CATCH THIS WHILE YOU CAN!

FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY, PURCHASE ANY MODEL OF HUSTLER Z4 RIDING MOWER AND GET A FREE 2-BAG CATCHING SYSTEM.

DON’T MISS THIS DEAL!

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL HUSTLER TURF EQUIPMENT DEALER TO GET ALL THE DETAILS OR SCHEDULE A TEST DRIVE. THIS OFFER EXPIRES SOON SO CATCH IT WHILE YOU CAN!

48”, 54” & 60” Decks available in the Z4

hustler turf.com
COVER STORY

continued from page 10

Many landscapers just have to “cowboy up” — be patient and stand behind their superior service and fair pricing.

After six years together, a large industrial customer dropped Black Landscape Contracting in Mechanicsburg, PA, opting to go with a national company for a 32% savings. President Greg Black said the national company failed to perform to expectations, and the client returned to Black Landscape within two years.

“We lost a mowing customer we had for five years to a low-ball,” says Peter Schepis, vice president of The Greenwood Group LLC, based in New Melle, MO. “The first month, the client’s lawn was mowed one and one-half times — and they tried to charge him more! We got the customer back with a 10% increase.”

Kevin Peck, a regional manager for Gaithersburg, MD-based Brickman Group, says the company recently lost a longtime customer because of a competitor’s extremely low bid. “Within six months, the former client was all but begging us to come back at the higher price, and apologized for ever questioning what they were getting from us.”

Brad’s Lawn Service in Owensboro, KY, also lost a client to a low-ball but the business returned in short order. “That was more than 20 years ago. The customer’s been with us ever since and won’t accept bids from other landscapers,” says Owner Brad Bell.

“We had a customer leave us who was happy with our services but was offered a lower price and wanted to save money,” says Blake Moore, president of Ferta-Lawn.

“PRO Landscape paid for itself 30 times over the first year!”
Kostas Menegakis, Landscapes-R-Us

If you make only one investment in your business this year, PRO Landscape design software should be at the top of your list.

It’s packed with more money-making tools than you ever thought possible, and is so easy to use, you’ll be up and running in minutes, translating your ideas into photorealistic images, accurate CAD plans and polished proposals that sell.

- Realistic photo imaging
- Easy-to-use CAD
- Customer proposals
- 3D photo rendering
- 3D CAD rendering
- Night & holiday lighting

“PRO Landscape paid for itself 30 times over the first year!”
Kostas Menegakis, Landscapes-R-Us

In today’s economy, there’s only one sure-fire investment.

www.prolandscape.com
800-231-8574 or prolandscape@drafix.com

SELL BETTER • PLAN BETTER • BID BETTER

LOST & FOUND

Following are 10 tips for regaining lost customers’ trust and business. These best practices were shared by members of The Leader’s Edge peer group for landscape professionals:

DOs

1. Do tell former clients you appreciate their business, show remorse for failing/losing them, and let them know you are ready to help if questions or problems arise — regardless of who currently manages their landscaping.
2. Do keep former customers on your mailing list — stay top of mind with them.
3. Do remain proactive on warranty issues: This is your chance to stay face-to-face and showcase your professionalism.
4. Do stay warm, open, friendly and accessible — so if they want to return, they won’t feel embarrassed.
5. Do get creative. For example, send flowers to Mrs. Smith with a note that reads, “Mr. Smith won your heart. We want to win back your trust and yard!”
1. Don’t assume you know the real reasons why your clients left. Ask the decision makers what triggered the moves, and let them know their feedback is helpful.

2. Don’t blame former clients or argue with their feelings or perceptions of your service. Instead, acknowledge their feelings and share their concerns.

3. Don’t try to talk customers out of leaving. Instead, offer to fix any problems and refund their money. They might talk themselves out of leaving. And don’t pester them if they’re not ready to talk: Timing is crucial.

4. Don’t trash former clients’ new landscapers or their do-it-yourself work.

5. Don’t overpromise to win back accounts — that might have been the problem to begin with.


Source for all infographics: September 2009 Landscape Management online survey with 249 respondents.

**THE BOTTOM 10%**

10% of landscape companies reported losing a combined average 44% of their customers in 2008.

**DON’Ts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>2009 Maintenance Customer Retention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employee retention</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11% or more</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TROUBLESONE FOURSOME**

What are the biggest threats to your customer retention?

- Customer service
- Low-ballers
- Employee retention
- RecessIon-made do-it-yourselfers

Wholesale distribution of specialty agricultural chemicals, serving the following industries:

- Landscape • Nursery • Golf
- Vegetation Management • Pest Control • Fumigation • Public Agency

Expert Training Staff • Full Product Line • ISO Certification

---

**TARGET™**

SANTA FE SPRINGS HOME OFFICE
800-352-3870
15415 Marquardt Ave., Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670

PORTLAND, OR
877-827-4381

TEMPE, AZ
800-352-5548

FRESNO, CA
800-827-4389

LAS VEGAS, NV
866-472-3695

SAN JOSE, CA
800-767-0719

SAN MARCOS, CA
800-237-5233

SAN DIEGO, CA
800-533-0816

SACRAMENTO, CA
800-573-0816

Come and visit us at: www.target-specialty.com
COVER STORY

SWEET SERVICE SAVES

What follow are a few examples of landscape service miscues and how the companies righted the situations and regained their clients’ trust:

› **Tree-demption** — A technician with Fullerton Grounds Maintenance in Ledgewood, NJ, applied Sevin instead of Trimec to about 100 trees dotting the landscape of a large condominium community. The company quickly informed the client of the mistake and spent the next week washing, watering, pruning and deep-root feeding the trees. Only two trees were lost; Fullerton replaced them in the fall. The condo community remains a customer.

› **Mulch A Do about Something** — Impact Landscaping in Morgantown, WV, installed 25 cu. yds. of a very acidic mulch at a high profile fitness club and it burned the delicate foliage and perennials in the beds. The landscaper identified the problem with the mulch supplier, and watered the beds daily to dilute the salinity. The company also replaced a few annuals and installed temporary irrigation hoses to keep the plants healthy. Once the situation was diffused and corrected, Impact Landscaping won the full maintenance contract for the property.

› **No Sorry Sod** — Terry Landscaping and Lawn Care in St. Louis installed sod on a yard this spring and even though the homeowner properly watered it, summer weeds quickly overtook the sod. The company replaced the sod free of charge. President Russell Terry told the pleasantly surprised client that if his name was going to be associated with the work, he wanted to be sure it looked professionally done. — MW

continued from page 12

in Bountiful, UT. “Before the end of the year, she returned. She wanted to know if we had a ‘Prodigal Son’ program for those who are sorry for leaving.”

**Corrective action**

No-shows and poor performance also trigger the loss of customer trust and business, but these, too, are reversible.

“I accidentally stood up a prospect who was a referral and, as a result, I didn’t get the job,” says Calvin Craig, owner of Calvin Craig Landscaping in Sacramento, CA. “But after I brought her flowers and told her how embarrassed I was, she hired us.”

When it rains it pours, especially for Daily Rain in Dexter, MI.

“We had a technician miss not one but two scheduled service appointments with the same client two days in a row,” says President Jerry Boquette. “Our continued on page 16
**WEAKEST LINK**
Most landscapers say their design/build/installation customers are the most likely to cancel services.

**NOT EASY COME … BUT EASY GO**
With annual customer loss averaging more than 10%, a typical landscape company theoretically could need to replace all of this year’s customers within a decade.

**LAWN RANGERS**
How does your 2009 lawn care customer retention compare to last year?

- 56% The same or better
- 22% Down 1-5%
- 13% Down 6-10%
- 9% Down 11% or more

**ON THE REBOUND**
27% of landscape companies are predict-ing their customer retention to increase in 2009.

> 9 percentage points is the average projected climb of these forecasted fortunate few.

Source for all infographics: September 2009 Landscape Management online survey with 249 respondents

---

**TIME IS MONEY**
How long does it take you to follow up with lost customers?

- We call the same day they stop service. 43%
- Within one week 25%
- Several months or longer 4%
- We just let them go. 20%
- Within one month 8%

---

**OUR QUICKBOOKS INTEGRATION IS SO SMOOTH**
Smooth. Real smooth. One click, and minutes later your entire customer list, employee list and item list is automatically synced with QuickBooks. Any change you make in QuickBooks or QXpress sync in real-time.

*and simple that you’ll be scheduling jobs*
QXpress looks and feels just like QuickBooks, so you’ll feel right at home, and be scheduling your crews and routes in no time.

*and creating invoices the very next day…*
Scheduled jobs convert into QuickBooks invoices with only a couple clicks! Quick and easy. With no double-entry, you’ll save time and prevent costly mistakes.

...just like Jody at Sepulvado Ventures Inc.

"The moment I started using QXpress, all of my apprehensions disappeared. It looked just like QuickBooks and imported my QuickBooks data, so I had a full database from the very start. My staff and I were literally scheduling in QXpress right away. Within no time, our crews’ mowing schedules were full and we were even scheduling landscape projects. It was the best transition I could have asked for!"

Discover why lawn & landscaping professionals have rated QXpress the easiest scheduling add-on to setup.

Contact QXpress for a FREE demo today!
http://www.qxpress.com/LPD 1-888-QXPRESS x1

---

**GOLD SERVICES**
QuickBooks
Scheduling Software

---

ILLUSTRATIONS BY: STOCK INTERNATIONAL INC.
“One customer complained we weren’t removing enough leaves from her yard, but a camera later revealed a neighbor was dumping leaves in her yard just minutes after we left.”

— PAUL E. ANDERSON, OWNER OF JACKSONVILLE, FL-BASED PEA GREEN LAWN & HOME MAINTENANCE

Mayday’s Lawn and Pest in Winter Park, FL, was calling “mayday, mayday,” after one of its clients canceled services across four properties because of poor performance. CEO Jason May’s make-good included hiring a new landscape crew and personally being on-site for service delivery six weeks straight.

“An employee’s poor work and attitude lost us an account,” says James Van Eenwyk, president of Grandpa’s Nursery & Gardens in Sodus, NY. “We fired him and through communication — an apology and a personal promise to exceed their expectations — we won back the account on a trial basis. We still have them as a client today.”

Craig might have been able to smooth over his faux pas with flowers, but not everyone is as fortunate. Flowers were the problem — not the solution — for James E. Coffey & Son Landscape Contractors in Laconia, NH.

“One customer caught a few of our employees throwing fallen rhododendron flowers at each other for more than a half-hour,” says Owner James Coffey. “The client called me and told the employees to leave the property.”

Coffey says he spoke with his crew and quickly visited the client to apologize face-to-face for his associates’ actions.

“I then put myself on that crew, which was a group of good people who just ‘had a moment,’” Coffey notes. “I stayed on the crew until the customer, whom I had done business with for nine years, again felt comfortable with our crew.”

Frequently, corralling straying customers “brings you both full circle,” concludes Coffey, noting the once-distressed customer relationship healed so well that the client and landscape crew eventually shared “a special moment.”

“A year after ‘the incident,’ while popping in on our same landscape crew at the same residence, I saw the customer throw the first rhododendron flower,” Coffey adds. “We all laughed, and that was that.”

Who’s in Your Corner?

Rise Up & Fight

this recession like a champ...

Join Landscape Management’s Consulting Clubs today.

Visit www.LMConsultingClubs.net today to receive limited-time reduced rates with our business coaches.
NEXT STOP: YOUR LAWN.

Only a superstar rolls like this, and you’re about to get a backstage pass to the hottest tour on the road. It’s the Rock the Weeds Tour 2009 featuring Dimension® specialty herbicide, the No. 1 preemergence herbicide brand in the lawn and landscape markets. Dimension is cranking up the volume on tough weeds like crabgrass, creeping woodsorrel, bittercress and many other grassy and broadleaf weeds. And its nonstaining formulation rocks all season long and delivers outstanding early postemergence control on crabgrass. On this tour, there are no groupies or wannabes. It’s brought to you by the company that delivers only proven solutions — Dow AgroSciences.

www.DowProvesIt.com
The common thread in conversations with business owners is the perception that it gets harder every year just to get back to the same place. Next year will be another challenging year. This is not pessimism; rather it is an acceptance of reality. The facts are housing and unemployment will be a drag on spending at least into 2011. And facts, as they say, are stubborn things. No amount of false hope and rah-rah changes that. The supply/demand equation remains tilted in the customer’s favor, and the current political and lending climates are clearly unhelpful to small business owners.

Ninety-five percent of the companies I know will make less money this year. They are being realistic about next year and adjusting their investment strategies accordingly. They are investing in two primary areas: sales to generate revenues, and computer systems to reduce labor expense.

Investment in sales
A significant opportunity exists to pick up new business in 2010. Call it the “boomerang” effect. Many customers who contracted with the “low price guy” are not happy now, and they are willing to pay a little more — although not a lot more — for improved quality and reliability.

Make an investment in a pricing model that enables you to win this business while still making gross profit. At the same time, investing in additional sales staff is a good idea. In many cases, the actual hire may be in operations or administration, freeing up the owner to focus on sales.

The days of selling by simply answering the phone are over. You must prospect more, bid more and employ what might be long-dormant selling skills to succeed. Investments in pricing and “feet on the street” are producing solid returns for many business owners already.

Although investments in Web sites, advertising and collateral material are always good ideas, they do not seem to be producing equal results.

Investment in systems
Another significant opportunity exists to reduce field and non-field labor expenses. Several companies I work with have invested in software that helps them manage in real time, thus minimizing the entry and manipulation of estimates, work orders and purchases. The goal is to enable the same number of people to handle greater workloads more efficiently.

This produces a “reduction in overhead” relative to revenue that has at least two virtuous effects:
1. It allows you to reallocate money away from “dead overhead” and redirect it to your sales effort.
2. It reduces your per-hour overhead recovery rate, allowing you to reduce prices in your pricing model — thus allowing you to safely work at a lower gross margin.

These investments go hand in hand, and are integral to recreating the way you will need to do business next year. Given the economic realities, it is best to get started now with these investments or risk falling behind. If you under-invest, the perception that it is getting harder to get back to the same place will unfortunately become your reality.

If you under-invest (in sales and systems), the perception that it is getting harder to get back to the same place will unfortunately become your reality.
SLICE
TRANSITION TIME

Katana™ Turf Herbicide
Quickly removes overseeded ryegrass from bermudagrass and zoysiagrass – even in cooler weather.

NEW

CONTROLS:
Clumpy Ryegrass  |  Fescues  |  Kyllingas  |  Poa  |  Broadleaf Weeds

ISIHARA-SANGYO KAISHA, LTD.

Gordon Corporation
An Employee-Owned Company
800.821.7925  •  pbigordon.com/katana
TRENCHERS

Compact Power Inc.
The Boxer 118 trencher features an 18-hp, air-cooled Kohler Command Pro gasoline engine, with a chain speed of 280 feet per minute. The dirt cut tooth chain is made of high carbon steel with frosted carbide tips. Available in 24- and 36-in. lengths, the unit is complemented by a standard discharge auger, which simultaneously pushes the dirt away — allowing for a clean cut trench and consistent trenching speeds across a variety of soils. The 1,062-lb., rubber tracked trencher produces just 2.9 psi, and produces a trench width range of 4 to 8 in. BoxerEquipment.com or 800/476-9673

Barreto Manufacturing
Because of its large footprint, the tracks of the new 2324TK Track Trencher are less invasive on the landscape. Cross-trenching is made simple — and by combining tracks with additional weight, the ability to keep the trench straight is greatly improved. The 2324TK features an ergonomic, single-handed control and up to 48 in. trenching depth. BarretoMfg.com or 800/525-7348

Brown Products Inc.
In addition to its Trench-Master line, Brown’s Model F931H BedEdger provides trenching capability, too. Featuring a 9hp Honda engine and steerable wheels, the unit trenches up to 9 in. deep and 2 in. wide. Interchangeable rotors provide versatility for landscaping or trenching operations. BrownProducts.com or 800/897-3726

For the Edge Inc.
The TRENCH’N edge Trencher has developed a new method of installing Sub-surface Drip Irrigation (SDI) and Waste Water Dispersion (WWD) systems that decrease installation cost and clean-up labor. SDI also eliminates the overspray onto sidewalks, streets and driveways that have now been restricted by California and Texas. The “blade-in-a-blade” technology is an option on all of the company’s irrigation trenchers, which will install both conventional irrigation and SDI/WWD systems all in one unit. This blade will also allow for the installation of low-voltage lighting, cable TV, dog fencing and sit fence. TrenchNEdge.com or 651/777-7923

Ditch Witch
The new RT80 is a utility-based, fully hydrostatic trencher with a compact footprint and an 83 gross hp turbocharged diesel engine. The unit offers a top speed of 9.8 mph. It offers four combinations of torque and speed for greater adaptability. cruise control and other operator comforts are standard, as is a 30-gal. fuel tank and an advanced cooling system to help maintain optimal engine performance. Several attachments are available, including traversing trencher, saw and backhoe. DitchWitch.com or 800/654-6481

E-Z Trench
The new Groundsaw model EZ9100 was built for fast digging, durability and performance. It has a centrifugal clutch drive that is bathed in oil, which provides protection against extreme conditions and abuse. Carbide bits cut right through tree roots and hard soils with progressive biting blades. The 250-lb. unit makes a clean, neat 2.5-in. wide trench from 0 to 13 in. deep. EZTrench.com or 843/756-6444

Turf Teq
In addition to Bed Edging and Trenching, the Multi-Use Power Edger offers a Bed Grooming function. This feature enables the operator to quickly, easily and cleanly maintain beds with minimal disturbance throughout the entire season. Capabilities include grooming, edging and trenching, among others. All Multi-Use Power Edger functions can be performed by simply changing the blade and guard. TurfTeq.com or 866/503-8873

Toro
The Toro TRX-15 and TRX-19 tracked, walk-behind trenchers boast traction, maneuverability and zero-turn ease of operation, even on rough terrain. They feature user-friendly controls and four-cycle, V-twin engines. A large oil reservoir helps maintain low engine temperature and prolongs engine life, and a large, dual-element KAI air cleaner improves airflow, performance and engine wear. Toro.com/TRX or 800/DIG-TORO

Ventrac
The KY400 Trencher is capable of trenching up to 40 in. deep with a 5.5-in.-wide cut. It is designed with dual Push-N-Pull cylinders to assure positive boom control for digging, boom lift and transport. The terminator/cup combo chain offers carbide cutting tips for cutting performance in a variety of soil conditions. Digging teeth bolt onto the chain for easy replacement. Ventrac.com or 866/VENTRAC