### Opportunities on the horizon

**How business might operate in 2002:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residential design/build</th>
<th><strong>DOWNSIDE</strong></th>
<th><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></th>
<th><strong>UPSIDE</strong></th>
<th><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clients will hesitate to commit to projects, may defer additional phases</td>
<td>Clients concerned with personal finances may be receptive to low-bidders or opt for DIY</td>
<td>Differentiate your services in a way that is meaningful to customers</td>
<td>Market your quality and special services in a way that is meaningful to customers</td>
<td>Market how your services improve the value of their investment in home</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Residential maintenance</th>
<th><strong>DOWNSIDE</strong></th>
<th><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></th>
<th><strong>UPSIDE</strong></th>
<th><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercial maintenance</td>
<td><strong>DOWNSIDE</strong></td>
<td><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></td>
<td><strong>UPSIDE</strong></td>
<td><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commercial design/build projects</strong> may slow, be postponed or get trimmed dramatically</td>
<td>Sew up 2002 business now</td>
<td>Know your cost structure and cost systems to make profits on every job</td>
<td>Communicate closely with current and prospective customers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Commercial maintenance</strong></td>
<td><strong>DOWNSIDE</strong></td>
<td><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></td>
<td><strong>UPSIDE</strong></td>
<td><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commercial, multifamily and institutional property owners may cut budgets and be receptive to low-balling, despite ongoing relationships with current landscapers</strong></td>
<td><strong>DOWNSIDE</strong></td>
<td><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></td>
<td><strong>UPSIDE</strong></td>
<td><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chemical lawn care</strong></td>
<td><strong>DOWNSIDE</strong></td>
<td><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></td>
<td><strong>UPSIDE</strong></td>
<td><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Irrigation, arbor care, specialty services, upgrades</strong></td>
<td><strong>DOWNSIDE</strong></td>
<td><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></td>
<td><strong>UPSIDE</strong></td>
<td><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Labor</strong></td>
<td><strong>DOWNSIDE</strong></td>
<td><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></td>
<td><strong>UPSIDE</strong></td>
<td><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Competition</strong></td>
<td><strong>DOWNSIDE</strong></td>
<td><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></td>
<td><strong>UPSIDE</strong></td>
<td><strong>SMART STRATEGY:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect new competitive and price pressures at every level</td>
<td>Expect new competitive and price pressures at every level</td>
<td>Know your cost structure and price for profit</td>
<td>Analyze costs and profit structure for maximum efficiencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Competition

- Analyze costs and profit structure for maximum efficiencies
- Price for profitability, not volume
- Analyze viability of low-profit services. Drop or adjust service packages accordingly
- Analyze viability of low-profit customers. Make adjustments as needed
- Opportunities exist to capitalize on competitors' weaknesses
- Opportunities exist for acquisitions on favorable terms

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### Natural selection will occur.

Unprofitable businesses will not fare well in highly competitive markets.
"I believe we are moving temporarily into a selling economy, not a buying economy," adds Tom Tolkacz, president of Swingle Tree & Landscape Care, Denver, CO. "We are now competing for a smaller pie of money and are being weighed against different things."

Jeff Aronson, president, As You Like It Potomac Valley Landscaping, Potomac, MD, notes, "We are giving a lot of estimates and proposals and have a lot on the table. The jobs aren’t closing at the same rate as the fall of 2000, but we are not losing jobs either. Clients just seem to be a little slower in their decision making."

**Design/build bump**

While many contractors have their hands full with ongoing construction projects, others are planning to encourage clients to continue or commit to projects now.

"Listening to the clients and providing the products and services they want will be vital," cautions Willig. "Sales, design and project management staff must be trained to do the work requested... and be sensitive to costs."

"We’re concentrating on building bridges with clients and creating relationships," notes David Snodgrass, president of Dennis’ Seven Dees Landscaping Inc., Portland, OR. "We’re building up the level of our performance and want to be on more of their short lists."

Mortgage rates are hitting the lowest in 40 years and many are considering refinance," says Rod Bailey, consultant, Alder Springs Enterprises, Woodinville, WA. "What a marvelous chance to upgrade or finish that landscape project. There is a tremendous need for the landscape community to be proactive about this. Everyone who wants to do-it-yourself is open to be sold on having it done right by a pro."

**Necessity vs. luxury**

No one expects customers to stop using landscape maintenance or lawn care services, but many still expect changes.

"A general slowdown in the economy will take out marginal customers — those who want the services but had to stretch the budget to afford it," notes Charles King, King Green Inc., Norcross, GA.

Ewald Altstadt, director of operations for Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, NJ, sees the new “stay at home” consumer as an opportunity. "People will be at home on their property and we need to take steps to jump on that opportunity to talk with them about our services."

While many pros focus on commercial customer relationships, they see price cutting as a potential problem.

"Commercial property managers are looking at value as well as the relationship," says Scott Brickman, president of The Brickman Group, Langhome, PA. "The relationships will continue to be important but also expect to hear, 'We’re hurting... I’m getting pressure.'"

Resist the urge to cut prices, he says. "The worst thing to do is to go out and cut prices. Keep pricing where it needs to be."

"Someone once told me the first thing to do in a downturn is raise prices, and it was the best advice I've ever gotten. You'll have less customers but those you have will stay," notes Phil Fogarty, sub-master franchisor for Weed Man/Turf Holdings Inc., Cleveland, OH.

**Opportunities knock**

Preparing your organization is one thing; understanding your opportunities and taking advantage of them is another.

"We’re going to follow up every lead, good or bad, no matter what. In the past, we just took orders. Now, we’re actually going to start selling," explains Dave Williams, owner of Rainy Days Irrigation Inc., Garner, NC. "I strongly advise lawn care companies to plan ahead for a potentially difficult winter," adds Jim Campanella, owner of The Lawn Dawg, Nashua, NH. "Offer customers incentives to renew and prepay early... Use the down time in winter to bring in new business. Call back people who received estimates but did not use your services."

"Marketing is the one input in your business that can bring in sales," says Marty Grunder, president, Grunder Landscaping Co., Miamisburg, OH. "We’re signing up contracts and hustling. We have an attitude of 'think spring' already."

Although competition may be more intense, demand will continue. As Rod Bailey notes, "Grass grows just as fast in a recession as it does in a boom."

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Visit our Web site’s “This Month’s Features” page for more ideas and reaction on business strategies for 2002. 

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People of the Year 2001

These outstanding people exemplify professionalism, dedication and a willingness to share their time and energy for our industry

Landscape contracting: Rick Doesburg / President, Thornton Landscape, Inc., Maineville, OH

BY JASON STAHL

Ever since he was 14, working at South Euclid Garden Supply in Ohio, Rick Doesburg knew he wanted to pursue a Green Industry career.

"I just enjoyed working with people, and once I gained more knowledge, I got a kick out of being able to diagnose turfgrass diseases," Doesburg says.

Now, he's getting a kick out of running his own company, Thornton Landscape, Inc., which he bought in 1999 after 25 years as one of its employees.

His single most important professional achievement?

"Putting together and being part of a wonderful team at my company geared toward quality and 'beauty by design,'" he says.

Doesburg says it's this team that allows him get involved with associations, another thing he's proud of.

But friend Kurt Kluznik, president of Yardmaster, Inc., Painesville, OH, who claims he would have never gotten involved in ALCA without Doesburg's prodding, feels there's another reason why Doesburg is able to accomplish so much. "I'd call him the velvet hammer if he was in sales with me because he knows how to get things done without being too assertive," Kluznik says.

That kind of skill came in handy in 1999 when Doesburg almost left Thornton Landscape because, as he says, "we didn't seem to have a good focus of where we were going." But now he says his company is poised to stay on top as a cutting edge leader of design/build landscape.

Staying on top won't be easy, says Doesburg, who believes the government will be responsible for some of the biggest challenges the Green Industry will face within the next decade. "Legislation, taxes, social security, OSHA — all that has a tremendous impact on our ability to be profitable. If we don't look out for ourselves, nobody will."

That's why Doesburg believes association work is so important. "People have to break away from their business and give something back," he says.

Doesburg has certainly done his share, whether it be with ALCA, the Ohio Nursery Association, Cincinnati Homebuilders or the Green Industry Expo.

"What I am is what I've learned from ALCA," he says. He has not only advanced those associations with his own work but helped others make their mark.

"He was always there to help me out when I needed it, like when I took leadership positions in ALCA," says Jud Griggs, vice president of operations at Smallwood Design Group/Smallwood Landscape, Inc., Naples, FL, and former ALCA president.

"Some people take on things because they want notoriety, but the best thing about Rick is that he prefers to stay in the background," Griggs added.

The reason Doesburg bought Thornton Landscape was because his son, Andy, was graduating from college. "We had always talked about starting a business, and that gave me an opportunity to work with him," Doesburg at least for now, Andy still works in sales, and Rick is hoping he takes over the business some day.

LM
George Van Haasteren, CGM, is no comedian, although sometimes he tries. In describing his college football days, he says he played end, tackle and guard. "I sat on the end of the bench, guarded the water bucket and tackled anyone who came near," he says.

This big man with a hearty demeanor has the rare ability to pack 25 hours of activity into every 24-hour day. Much of that energy is directed at being the best grounds professional he can be — and helping others achieve a similar goal.

"Many people believe that anybody can run a grounds maintenance operation," says Van Haasteren. "They don’t realize that it takes years of training and education to be successful in this profession."

Van Haasteren says childhood experiences on nearby sandlots led him, ultimately, to become the first grounds manager in the State of New Jersey to gain certification from the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS) and, this year, president of that organization.

"When we were kids we played baseball morning, noon and night," he says. "There was a little area between a library and some tennis courts, and we built our own baseball field and made our own ground rules. For instance, if you hit the ball over the tennis nets you had a double, and if you hit it to the school, you had a home run."

This love of sport led Van Haasteren to excel in football, eventually making the University of Miami (FL) squad. In a sense, those experiences still drive him. In addition to his duties at Dwight-Englewood School, he and partner Ken Krausz, CGCS, own Sports Fields Management, Inc., a firm specializing in athletic field construction and maintenance. One of its clients is Paramus Catholic High School, Paramus, NJ.

"George has done great things with our fields," says Steve DeGregorio, PCHS athletic director and head football coach. "Before he started here there was a 50-by 70-yard area that was bumpy with rocks, twigs and glass. It was awful. Now it’s a gorgeous field."

Tom Shaner, executive director of the PGMS, says that Van Haasteren’s ability to work as a team player is, perhaps, his greatest gift. "Like a good captain, George seeks out and recruits the best player or member in this case, to meet every challenge," says Shaner.
Lawn care: Roger Yeary / 
Vice president of health, safety and environmental 
stewardship of TruGreen ChemLawn, Delaware, OH

BY RON HALL

any lawn care company owners probably weren't in the business when the industry faced its most bitter battles concerning lawn care chemical use. Nor are you probably aware that one of the industry’s influential figures during those times is quietly leaving the industry.

Dr. Roger Yeary retired from TruGreen ChemLawn earlier this year, but remains as a consultant with the company until the end of this year. A toxicologist, he still makes once-a-week trips to the TG-CL research facility in Delaware, OH.

"Probably what I’m going to do is spend the winter months in Arizona and the summer and fall months in Columbus," Yeary tells LM.

Yeary's career took several twists before he began his 25-plus-year association with lawn care. He earned a degree in veterinary medicine at The Ohio State University, Columbus, in 1956, but several months into a practice in Willoughby, OH, he was coaxed into joining the U.S. Air Force School of Aviation Medicine in San Antonio, TX.

Yeary fulfilled his military commitment working with a small group of specialists developing environmental systems for space flight, part of the U.S. space race with the Soviets. It was during this time that he became interested in toxicology.

In 1977, then with The Ohio State University cooperative extension, he got a call from ChemLawn which was fielding concerns from homeowners fearful of the safety of lawn care products on their pets.

"I started doing some consulting for them," says Yeary. "I did that about four years and finally realized that I was working 2 full-time jobs, so I left the university and went to work for ChemLawn fulltime in 1984," he says.

During the tumultuous 1980s, when municipalities across the United States tried to write their own rules concerning chemical lawn care, the industry looked to ChemLawn and the data generated by Yeary to show that the industry presented negligible risk to employees, customers, their families and pets, and to the environment.

"I've always considered myself to be the guardian of the health and safety of our employees," he says. "Since so many companies copied our programs, I believe that this has had a positive impact on the entire industry."

Yeary, a popular speaker at Green Industry conferences and seminars, participated in dozens of public, legislative and EPA hearings during his career, and defended the industry on national news programs like Ted Koppel and Good Morning America.

"I believe that my most important contribution to the lawn care industry has been defusing the exaggerated and inflammatory claims of the health and environmental risks of lawn care to the media, regulators, legislators and, at times, in the judicial system as an expert witness," he says.
These days, to the point of confusion, the commercial riding mower market is filled with Mid-Mount “Z”s. Many of these machines are being sold with empty points of price, ground speed and overkill of horsepower—ignoring true value to the owner.

To help the selection process, Walker has produced a Buyer’s Guide (hot off the press). While the Mid-Mount fits some mowing jobs, the Buyer’s Guide shows 10 ways the Walker is the better choice for many of today’s landscaped properties. Pick up a copy of the Buyer’s Guide at your Walker dealer or write or call for your copy today.

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Is H-2B right for you?

Little-known details about the application process from this industry expert will save you time and trouble.

The H-2B visa can sometimes solve a company’s inability to find a dependable labor source.

BY JEFF WEST

To H-2B or not to H-2B? That is the question many companies in various seasonal industries are asking themselves more and more often. As little as four years ago, most service companies in the United States hadn’t even heard of an H-2B visa, let alone decided whether to pursue one.

H-2B defined
The H-2B visa has recently become popular with a number of industries that have had difficulty finding a dependable labor source. In laymen’s terms, the H-2B visa is a temporary seasonal work visa for companies that cannot find enough domestic labor to run their business. To be eligible for an H-2B visa, your company must prove that the jobs it’s trying to fill are temporary and seasonal in nature. For example, if you own a landscape company and lay off workers in the fall or winter due to weather, you would be a prime candidate. If your landscape company is located in, say, Arizona, you must prove you have a peak season by showing noticeable fluctuation in your payroll over several years.

Finding the workers
Approximately 90% of workers who arrive in the U.S. under H-2B visas are Mexican immigrants; the remaining 10% come from Canada,