U.S. LAWNS®

Commercial Landscape Management at its best

THINKING ABOUT BECOMING A BUSINESS OWNER?

We can help.

We start with you. We stay with you.

Our Franchise Support Team has over 260 years of combined commercial landscape industry experience to assist you with business and industry knowledge.

INVEST IN YOUR FUTURE

BECOME A FRANCHISE OWNER WITH U.S. LAWNS

YOUR SUCCESS is everything to US

NATIONAL STRENGTH
LOCAL COMMITMENT

1-866-781-4875
franchise@uslawns.net
www.uslawns.com/franchise

CONTENTS»

NOVEMBER 2009
VOL 48, ISSUE 11

Landscape Management is now on Twitter and Facebook. Get the latest news, blogs, and info by becoming a fan of the magazine on Facebook at: http://tiny.cc/MTfcH.

Or you can keep up to date with everything *LM* has to offer by following our tweets at: twitter.com/LandscapeMgmt.

DIGITAL VAULT

Select stories from our e-newsletters. Visit www.landscapemanagement.net/enewsletters to sign up or view.

LMdirect!
What does "sustainability" mean for us? Perhaps you're wondering that in light of the growing popularity, use and misuse of the word within our industry.

Athletic Turf News
The experienced grounds manager at The Ohio Stadium still likes grass best, but says the three-year-old synthetic turf playing field is less stressful to maintain.

LD/B Solutions
After successfully marketing his design-build services with displays at supply yards along busy roadsides, Erik Klein decided to bring the outside in.

Get Growing
Green Giant is a fast growing, pyramid-shaped evergreen that has no serious pest or disease problems.

DEPARTMENTS

6 News & Views
Ariens, Yellowstone acquisitons; PLANET Awards.

20 LM Reports Trenchers

30 Lawn Care Pro
Mark Grunkemeyer, Buckeye Ecocare, Centerville, OH
BY RON HALL

50 A Cut Above
Yellowstone Landscape Group, Plano, TX
BY DANIEL G. JACOBS

20

COLUMNS

4 The Hall Mark
BY RON HALL

18 The Benchmark
BY KEVIN KEHOE

32 Best Practices
BY BRUCE WILSON

48 InfoTech
BY TYLER WHITAKER

64 Whit's World
BY MARTY WHITFORD

IN EVERY ISSUE

61 Products **62** Classifieds
63 Resources

ON THE COVER
Illustration by: Roger Motzkus; www.motzkusart.com

8

FEATURES

8 Corralling customers (B)
Landscapers share how they regain clients' trust and business. BY MARTY WHITFORD

SPECIAL REPORT
21 Turfgrass Fertility Report, Part 2 (LC)
Selecting the right fertilizer to meet today's environmental and competitive challenges is vital for success. BY RON HALL AND CINDY GRAHL

SPECIAL REPORT
35 Water Wise, Part 3 (I)
The Green Industry looks to technology to save irrigation. BY RON HALL

***LM* MARKET MATCH** We've made your life a little easier by supplying icons that direct you to stories targeting your core business.
B – Business, **D/B** – Design/Build, **I** – Irrigation, **LC** – Lawn Care, **M** – Maintenance

SPECIAL SECTION

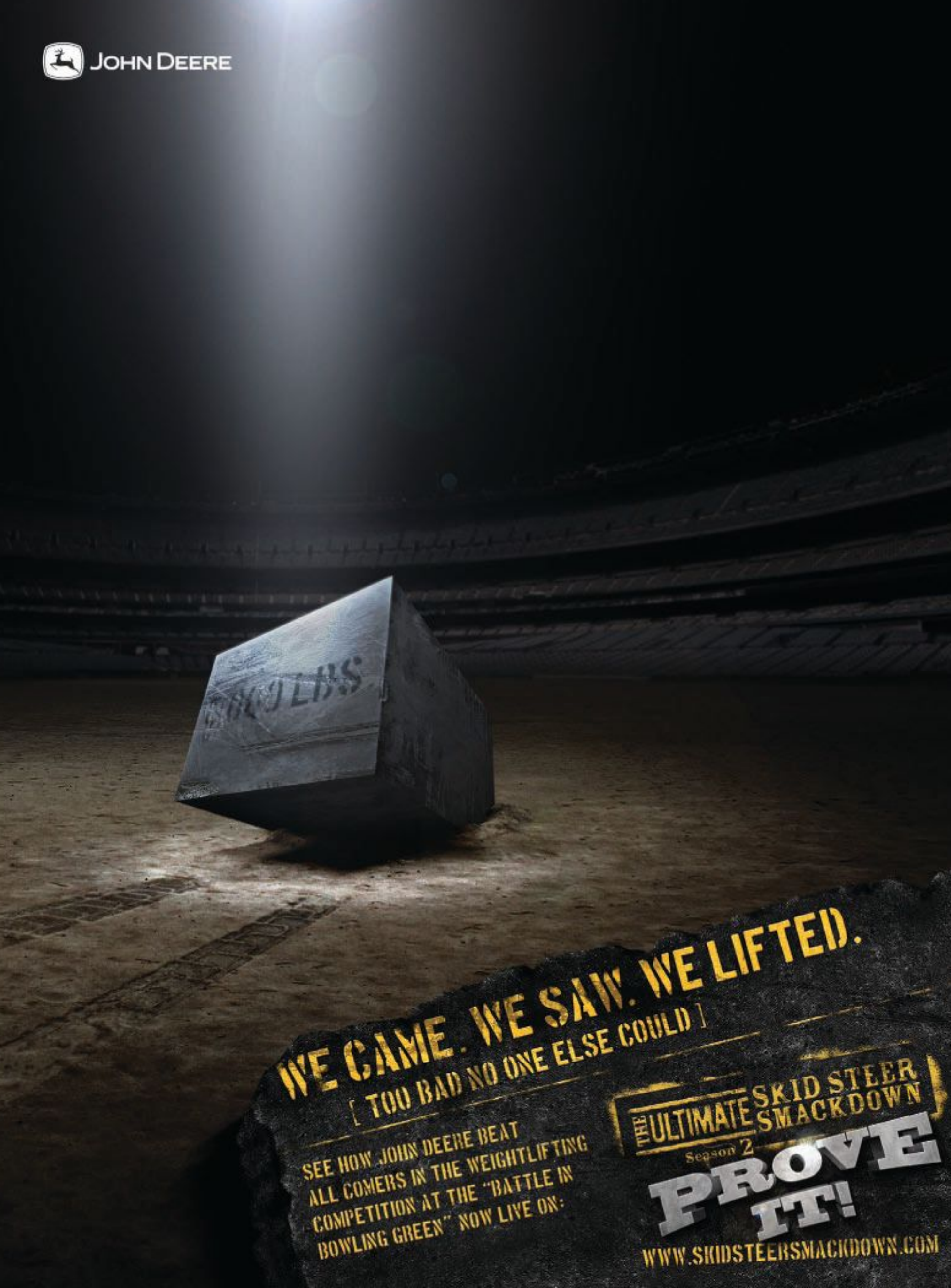
53
LIVESCAPES
The right landscaping can attract wildlife to your clients' property.

Landscape Management

OUR MISSION: *Landscape Management — the* leading information resource for large, successful lawn care, landscape maintenance, design/build and irrigation professionals — empowers Green Industry professionals to learn and grow from their peers and our exclusive business intelligence. Serving as the industry conscience, we not only report on but also help shape news, views, trends and solutions.

Landscape Management

CLEVELAND HEADQUARTERS
600 SUPERIOR AVE. EAST SUITE 1100
CLEVELAND OH 44114 800/669-1668


JOHN DEERE
WE CAME. WE SAW. WE LIFTED.
[TOO BAD NO ONE ELSE COULD]
SEE HOW JOHN DEERE BEAT ALL COMERS IN THE WEIGHTLIFTING COMPETITION AT THE "BATTLE IN BOWLING GREEN" NOW LIVE ON:
THE ULTIMATE SKID STEER SMACKDOWN
Season 2
PROVE IT!
WWW.SKIDSTEERSMACKDOWN.COM

RON HALL EDITOR-AT-LARGE | Contact Ron via e-mail at rhall@questex.com.

H_20 issues invite government control

This fall the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) released an updated Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance. It states all cities in California will have rules to limit the amount of water used for landscape irrigation by January 2010. Local governments can adopt the DWR ordinance or develop their own as long as they provide an equal level of water savings.

California is preparing for what will be a future of rising water costs and increasing scarcity. These regulations will be permanent regardless of when the three-year drought in the state ends.

Preparing for change

Landscapers and irrigation experts in the Golden State — and associations representing them — have been participating in public hearings about the ordinance these past few months. They've voiced their concerns to some of the provisions in the ordinance. Among the provisions are:

- water budgets for landscapes,
- the prevention of excessive erosion and irrigation runoff,
- landscape and irrigation design requirements,
- the use of recycled water where available,
- irrigation audits and
- scheduled irrigation based on local climate.

In a real sense this is government dictating what types of landscapes property owners in California will have and how landscape professionals will be providing services to their customers.

In a perfect world, our industry would function based solely on its own time-tested, **environmentally sound best practices**. But this isn't a perfect world.

Not confined to California

Don't look at this as a California-only phenomenon. It's national. Consider the U.S. EPA WaterSense program and its controversial proposed limits on the amount of turfgrass in landscapes. That's one of several provisions in the program that seems ill-advised. Water is the common denominator.

Whether there's an overt anti-industry bias in these decisions is debatable. The people making these rules almost certainly feel they're for the public's good. Disconcerting, however, is the too-often lack of inclusion of industry participants as part of the rule-making processes. Input from researchers and industry leaders is often ignored. Too bad.

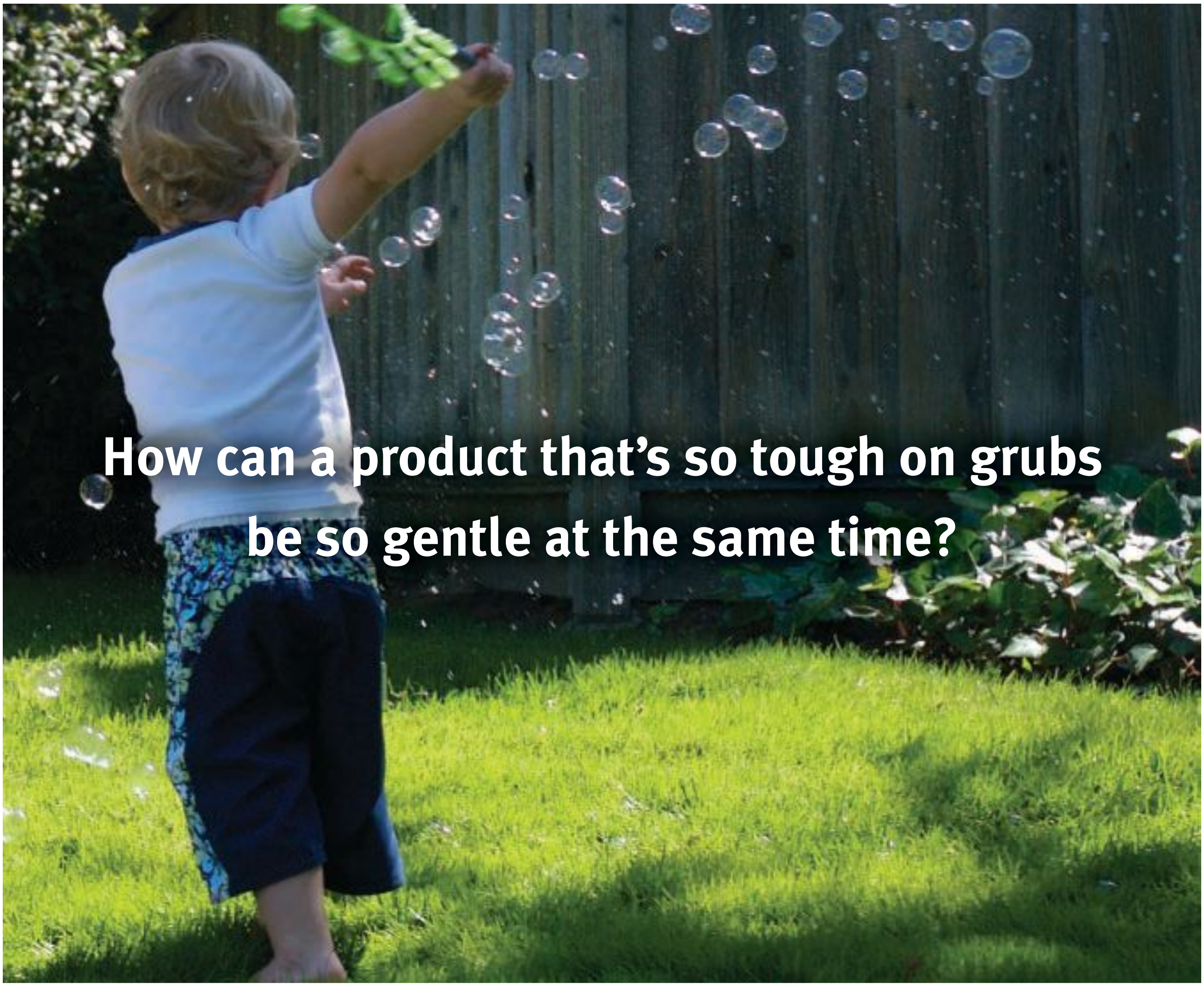
Once policies and enforcement are in place, there's no turning back. Government involvement and oversight grow and rarely, if ever, shrink.

Unsettling also is the pace at which the process has been accelerating. Water-use restrictions seem to be popping up faster than landscape professionals can assimilate them into their service programs. While particulars vary from region to region, these rules typically include:

- watering restrictions,
- limits on turfgrass in landscapes,
- landscape water budgets,
- water audit requirements,
- incentives for installing artificial turf in landscapes and
- rebates for the purchase and use of irrigation-system technology, such as sensors and smart controllers.

Some mandates and guidelines are proven water savers and fit the landscape industry's broader environmental efforts. Others are questionable.

In a perfect world, our industry would function based solely on its own time-tested, environmentally sound best practices. But as we all realize, this isn't a perfect world.



It's a little miracle we call Acelepryn®

More than 550 independent university trials prove it. One application of DuPont™ Acelepryn® insecticide delivers excellent control of the 10 toughest grubs at the lowest application rate ever utilized for white grub control. Plus, Acelepryn® offers more than just grub control. One early application also provides excellent control of key surface-feeding pests, including cutworms, webworms, annual bluegrass weevils and billbugs. No other grub product can match the level of performance or outstanding environmental and toxicological profile of Acelepryn.® In fact, Acelepryn® has been classified as reduced-risk for turf applications by the U.S. EPA. DuPont™ Acelepryn.® Learn more by visiting us at proproducts.dupont.com. **Kill them. With kindness.**

DuPont Professional Products

The miracles of science™

Ariens, Yellowstone make acquisitions

Ariens Co. has acquired the assets of debris maintenance equipment manufacturer, Parker Co. Inc. of Phoenix. Ariens will continue to sell Parker products through two-step distribution channels in the outdoor power equipment market. The products will also be made available as brands sold directly to the independent dealer channel for the fall 2010 clean-up season.

"The addition of the Parker lawn sweepers and debris handling equipment will help extend the lawn and garden season for our equipment dealers with fall clean-up products," says Dan Ariens, president of Ariens, Brillion, WI. "It will also serve our growing sports turf maintenance segment."

Ariens will produce the Parker products at its manufacturing facility in Auburn, NE. The company expects to make parts available to distributors in 30 to 60 days. Whole goods availability is expected by December.

BIO Landscape & Maintenance, a Yellowstone Landscape Group company, expanded its Texas presence through the acquisition of Outdoor Environments, a commercial landscape maintenance company headquartered in Houston. All members of the Outdoor Environments team have joined the BIO team.

"Outdoor Environments and its principal, Chris Lallier, will quickly become an integral part of the BIO team," said Robert Taylor, president of BIO. "Chris worked for BIO some years back, went out on his own, and we welcome him back to share in the vision we have for BIO and Yellowstone. Chris is a very capable manager and will soon be running our North Houston Branch."

With the addition of Outdoor Environments, BIO now serves 10 counties with a combined 380 employees throughout Southeast Texas. In April 2008, BIO merged with the Yellowstone Landscape Group, one of the largest full service and environmentally focused landscape providers in the United States.

PLANET honors Environmental Award winners at GIE+EXPO

PLANET honors Rick Doesburg with its Lifetime Leadership Award. Pictured left to right: Andy Doesburg, Peggy Doesburg, Rick Doesburg and PLANET President, Bill Hildebolt.

PHOTO BY: PHILIPPE NOBILE

The Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) is proud to announce the recipients of its annual 2009 Environmental Improvement Awards. This year marks the program's 40th anniversary. Of the 134 projects entered in this year's awards program, 126 were recognized with an award. The awards breakdown includes three Decade Awards, 38 Grand Awards, 46 Merit Awards, and 39 Distinction Awards.

"It is encouraging to the entire Green Industry to see such excellence," says Awards Committee Chair Will Spiegelberg, CLP, Spiegelberg Landscape Design Inc., Chicago. "Congratulations from all of us at PLANET."

The awards program, which is open to only PLANET members, reflects the association's commitment to creating and preserving the beauty of the landscape and is designed to reward independent landscape, lawn care, and interior plantscaping professionals who execute superior projects.

"The quality of the submittals was overwhelming in many realms," says Spiegelberg.

PLANET also presented special awards including the Promise Award to Marshall Scheibe; the Association Partner of the Year award to the Minnesota Nursery & Landscape Association; the Lifetime Leadership Award to Rick Doesburg, CCLP; and Sustainable Company Awards to Pacific Landscape Management, Lambert Landscape Co., John Mini Distinctive Landscapes, Cagwin & Dorward and The Laurelrock Co.

Special thanks to the judges for their commitment and expertise. The judging panel consisted of Matt Triplett CLP, CLT, CLIA, Willamette Landscape Services, Tualatin, OR; Louis Kobus, CLP, Fox Run Nurseries, Alexandria, VA; Aaron R. Williams, CLP, Williams Landscape & Design, Williamsburg, VA; and Gerald J. Grossi, CTP-CSL, ArborLawn, Lansing, MI.

Through a special multimedia show, recipients were honored at the PLANET Green Industry Conference Awards Presentation and Reception last month, in Louisville, KY. The Awards Reception was sponsored by Husqvarna.

> *"'Follow up and follow through' is the motto we live by. Clients will always migrate back to such a business model should low-ballers not be able to keep the pace."*
>
> — **DONALD SMITH**, PRESIDENT OF SANTA ANA, CA-BASED PACIFIC CREST LANDSCAPE

BY **MARTY WHITFORD** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

CORRALLING CUSTOME

Landscapers share how they regain clients' trust and business.

ILLUSTRATION BY: ROGER MOTZKUS; WWW.MOTZKUSART.COM

CORRALLING LANDSCAPE customers can be harder than herding cats.

A September online survey conducted by *Landscape Management* (*LM*) shows the average landscape company lost 12% of its customers in 2008, and another 9% will gallop away this year.

The *LM* survey found 20% of landscapers let their customers just trot off. Although one-third win back 25% or more of their lost clients, another 44% of landscapers admit they corral, at most, one of every 20 customers who stray. The average landscape business, theoretically, could need to replace all of its customers every decade or sooner.

Losing customers' trust and business is a part of doing business. But those losses should be exceptions to the rule — and they need not be permanent. Our survey shows most customer loss is spurred by low-ballers and landscapers overpromising and under-delivering. The flip side of the coin — WOWing customers while competing on value, not price — presents the key to lassoing lost business back beside you.

RS

"We have a 'Return Customer Discount' note on our invoices that has helped bring back clients from 10 years earlier."

— **TREVOR GRIFFIN**, OWNER OF SULLIVAN, NH-BASED T. GRIFFIN TREE

> *"We lost a client to a low-baller, who lost the account to another low-baller, who lost it to a third low-baller. After the site was a disaster, we got the account back at a higher contract price."*
>
> — **ROLLIN HAAS**, PRESIDENT OF MONTEREY, CA-BASED MASTER LANDSCAPES

Rescue opportunities

Losing one of your largest customers to a lower-priced competitor hurts. But if that competitor fails to follow through, it creates quite a rescue opportunity — if you are willing to shelve your ego and shovel an ex-client out of trouble.

Last winter, Elkhart, IN-based NatureScape Services lost a key full-service account when the real-estate developer was wooed away by supposed savings.

Before NatureScape lost the account, it received all of the client's installation and maintenance business at strip malls and residential rental properties, basically without having to bid on the projects, says Mike Knepper, NatureScape's operations manager. The customer made a price-based switch in landscape service providers, but he soon discovered cheaper isn't always better.

This February, the former customer called Knepper and asked whether NatureScape could bail him out by providing snow removal at one of his strip malls that the other contractor had not been able to get to on time. The parking lot was a mess. NatureScape's crews were there *that day* to scrape it, and applied salt for the next four days to melt the parking lot's 4-in. base of ice.

"I gave him a break on that bill in the hopes that it would help us win back his business," Knepper says. "This spring he told me he 'had learned his lesson' — that he now realizes our service, support and response times are well worth our slightly higher rates. He asked us to again service all of the jobs he pulled from us last season.

"Unfortunately, in this industry a lot of contractors spend a majority of their time cutting their competitors' throats instead of putting their efforts and resources into providing stellar service and quality," Knepper adds. "It was nice to affirm that sometimes 'the good guys' actually do win in the end."

Low-ballers lose

Most of Ryan Lawn & Tree's lost-and-found customers strayed after competitors dangled lower prices in front of them, notes Mike McGillicuddy, turf manager for the Overland Park, KS-based business. Many returned because they now trust Ryan even more and place more value on its service quality.

Ryan is far from alone. Quite a few landscapers say they also recover business once former clients realize the grass all too often isn't greener — literally — on the cheaper side of the street.

continued on page 12