brush and heavy-duty cutters. For more information, contact Woods Equipment Co. at 815/381-6028 / Circle no. 275

Deck-orated
LESCO’s Viper midmount zero-turn mowers have improved fabricated decks and three new deck widths: 48-, 54- and 60-in. A 19-hp Kawasaki twin-cylinder OHV power plant powers the 48-in. Viper, while a 23-hp engine powers the 54- and 60-in. models. For more information contact LESCO, Inc. at 800/321-5325 / Circle no. 276

Stable ride
Husqvarna’s zero-turn ZTH6125 mowers feature a unibody frame for a low center of gravity and wide wheel stance for stability. Exactly 19 cutting heights fit any application need. The 52- and 61-in. decks offer 1.5- to 6-in. height in 1/4-in. increments. Maximum ground speed is 10 mph and fuel capacity is 11.4 gallons. They feature air-cooled, liquid-cooled and fuel injection engines. An optional foot assist lift mechanism lessens the effort of raising the deck over curbs or changing cutting height options. For more information contact Husqvarna at 704/597-5000 or www.husqvarna.com / Circle No. 274

Less noise
New Holland’s MC Series commercial mowers feature diesel engines that are isolation-mounted and have under-hood exhaust for quiet, vibration-free operation. They also have a large, unobstructed platform with lots of leg room. A full suspension seat with weight adjustment is standard equipment. The steering column has telescopic adjustment to accommodate operators of all sizes. Cup holder and auxiliary power socket for cell phone are standard. For more information contact New Holland at 888/290-7377 or www.nevholland.com / Circle No. 277
Smooth ride
Great Dane Super Surfer mowers feature a spring loaded platform set forward of the drive wheels to reduce bumps and jars. They also provide comfort and security to the operator during zero turning maneuvers due to the platform's position. They come available in cutting widths from 36 in. to 61 in. and engine sizes from 15 hp to 23 hp. For more information contact Great Dane Power Equipment, Inc. at 812/218-7100 / Circle no. 278

Brush up
The Swisher 44-in. Trailcutter is designed for clearing brush from overgrown fields, roadsides, fences, and trails. It features a 10.5 hp engine, heavy duty swinging blades which can handle brush up to 1-1/2-in. in diameter, universal articulating hitch and single-point height adjustment. For more information contact Swisher, Inc. at 660/747-8183 or www.swisher-inc.com / Circle no. 279

Making the cut
John Deere's 1400 Series front mowers feature gas or diesel liquid-cooled Yanmar engines from 28-hp to 31-hp. A 14.5-gal. fuel tank allows for all-day mowing. The air intake system allows air to enter from the rear and side of the mower for lower sound levels at the operator station and less debris buildup. Available are 60- and 72-in. 7-iron side-discharge mower decks. A 20-in. turning radius to the trim side leaves only a 28-in. uncut circle of grass. For more information contact John Deere at 800/537-8233 or www.johndeere.com / Circle no. 280

Zip in a Z
Exmark Manufacturing's XP series of Lazer Z riding mowers features 27-hp liquid-cooled diesels or 31-hp liquid-cooled gas models. Each model is available with either a 60-in. UltraCut deck that mows up to six acres per hour or the 72-in. UltraCut deck that mows up to seven acres per hour. Ground speed is 11 mph forward and 7 mph in reverse. For more information contact Exmark Mfg. Co., Inc. at 402/223-6300 or www.exmark.com / Circle No. 281

Nice blades
The Gravely 260Z comes equipped with stay-sharp Tungsten carbide-coated blades, maintenance-free Gravely XL spindles and a two-year limited commercial warranty. It's manufactured with either a Kohler Command OHV 25 hp engine or 25 hp Kawasaki engine. The air-flow deck's cutting chamber expels clippings faster using a 21-in.-wide discharge tunnel. For more information contact the Ariens Co. at 800/678-5443 or www.ariens.com / Circle no. 282

No fixin' a Dixon
Dixon Industries Inc.'s ZTR® 8000 Series commercial mower features a 25 hp Kohler Command or 26.5-hp Briggs & Stratton-Daihatsu engine; white wheel motors and Hydro-Gear® BDU pumps; 60- or 72-in. cutting widths; "big rig" seat suspension and fully-adjustable seat; speed up to 10 mph; 11-1/2-gal. fuel capacity; and 1-in. front caster wheel. All mount to mower with automatic-type receiver hitch. ROPS available. For more information contact Dixon Industries, Inc. at 800/264-6075 or www.dixon-ztr.com / Circle no. 285

Endearing steering
Textron's Bob-Cat ZT 200 Series now includes a 20-hp Yanmar diesel engine. The liquid-cooled ZT 220D provides up to twice the reliability and fuel economy of gas engines. The ZT 200 Series offers a 19- or 23-hp Kawasaki V-Twin engine and a 25-hp Kohler Command engine. The mowers feature lever-type steering that controls independent power to each wheel. The hydrostatic drive enables the machine to reach speeds up to 8 mph. For more information contact Textron at 262/637-6711 or www.textron.com / Circle no. 286

Easy does it
Rich Manufacturing, Inc.'s Convertible features easy-access controls and a spring-loaded seat that can be adjusted forward and back. The platform is designed for easy mounting and dismounting. Its mower deck is made of 10-gauge steel, welded not stamped with a curve trimming edge to prevent deck damage. The deck lift system allows for seven different height positions. For more information contact Rich Manufacturing, Inc. at 765/436-2744 / Circle no. 287
These contractors have found the right mix of materials, prices and products to make hydroseeding services profitable.

It's summer and business is heating up. So are the chances of your hydroteeder plugging. One problem might be failure to rinse out the hoses. A minute with the rinse tank can save hours of frustration.

"Clogged hoses can be a real mess," says Rob Childs, owner of Outside Unlimited, Meredith, NH. He's found that keeping tabs on the paper material carrying the seed can reduce the likelihood of clogging.

Childs does about 70% commercial hydroseeding, including new houses and shopping centers. Most of the residential work is around the upscale homes of the Lakes Region. A two-man hydroseeding crew follows the grounds team onto job sites.

John Goode, who operates Easy Lawn of Ohio Valley, Circleville, OH, recommends using a paper-based mulch, especially on the smaller units. "Paper absorbs all the water it is going to take up in about 10 minutes," he says. "Wood will keep absorbing water for an hour or more."

"Those home-built trailers are really versatile and mobile when we have to run them in between buildings."

- Wiggins
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Goode's business is a 50-50 mix of residential and commercial jobs. The latter includes shopping stores and recent work around the Ohio University campus in Athens, OH.

"If you have mostly wood in the blend, you are more prone to clog," he says. He feels it is safe to use wood mulch, paper mulch or a blend in larger units, but the carrier should vary with the application.

Hot weather blues

There are specific reasons material dries out, and it is a major cause of hydroseeder hassles, agrees Tim Fesler, shop foreman at HydroTurf, Inc. (www.hydroturf.net) Mendota, MN. He works on units from all manufacturers. The drying problem is especially tricky in warm weather.

"Then, you've got 500 gallons of solution in your tank and a 20-minute drive between jobs," Fesler says. Even if the agitator is working in the tank, the hose just sits there. "In 90-degree weather, that's all it takes for the hose to get plugged."

Fesler says the tank is usually not a problem as long as the material stays agitated. But there almost always will be residual material in the hose. Rinsing the line after each application can save three or four hours of downtime.

The right carrier material

While there has been debate about various kinds of carriers, Roch