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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.
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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.

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.

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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

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 Tripplett 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.

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CORRALLING CUSTOMERS

Landscapers share how they regain clients’ trust and business.

“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 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.
“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
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.