

THE MARKET DURING COVID-19 PG. 12

PLUS: SHARE THE KNOWLEDGE PG. 26

JULY 2020
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THE WATER ISSUE

Technology in the
irrigation industry
is opening new
opportunities for
contractors.

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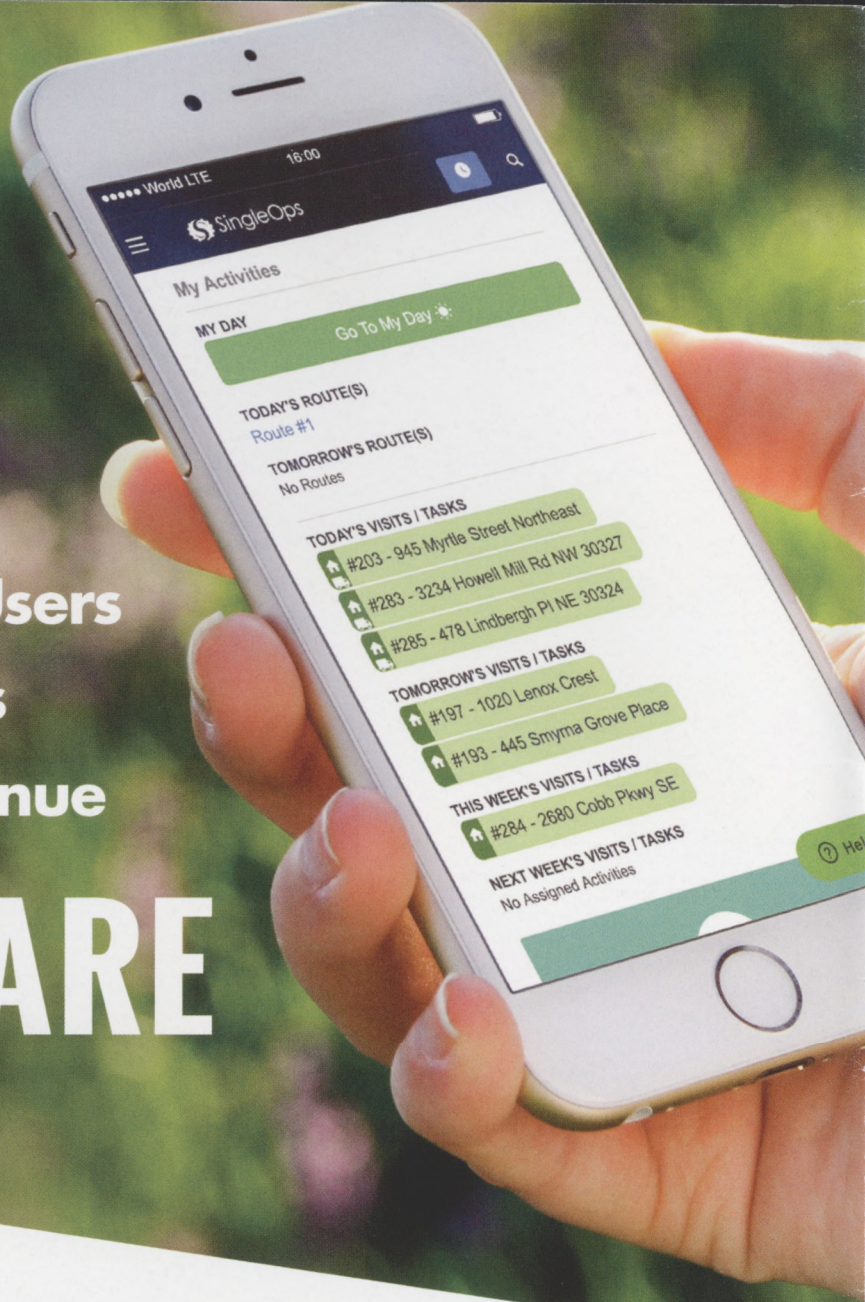
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"It's a huge
part of the
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growth of our
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PG. 12

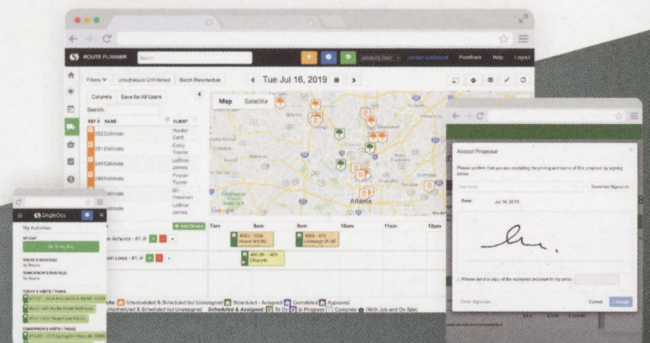
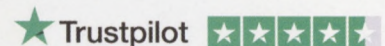
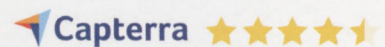


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THE WATER ISSUE



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JULY 2020

A GIE MEDIA PUBLICATION
VOLUME 41, NUMBER 7

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Brian Horn
Editor, Lawn & Landscape

"In the current economic climate, a lot of you are forced to focus on the present more than ever."

Present tense

ESPN recently aired an interesting documentary called "The Last Dance." The documentary followed the 1997-98 Chicago Bulls during the final season of their National Basketball Association dynasty in the 1990s. If you are at all interested in sports, I recommend it.

Growing up as a Cleveland Cavaliers fan, Michael Jordan broke my heart a few times as he was particularly great at dominating them. But it was hard to hate him because he was so unbelievably talented. I mean, what kid didn't want to "Be Like Mike."

The documentary lets you in on how obsessed Jordan was with winning. I had read books and heard stories about his work ethic, so none of that information was really new.

But the documentary did make me look at his drive in a different way. I realized how much he cared about the present. Sure, he held grudges from the past, but he didn't really focus too much on tomorrow. That type of thinking would have taken the attention away from the current task.

When the Bulls weren't really playing for anything and wanted to hold Jordan out after an injury he had healed from, he was

stunned. He didn't care the team wasn't going to go far in the playoffs if they made it. He wanted to try his hardest and win every game possible. Every win and loss has a lesson that you can't fully digest if you are sitting on the sidelines.

As business owners, you're told to learn from your mistakes, focus on the now and plan for the future. In the current economic climate, a lot of you are forced to focus on the present more than ever. Who knows what the rest of the year may hold, so making the most out of today's job is what will help you succeed and even survive into the fourth quarter of 2020 and into 2021.

Sometimes, we've missed opportunities because we're too focused on what happened yesterday or what will happen tomorrow.

I think we all can learn from Jordan about living in the moment and doing our best right now.

At the end of "The Last Dance," the director chose a great song, with a great line that sums up Jordan's maniacal approach to winning – "Present Tense" by Pearl Jam.

"Makes much more sense to live in the present tense." – *Brian Horn*

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5811 Canal Rd., Valley View, OH, 44125

Phone: 800-456-0707 Editorial Fax: 216-651-0830 Subscriptions & Classifieds: 800-456-0707

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EDITORIAL

BRIAN HORN EDITOR bhorn@gie.net
JIMMY MILLER ASSISTANT EDITOR jmiller@gie.net
KIM LUX ASSISTANT EDITOR klux@gie.net
JIM HUSTON J.R. HUSTON ENTERPRISES jhuston@giemedia.com
BRUCE WILSON & COMPANY bwilson@giemedia.com
THE HARVEST GROUP harvest@giemedia.com
KRISTEN HAMPSHIRE CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

CREATIVE

JUSTIN ARMBURGER ART DIRECTOR jarmburger@gie.net

ADVERTISING/PRODUCTION INQUIRIES

CAITLIN MCCOY cmccoy@gie.net

SALES

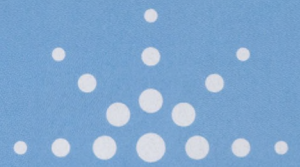
DAVID SZY PUBLISHER dszy@gie.net
DAN HEBERLEIN ACCOUNT MANAGER dheberlein@gie.net
TRACI MUELLER ACCOUNT MANAGER tmueller@gie.net
BRIAN MAY ACCOUNT MANAGER bmay@gie.net
DANNY WALSH ACCOUNT MANAGER dwalsh@gie.net
RUSSELL WARNER NATIONAL ACCOUNT MANAGER rwarnar@gie.net
STEVEN WEBB CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING SALES swebb@gie.net

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REACTING TO THE COVID-19 CHALLENGE

→ **ENTREPRENEURS ARE AN INTERESTING BREED.** They come in all shapes and sizes. Becoming one isn't for the faint of heart. Once you become one, staying one is even tougher. Successful entrepreneurs love not only people but also challenges. It's important to understand that owning a business no more makes you an entrepreneur than owning a saddle makes you a cowboy... there's a lot more to it.

Entrepreneurship is all about character. Circumstances don't determine your character. Rather, they reveal it. Too many people, especially consultants, tend to think that success is all about having the right technology, having the right software or implementing the latest management technique (fad). They're wrong. It's all about becoming and staying the right person.

Because the current COVID-19 pandemic is so unprecedented and insidious, it provides us with not only one of the greatest challenges, but also one of the greatest opportunities that our nation has ever seen. Solving this problem will reveal our character, not create it.

Here's how some of my clients (fellow entrepreneurs) are responding to the current coronavirus challenge:

ANALYSIS AND ACTION. Loren has a great company in the southwest U.S., and he planned that his 2020 revenue would equal or exceed his 2019 sales of about \$12 million. Due to the current pandemic and to the fact that he probably would not get his 80-plus H-2B workers, he reduced his 2020 sales projections to roughly \$6 million. This wise entrepreneur did his homework, refined his numbers and faced the crisis head-on. He didn't sulk or have an extended pity-party. He took decisive action based on good analysis.

Ken was building a great company in a booming Texas market. He knew his margins were far too thin and that he needed to calculate his costs and pricing more accurately. He had a fantastic marketing team and a production team that could hit any goal set before them. Then it all hit the skids due to the current pandemic. March/April sales took a big hit and the future was very uncertain, but he brought me in to do my analysis anyway. We established a 2020 baseline budget for all divisions and calculated daily revenue goals for every service that his company provided. His salespeople and production team responded to the challenge with vigor and, at this point, it looks like his 2020 sales will exceed his projections. This seasoned entrepreneur and his team faced adversity, spit in its face and prevailed.

Henry and Tom are in their late twenties, and they closed a deal last year to buy a company in New England where they had been working for a number of years. They both had degrees in turf management and knew the production side of the business. Nathan, the

previous owner, had been a client of mine for thirty years and brought me in to train Henry and Tom about the business side of things. We created a budget for 2020 and reviewed all of the pricing for their services. They were excited but a bit nervous about their new venture. They knew that if they achieved the modest increase in sales that we had projected in the budget, everything would work out fine.

Once the pandemic hit, their anxiety increased significantly. However, they had a good plan that was quantifiable, easy to monitor and simple. They also had a good support team to back them up and encourage them. They dug in and focused on sales because they knew that if they sold the work, they'd get it done profitably in the field. Tracking each and every lead and its status provided them with a daily progress report as they pursued their goals. They knew exactly what was in the pipeline and could see their steady progress. This lessened their anxiety and gave them confidence that they could be successful.

COMMON THEME. These four entrepreneurs had a simple, measurable plan that they could track throughout the year. Not only could they see how they were progressing toward their annual sales budget, but they could also see how they and their crews were doing on a daily basis. However, they had something more. These individuals had the determination to succeed in spite of (not because of) their circumstances. If you're going to thrive during the COVID-19 pandemic (or during any crisis), you've got to have grit. Remember, it's not the size of the dog that's in the fight, it's the size of the fight that's in the dog. Bark loudly, my friend, but bite harder! **L&L**

↓
HAVING THE DETERMINATION TO SUCCEED, regardless of your circumstances, is pivotal if your company hopes to survive this pandemic.

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LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

→ **AS WE ASSESS THE PANDEMIC'S** longer-term impact on the economy, two things this crisis has in common with past recessionary events are a heightened sense of urgency around planning and budgeting, and questions about how to manage the unexpected.

The best advice I've ever received about leading through change was from the founder of ValleyCrest Companies, Burt Sperber. He would say each and every time, "Don't read the papers." Although news has gone online, Burt's point is solid. Too much information can have an adverse effect on our capacity to be objective.

Managing all the data we get in our daily lives is a problem for everyone, not just CEOs. But when CEOs need clarity to be effective leaders, information overload is likely to reduce the ability to make quality decisions.

We see the influence of information overload happening in conversations at our peer group meetings, as we tackle the data, and process and evaluate what's relevant. Most landscape CEO concerns are focused on shared problems: the crisis' impact on customers, cutting expenses while continuing to invest in their teams and dealing with situations that could require a company-wide pivot.

Now don't get me wrong, it's wise to worry about worst-case scenarios. Just don't let it become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead, coach your teams to manage the crisis lifecycle, not just the event; have empathy for people affected; lead with compassion and positivity, balance optimism with reality, and maintain faith in the long game. There are winners in every crisis and it's possible to emerge from this one stronger and more resilient than ever.

To prepare for what comes next, your planning team should focus on changes in customers' priorities, what they're investing in and what they're cutting back on, such as enhancements, which could lead to reductions in sales, either due to the customers' postponement in spending or budget cuts.

Owners need to challenge their account teams to find out how the pandemic has impacted customers' business or lifestyle, and then propose modified enhancement programs that are in line with their circumstances. This customer-focused approach will also help your account team be better able to help your customers make informed decisions and be more consultative in their selling.

On the residential design/build side, projects are stalled and new ones are being put off. Some landscape companies are going to work through this more effectively than others. They are already coming

up with creative ways to get things moving. For example, "staying in" is the new "going out," and as homeowners are nesting more, there may be opportunities to support new outdoor priorities. Yes, it will be a tough year but, as I said before, there will be winners.

This is also a time to adjust your company's brand message to relate more to what your customers are going through, embrace community leadership and ensure you're being of service to your customers. Update your content to focus more on the "why" and remind your customers that what you're doing and what they're experiencing matters. Keep in mind that there's a difference between information and insight, and be the source for the unique wisdom your customers are looking for.

Technology has introduced new ways to connect with customers, be more purposeful with prospects and align team culture while working remotely. We're using video conferencing in our own company to reinforce team goals, advance learning and create a new, virtual space to be heard and supported.

During any crisis, strong performers perform and weak performers don't. So, if you want to think through the options, it's worth taking a hard look at employees who lack the ability to move fast or adapt to change. Weak performers use recessions as an excuse for their failures or a sign that they lack the determination to succeed. If you need to make adjustments, start here. There are some "personal-best" people looking to grow their careers. Seek out these high performers to build a winning team who can help you envision your new beginning. **L&L**

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CREAM OF THE CROP
WITH CHRIS DARNELL
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CREAM OF THE CROP features a rotating panel from the Harvest Group, a landscape business consulting company.

OPTIMIZE YOUR WEBSITE FOR LOCAL TRAFFIC

→ **IN THIS DAY AND AGE**, most business owners have been beaten to death with the importance of optimizing your website for search engines. You most likely receive emails weekly or even daily from marketers and scammers claiming to get you to the “top of the list” in a short time. Most technically savvy business owners also know it’s just not that simple.

There are a lot of different strategies to optimize your website. While it’s important to draw traffic across the nation, or even world, at the end of the day, you want local buyers. I’m often asked, “How do you optimize your site for local traffic vs regular SEO?” That’s a good question. Here are five local SEO tips that even the technically unsavvy can act on:

1. SET UP YOUR GOOGLE MY BUSINESS PROFILE. This is one of the easiest opportunities for local search traffic. Google is great at walking you through everything that needs to be completed, even for a novice computer user. Stay active with your Google My Business (GMB) listing, update hours for holidays, submit your blog posts and post photos for visitors to see. This is also how you will manage and respond to your customer reviews which makes up a huge piece of your local business reputation.

2. SIGN UP AND USE A LOCAL LISTING MANAGEMENT TOOL. You can find a number of online tools to complete your business listing in databases all over the world. Have you ever wondered how your Amazon Alexa can tell you where the nearest gas station is? While search engines try to find businesses locally, they also link to world-wide databases. This is just one small example, but you want your information everywhere! Check out these two tools to boost your listings: Yext Local Listing Management - [Yext.com](https://yext.com) and Moz Local - <https://moz.com/products/local>

3. CREATE CONTENT AIMED AT LOCAL USERS. One of the biggest issues I see with websites is the message companies use to market themselves. Landscape contractors are notorious for putting a picture of their nice company truck on their home page. But, how does your customer identify with that? Wouldn’t it be better to picture a family enjoying their outdoor space? Or, picnicking on a beautiful green lawn? Your written content should be phrased around your target market as well. If you service commercial clients, use words like property manager or facility manager in your text. For residential, reference homeowners, parents or families. Make sure your website is inviting and speaks to what the client wants vs. a show-and-tell about your business.

4. WORK WITH LOCAL PARTNERS AND SUPPLIERS TO CROSS LINK/CROSS PROMOTE ON YOUR WEBSITES.

Networking has been a proven sales and marketing tactic since the stone age, and things have not changed with advancements of computers and the internet. Use partners you work with to perform some cross-marketing. Don’t just create a page with their address and number; instead, write a blog about the quality mulch your supplier provides. Or include a partner’s page that discusses some of the warm and fuzzy stuff about another local business and your long-term relationship with them. People love to keep business local if possible, so use this to your advantage.

5. ENGAGE IN SOCIAL MEDIA. While I personally don’t enjoy social media, it’s an indisputable method to improve the online presence of companies. I usually recommend creating a culture around social media: have a photo on social media to engage customers and prospects, connect local suppliers and businesses that you work with and post about unique things that you do as a company, especially when it concerns your employees.

SIDE NOTE. Make sure you take great photos when posting to social media or your website. A photo is worth 1,000 words, and you want them all to be positive. It no longer takes fancy equipment or grueling photo editing software for great results. Use a new iPhone and order a cheap lens off Amazon. Adobe Lightroom is a simple tool to use, and the auto adjustments are usually decent or at least better than not doing anything. **L&L**

↓
WHILE REGULAR SEO IS IMPORTANT, you also want to spend time doing the things online that attract local traffic since those viewers will be clients.

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FINDING THEIR

FLOW

Irrigation companies
are still focused
despite small setbacks
from COVID-19.

By Jimmy Miller

ABOVE: Hittle Landscaping took irrigation from a “hidden, embedded service” to an official division two years ago.

Hittle Landscaping in Indianapolis has long offered irrigation, but President Scott DeNardin says it was previously a “hidden, embedded service.” Some clients didn’t even know they offered it, and the department only fixed problems as they arose rather than keeping track of their systems and clients efficiently.

Two years ago, the team set out to make irrigation an actual division at the company. They figured this would help them organize the team better, boost their brand and legitimize their ability to do irrigation jobs well. There were only a handful of other irrigation competitors in Indianapolis, so better establishing themselves could’ve led to being the leading voice in the area. Plus, potential and current employees might look at the irrigation division and determine that there’s more career paths to actually grow within the business.

When they started, Hittle hired a few workers with irrigation and management experience to join the team of 15-18 people. Hittle didn’t receive their H-2B workers this year due to COVID-19 concerns, but the team is still hovering around a dozen employees.



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“If anything, having people at home to see the disarray in their yards has made yard projects much higher on the priority list.”

JACKIE COLSON, Colson Sprinkler & Landscaping

“What you don’t measure, you can’t grow it, you can’t define it, you can’t hold people accountable,” DeNardin says, adding that the irrigation division has been an excellent recruiting tool. “It also helps to attract and retain employees by having a division versus just having this unnamed, unseen role within the company. I think it’s brought a lot of energy and opportunity.”

Roughly 24 months later, and there’s been no regrets – in fact, leadership at Hittle Landscaping believes irrigation has the potential to blossom with their company, especially with technological advancements that only make life easier. Other landscapers nationwide feel much of the same: that despite COVID-19, the irrigation market is staying strong.

“There’s a large area of the new controllers and the technology that we’re going to

start capturing,” says Eric Bensinger, Hittle’s irrigation field manager. “It’s a huge part of the business and growth of our division that’s just going to explode.”

THE PANDEMIC. COVID-19 is the elephant in the room when talking about how business is going – the coronavirus triggered sizable economic chaos, and the landscaping industry was not immune to that. But in Loveland, Colorado, Jackie Colson says her company hasn’t missed a beat. Colson Sprinkler & Landscaping’s sales are right on par with where they stood last year, and Colson says she never shut down her business for COVID-19.

While she sought out guidance from her state representative, she determined that according to the state’s guidelines, her business

was essential. They work outside and could communicate with clients over the phone, who were often quarantined during the springtime. Colson says this may have actually played to their advantage in some ways.

“If anything, having people at home to see the disarray in their yards has made yard projects much higher on the priority list,” Colson says. “We kicked off the new year with a beautiful \$8,000 waterfall install.”

In Virginia, Dave Schrader’s Bio Green Outdoor Services saw a moderate dip in sales this spring – he estimates it was roughly a \$300,000 hit when accounting for both his lawn and irrigation side of things. But as the governor’s orders allowed them to continue operating as usual, Schrader says the irrigation market has already started to rebound and his current sales aren’t far off where they were last



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Potential and current employees might look at the irrigation division as another way to grow at Hittle Landscaping.



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THE WATER ISSUE

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in more people working from home and noticing they need some landscaping work.



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“The COVID-19 piece has definitely affected all of our businesses, not just irrigation.”

RYAN DIPPOLD, Hittle Landscaping

year. There were several customers who said when COVID-19 started they'd delay their services, and now Schrader's in the process of asking them if they're ready to begin again.

"I'm always very hopeful," he says. "We're about even from June last year which is the first time that's happened in a few months."

Back at Hittle Landscaping, Ryan Dip-pold helped his teams implement safety measures but never felt it impacted the workflow too significantly. The director of landscape maintenance says his employees came through a company checkpoint any time they came to the office, but logistically, it was also all about keeping employees apart as best they could during commutes.

"Really, it boiled down to how many people we could put into a truck and having enough resources to send two guys in a truck

and send our crews out in two trucks. Historically, we'd just send them in one," Ryan says. "The COVID-19 piece has definitely affected all of our business, not just irrigation."

Meanwhile, Bensinger acknowledges that the pandemic is overall a negative – both for business and for public health – but he echoed Colson's belief that having clients home made things easier in some ways.

"One of the more interesting things that happened because of COVID, which was more unintended, was that the service side of it was actually a little easier because scheduling wasn't as hard," he says.

One other perk: Schrader points out that the Virginia traffic has been much lighter since the pandemic began, even today as things open back up.

"Getting around has been pretty damn

easy," he says. "That's still the case, so I still think there's folks who feel a little unsafe. I'm cautiously optimistic, I would say."

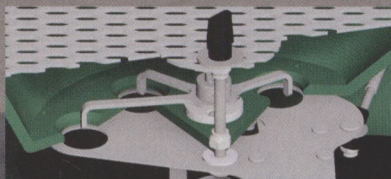
INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY. Though this year will ultimately end with financial difficulties for nearly every company, one investment that will remain strong for irrigation businesses is in technology.

"The main thing is just the technology with these controllers," he says. "From the service aspect of it, you don't need to be home, so it shortens our time out in the field."

Bensinger likens the smart controller technology to a "bar app" on the clients' phones. They could whip out their phone and show their buddies that they can control when the water comes on and off in their yard. Plus,

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THE WATER ISSUE



the technology allows them to play around a little more with their customizations. They can label zones whatever they want in some apps so they can easily track what areas are getting watered, for instance.

And, in the cases where clients go away for the winters, Bensinger says Hittle can keep track of the clients' systems for them. It allows the company to also be proactive about fixing problems in the system like leaks that could lose clients money, notifying them about their issues before the client even notices.

"(The technology has) been very well embraced," Dippold says. "Some of the bigger sites, because of cost (are a little reluctant)...but technology keeps advancing every year where that won't be a problem. People love it."

PHOTO COURTESY OF HITTLE LANDSCAPING

“Customers are ‘warming up’ to the smart irrigation system clocks with WiFi.”

JACKIE COLSON, Colson Sprinkler & Landscaping



Colson says that some clients have a hard time understanding all the fancy irrigation technology, but overall, she's receiving far less pushback and more overall interest in learning more. She views the technology as a way to educate the clients on how to maintain healthy lawns.

“Customers are ‘warming up’ to the smart irrigation system clocks with WiFi,” Colson says. “People who travel like that they can program their clocks while away. One gentleman has a very large yard and likes how he can

change zones from his phone while walking around in the yard.”

For Schrader, clients have certainly warmed up to the technological advancements in irrigation. He says roughly 75% of their new sales over the last few years have been from their “ultimate smart system” package, which includes the smart controllers, high-tech sensors and more.

“We've always tried to stay on the cutting edge,” he says. “We tend to be a pricier system in our area. We've always wanted to offer a system that's focused on saving water.” **L&L**



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THE WATER ISSUE

STAY COOL

Water is a key component of avoiding heat stress, but that's not all you need to do to stay healthy. **By Susan Haddock**

Heat stress can be a major concern for outdoor workers, especially during the summer months. It can result in a stroke, exhaustion, cramps or rashes. Heat rash and cramps are the mildest forms of heat stress. Heat exhaustion can occur when workers are exposed to high temperatures, especially when combined with high humidity and strenuous activity. Without treatment, heat exhaustion can lead to life-threatening heat stroke. Workers can also be at greater risk of injuries due to sweaty palms, fogged-up safety glasses and dizziness. Learn how to identify the symptoms and protect yourself and workers from heat stress.

WHAT IS HEAT STRESS? Heat stress is the buildup in the body of heat generated by the muscles during work and from heat coming from the hot work environment. When the body is overheated, less blood flows to the brain, muscles and other organs. Because there is no pain, workers may not realize when they become weak and tired and that they are less alert and less able to use good judgment. An increase in body temperature of 2 degrees Fahrenheit can affect mental performance, and an increase in 5 degrees can cause serious illness or death.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF HEAT STRESS?

- Cool, moist skin with goose bumps in the heat
- Sweating
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Dry mouth, dry membranes
- No tears
- No spit present
- Muscle cramps
- Weak rapid pulse (slow if person has fainted)
- Nausea
- Dilated pupils
- Central nervous system depression
- Loss of coordination
- Confusion

HOW DO LANDSCAPE COMPANIES PREVENT WORKER HEAT STRESS CONCERNS?

1. Assign a manager for heat stress management.
2. Train workers and supervisors in the prevention, recognition and treatment of heat stress, and conduct safety meetings during heat spells.

➔ General recommendations for workers are to drink at least one cup of water every 30 minutes.

3. Acclimate workers when they begin to work under hot conditions by assigning lighter workdays, longer rest periods and watching workers' response for five to seven days.
4. Account for the conditions of work by checking weather conditions, how heavy the work is and if the worker has to wear additional protective wear and equipment.
5. Account for the conditions of the workers by knowing if the worker has been sick, is rested, taking medications or has consumed alcohol.
6. Manage work activities by setting up work breaks, rotating strenuous tasks, scheduling heavy work for cooler hours and postponing non-essential tasks during heat spells.
7. Establish a drinking water program.
8. Provide additional measures such as special cooling and breathable clothing, provide shade, use air-conditioned mobile equipment and modify pesticide usage to reduce the need for personal protective equipment (PPE).
9. Recognize that pesticide poisoning has similar, but some different, signs and symptoms such as moist membranes, salivation, tears, spit, slow pulse, nausea, diarrhea, possible small pupils and coma. There can also be combined effects of heat stress and pesticide poisoning.
10. Take action and provide first aid if workers show signs and symptoms of heat stress.

HOW MUCH WATER SHOULD WORKERS DRINK? General recommendations for workers are to drink at least one cup of water every 30 minutes and greater amounts as heat conditions become more extreme and workload level is more strenuous, even if they are not thirsty. Drinking two or three cups of water before work provides a head start, and they should continue drinking water into the evening to replace all water lost through sweating. During extreme heat or when wearing confining PPE, workers should be advised to drink a pint or more of water before beginning work. Managers should be aware of workers who have fluid retention or other medical problems that may affect the worker's intake of fluids. Also, managers should be aware of workers who, due to economic pressure or toilet avail-

ability, tend to limit the amount of water they drink or needed breaks.

WHAT ARE WORKLOAD LEVEL EXAMPLES?

- **Light:** sitting at ease, writing, sorting materials, inspecting landscapes, driving mobile equipment on paved roads
- **Moderate:** using a chain saw, driving mobile equipment off-road, periodic handling of heavy materials, weeding/hoeing, pruning, backpack spraying on level-even ground, pushing or pulling light-weight carts or wheelbarrows, washing off vehicle or equipment, walking 2 to 3 mph
- **Heavy:** transferring heavy materials, shoveling, digging, hand mowing, loading materials, planting, pushing or pulling loaded hand carts or wheelbarrows, laying blocks, backpack spraying on rough ground or an incline, walking 4 mph
- **Very heavy:** heavy shoveling and digging, ax work, climbing stairs, ramps and ladders, lifting more than 44 pounds at 10 lifts per minute, walking, jogging or running at more than 4 mph

HOW SHOULD LANDSCAPE COMPANIES SET WORK AND REST PERIODS? Work and rest periods need to consider workload levels, air temperature, humidity, sunlight conditions, worker clothing and PPE. Workers will recover better from heat with shorter, more frequent breaks than longer, less frequent breaks. For heavier work in higher temperatures and higher humidity, longer and more frequent breaks are needed. If possible, breaks should be taken in a shaded or air conditioned area. In general, if performing heavy work at 95 degrees with 30% humidity, each hour of work should include a 15-minute break (45 minutes of work/15-minute break). Break times need to increase and work times need to decrease significantly as temperature and humidity increase. When air temperatures reach 105 degrees, each hour of work should include a 45-minute break (15 minutes of work/45-minute break). **L&L**

The author is a commercial horticulture and integrated pest management agent at the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.



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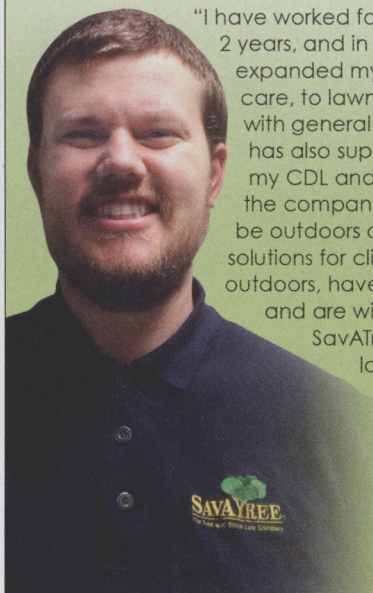


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THE WATER ISSUE



Steve Kennedy, owner of Dew Drop Lawn Sprinklers, inspires his irrigation technicians to work harder and more efficiently.

DECREASING DOWNTIME

Dew Drop Lawn Sprinklers reduced downtime and inspired irrigation technicians to become property problem-solvers through technician-driven sales. **By Kristen Hampshire**

Steve Kennedy doesn't believe in sales commission. "I don't want to give my irrigation technicians an incentive to sell customers something they might not need," says the owner of Dew Drop Lawn Sprinklers, based in West Long Branch, N.J.

What Kennedy wants is to ensure that customers' irrigation systems are delivering the most value possible, and this requires identifying broken or bent sprinkler heads, leaks and other issues that crop up. The problem is, during sprinkler activation season, his seven two-man crews are swamped with full days of turning on systems.

When could they take extra time to document ways to improve the

“We are shelling out proposals every day, and our guys are finding opportunities to improve customers’ irrigation systems.”

STEVE KENNEDY, owner of Dew Drop Lawn Sprinklers

system? How could he motivate technicians to document issues on the spot so proposals for add-on services could be drawn up in a timely manner?

Kennedy worked on this problem for a number of years before implementing a process that’s a triple win, benefiting clients, technicians and the company’s bottom line. There’s still no sales commission involved, but there is certainly a financial incentive.

After completing a system activation or visiting a property for any other reason, technicians fill out the company’s standard electronic form through a smart phone app.

Except, now the bottom of the form includes drop-down menus for issues they identify: leaking heads, installing new zones for landscape beds, installing pot emitter zones, straightening heads and so on.

“If they see a head is located in the wrong place or is crooked, leaking, whatever, they never wanted to take the time to document it because it slowed them down,” Kennedy relates. “Now, they add those remarks from the system activation service call.”

Those jobsite notes are automatically routed to the office via the software platform. Then, office personnel write up proposals based on those notes.

Proposals are distributed via email to customers, who can approve the work if they choose. Most of them do, and this generates extra work for technicians, Kennedy explains.

Now, Kennedy can keep his irrigation technicians on staff longer into the season, whereas before he would lay off about three crews after activation season was completed. “We are shelling out proposals every day, and our guys are finding opportunities to improve customers’ irrigation systems,” Kennedy says.

At first, Kennedy promised technicians that they would get to perform the work for every accepted proposal, which resulted in more hours and bigger paychecks for those who adopted the system. Today, everyone is on board and work is distributed based on the property’s location.

Kennedy says the company has about 40% more work to perform mid-summer than before this proposal system was in place. “I

have one technician who would typically be laid off for two months during the summer, and now he has one month off – which he doesn’t mind,” Kennedy says.

The system didn’t go over easily at first. But after a couple of years, technicians realized that taking a few minutes after each activation service to note other issues on the property would generate more work for them after the spring/early summer rush ended.

A KEEP-IT-SIMPLE SYSTEM. Dew Drop already had an app-based business system in place that irrigation technicians use to generate service visit notes. The system allows technicians to access their schedules, parts lists and to record remarks from service calls. “At the bottom of an activation call, they can type in additional work needed,” Kennedy says.

By building this “add-on work” section into the existing form, technicians only needed to complete one simple extra step. Making it even easier, the “notes” section includes drop-down menus. “They can select ‘rotor head’ or ‘leaking head’ and they can fill in the number of heads,” he explains. “It saves them time.”

When there was push back about notes, Kennedy reminded them it was really no different than texting.

FRIENDLY COMPETITION. Once irrigation technicians at Dew Drop began building up their schedules with more work from accepted proposals, the whole team started taking notice.

“If one technician saw an issue on a property that another tech didn’t catch, he’d harass him about it – our guys are competitive, and they don’t want to miss out on a job,” Kennedy says.

Not to mention, if one technician was earning hours of extra work (and pay) because of taking the time to add notes to service write-ups that resulted in proposals, others wanted to know how they could clock more hours, too.

At the end of the day, the process Dew Drop Lawn Sprinklers implemented to boost its billable hours not only elevates customer service, it benefits employees and the bottom line. “Technicians realize they are not getting laid off as long as they used to,” Kennedy says. **L&L**

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TAPPING THE TEAM, SELLING

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If you ask property managers what is most important for maintaining an attractive, healthy landscape they'll probably mention fertilizer and maybe sunlight or a good mow. Water, yes – they might bring up water as a key for keeping their grass green.

But chances are slim to none that a client will say, "water management."

Still, Environmental Designs, Inc. (EDI) in Henderson, Colo., has been providing the environmentally conscious service for nearly 30 years and today it is 7% of total revenues.

NGS

Environmental Designs, Inc. relies on internal and external experts to help clients understand why water management is mission critical.

By Kristen Hampshire



THE WATER ISSUE

Water management is as important as sun and fertilizer for manicured landscapes and natural spaces; but convincing property managers and owners of this case is tough. “You are selling them snake oil, in a way,” says Shawn Ryan, president of EDI. “To get people to convert (a system) before it’s broken is a challenge.”

But some impactful show-and-tell helps a lot.

EDI received the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC) 2019 ELITE Award for Irrigation Management by saving a client more than 5 million gallons of water per year after an extensive irrigation overhaul. The property was Centerra Metro District in Loveland, which includes eight hydrozones and a city-mandated water budget. After an audit, EDI reported that half of the property’s irrigation system was

in disrepair due to undetected mainline breaks, inactivated flow sensors, broken master valves and zones that simply were not operating.

The three-year water management project involved repairs and then upgrades so the new system includes 24/7 weather forecasting and provides real-time alerts of breakages or flow issues. Because of this, water usage fell to 24% below budget and the

property saved 10 million gallons of water in two years.

NUMBERS TALK. Technology makes all the difference. And so does EDI’s team approach to identifying water waste and problem-solving solutions to improve a system’s efficiency and environmental impact.

“When we look at three and four years of water savings by properties with larger

“The advances in technology have helped us in this industry – smart controllers and changing nozzles for water conservation.”

SHAWN RYAN, president, EDI

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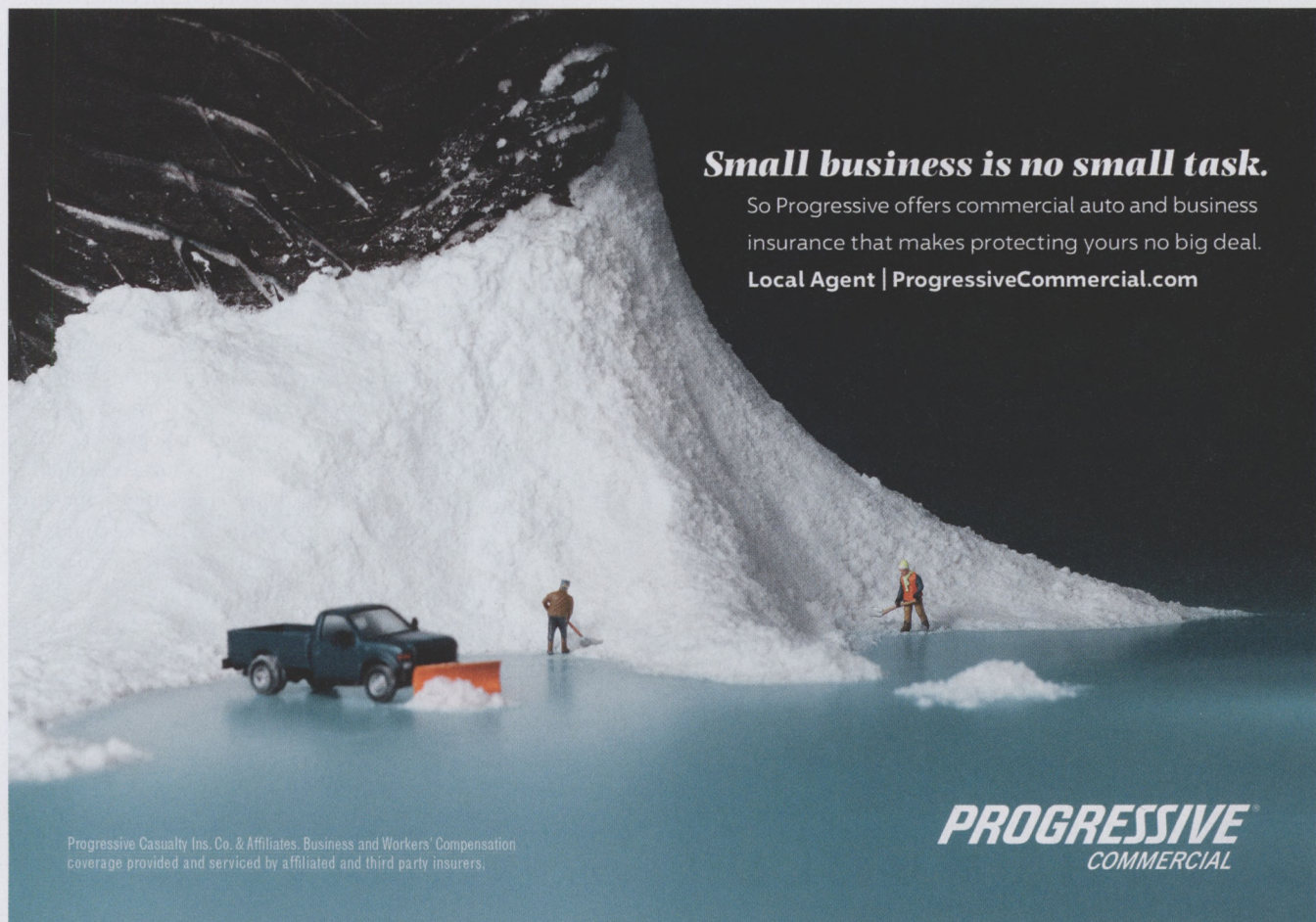
EDI wants to educate clients
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water bills – HOAs, commercial properties, apartment complexes – you can see the ROI,” Ryan says, relating that EDI forecasts potential savings when presenting

water management services so property owners and managers can better understand the value.

Meanwhile, EDI has steadily grown its

water management division. “We have been proactive with using the latest technology and I think that has given us the ability to grow the service and do a better job,” Ryan says, adding that client relationships plus leveraging internal and external resources is key.



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SELLING SNAKE OIL. Cost and speculation are the two biggest barriers to selling water management services. The reality is, unless an irrigation controller is broken, a valve busts or a pipe lets loose, property owners are not thinking about system upgrades and purchases.

“It’s hard to sell,” Ryan says. “I wish everyone would say, ‘Yeah, water management is great,’ but it’s no different than buying a new iPhone. Not everyone buys the latest model every time one comes out. It’s the same with irrigation technology.”

Selling irrigation upgrades is also a lot like buying a new hot water heater or toilet, Ryan says. “Unless it’s broken, most people don’t go out and buy a new one.

“So, we use client testimonials,” Ryan continues. “We share when clients say, ‘This worked for us, we are in the same place you are today and we didn’t think it was worth the money, and we are glad we did it.’”

When a client can attest to saving \$3,000 to \$4,000 every year, the dollars pocketed gain prospects’ attention. So, the key to sales is to inform. “I think it’s our job as landscape professionals to continue educating clients – that’s the really big thing,” Ryan says. “We educate clients on the technology that’s out there, encourage them to make decisions that are better for the environment and all of us, and just continue to stay the course.”

EDI invites its distributor and manufacturer partners to present to clients and explain how water-saving technology works. “We need to collaborate to be successful and not just rely on our internal team,” Ryan says.

Including external resources in client meetings improves trust. Rather than a sale, the session truly becomes an educational opportunity for property owners and managers. Plus, clients realize that EDI is already

I think it's our job as landscape professionals to continue educating clients."

SHAWN RYAN, president, EDI

investing in them. "Obviously, we are there to sell our services first and foremost – that's true," Ryan says. "But at the end of the day, the vendor can help educate the clients so they can make the best decision."

Environmental Designs' internal team also plays a critical role in identifying opportunities to improve properties. Technicians perform property checks on a weekly or bi-weekly basis and bring issues to the sales staff's attention. "We can then reach out to property managers and begin making recommendations, giving them solutions to problems we see," Ryan says.

It's a team approach. Account managers, the irrigation manager, technicians and vendors are involved in educating clients so they can better understand the value of water management. And because EDI invests in training its team, encouraging irrigation certification, clients have more confidence in the issues that technicians identify in the field. "It's good for clients to know your people are certified, and it's good for employees because they appreciate and respect the company's investment in them and know we are trying to make them better and us better," Ryan says.

TRAINING THE TECH. Technology is also making water management better, and EDI proactively learns about new irrigation innovations and puts those solutions to work in the field. "It's all about smart controllers," Ryan says. "The advances in technology have helped us in this industry – smart controllers and changing nozzles for water conservation."

For example, on the Centerra site, old spray heads were replaced with pressure regulation / rotary nozzles. A control system downloads weather station data on a daily basis. Rain sensors ensure that the system only runs when necessary.

"We can program controllers to know if a zone is on a slope or grass so it will adjust water output," Ryan says. "The smart controllers measure the amount of moisture in the air and adjust the clock and time it waters."

Linked to a mobile platform that deliv-

ers real-time alerts to technicians, the new sophisticated irrigation controllers deliver information – and that's powerful for saving water and realizing a return on invest-

ment for irrigation upgrades.

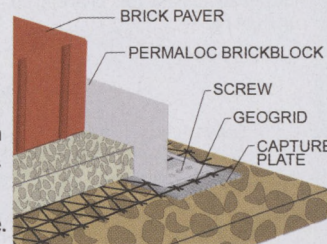
Because technology is ever-evolving, EDI relies on its distributor and manufacturer partners to learn about the latest. "In the

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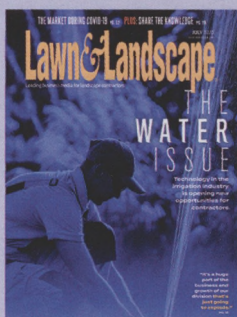
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THE WATER ISSUE



EDI wants to avoid unhappy clients calling with a yellow lawn and instead offer solutions before problems happen.


landscape industry, sometimes we want to keep doing things the way we did 30 years ago, and a lot of companies are slow to make changes," Ryan says. "Often, we don't lean on people who can educate us."

But EDI does.

"We invest in training and we are always looking forward to what's coming out in the market," Ryan says. "We want to say, 'What is next?' and try to stay ahead."

Ultimately, that's what Ryan hopes their clients and prospects will do, too.

"Clients tend to call you when their grass is yellow and it's really hard at that point, when they are unhappy, to tell them they need to spend money and invest in their properties," Ryan says. "If we bring an issue to their attention before it's a big problem, there's more trust. It's an easier sell." **L&L**



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PRICE FIX

Due to economic hard times, clients may inquire about discounts and renegotiating contracts prior to Winter 2020-21.

By Mike Zawacki

If you haven't received it already, the phone call or email from a client seeking to renegotiate the terms of their winter services contract may be inevitable.

In fact, according to recent industry research conducted by the Accredited Snow Contractors Association and Snow Magazine, the majority of snow contractors believe their clients are having cash-flow problems in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and nearly half (44%) anticipate these clients will seek to reduce the scope of their snow and ice service before winter. A little more than half (51%) of contractors expect clients will approach them about renegotiating the terms of their winter service contracts.

In some instances, this scenario is already taking shape. Throughout the industry, snow contractors are reporting instances of clients firing vendors, putting contracts out to rebid and advising to lower price points. Likewise, the pandemic's trickle-down effect is beginning to reach contractors as property owners are forced to delay their payments beyond 30 to 60 days because retailers and non-essential businesses have been unable to pay rents over the last six to eight weeks.

"Our clients are already experiencing some deep cuts, which means there will be deep cuts for us, too," says Troy Clogg, owner of Troy Clogg Landscape Associates and a veteran snow contractor serving the Greater Detroit market. He anticipates client will ask him to scale back winter services based on trends he's already observed with summer landscape services.

"It's going to be about reaching out and being a partner to (clients) as we go through this and try to help them determine how to best keep their properties safe and not violate ASCA Standards," Clogg says, adding he's reluctant to compromise on Industry Standards. "This is the best time to find out what type of relationship you have with the client and what type of relationship the client has with you. If the relationship hasn't been tested yet, it will be."

So how should contractors best react when faced with contract and price-reduction scenarios?

First, resist the temptation to enter client meetings resigned that the client is going to want some sort of price discount. Instead, approach these situations with a positive, assumptive mind-set, says sales consultant and business coach Marvin Montgomery.



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"Customers aren't stupid," he says. "They can smell self-doubt. They can smell if you're insecure. They can smell if you're in the position of already thinking about bending and

dropping the price. You want to go into these meetings with confidence."

In addition, contractors must place themselves in a state of heightened preparedness

when entering these meetings, which means examining all of the options available to them and to clients in the event the meeting turns into a negotiation. This includes not offering the client a discount.

Montgomery offers this scenario: **CLIENT REQUEST:** "This whole pandemic has really put us in a tough financial position and we're looking for you to help us out by giving us price break heading into next winter." **CONTRACTOR COMEBACK:** "We've already considered you might have that issue and here are some of the services we looked at that we can reduce ..."

Don't wait until the client meeting to begin thinking about your options. Instead, compile alternatives that avoid any sort of price drop?

"You have to be very careful about how you broach this topic," Montgomery says. "I always say you don't want to use the word 'discount,' but you do want to use the word 'adjustment' ... or maybe it's a two-part word, 'temporary adjustment.'"

If discussing price becomes unavoidable, contractors must come to terms with what "justifies an adjustment," Montgomery says. If you're willing to adjust the price, will the client resign for another three years? Will the client let you manage snow and ice on three additional properties they have?

At this time, while the economy is on thin ice, be aware property owners and managers may be testing all of their vendors on price points. Therefore, Montgomery advises professional snow and ice management contractors to stand firm and inform clients they're already received the best price for snow and ice mitigation.

"Before you even make an adjustment on the pricing you should be asking (the client), 'Where do you need to be,'" Montgomery says. "What happens is, you're giving them 10% off, but they were only looking for 3%."

"And if an adjustment is made, make it very clear this is a one-time adjustment only, and next year the price will be back to where it's supposed to be," he adds. **L&L**

Mike Zawacki is editor of Snow Magazine.

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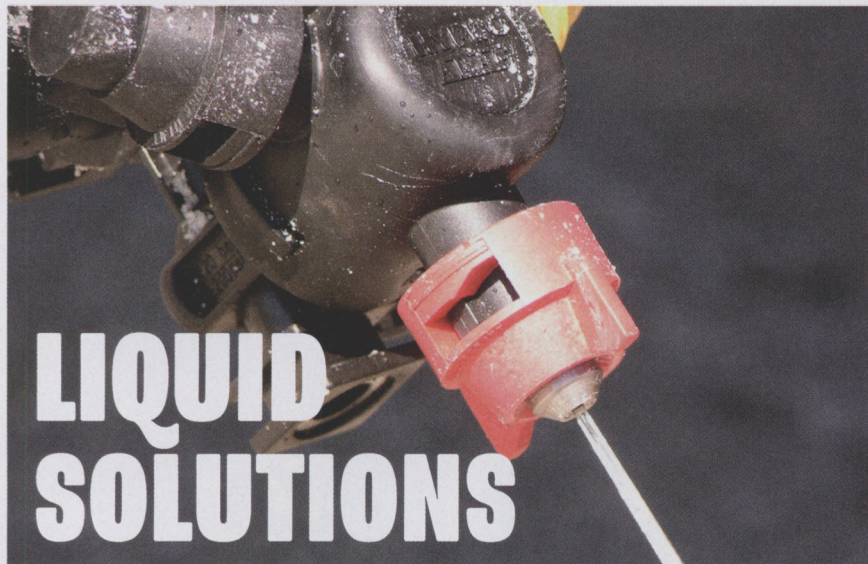
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LIQUID SOLUTIONS

Converting from rock salt to liquid anti-icing products brings several benefits for professional snow and ice managers.

By Jerry Schill

Adopting and integrating liquids – both brine and exothermic blends – into an ice management strategy addresses several key factors that influence not only profitability, but also the ability to succeed in a highly competitive market.

LABOR. At the end of the day, one way to look at snow and ice management is we're actually selling labor. And the less time our crews are concentrated on snow and ice activities that don't produce results, the bigger the influence on our margins and in the savings we can pass on to customers through competitive pricing.

One of the things we love about liquids is we can get in front of a snow event a couple of days in advance and pretreat properties while our staff is fresh and rested. In fact, we can apply liquid treatments two-and-a-half to three-times within the costs of one rock salt application. Therefore, we're able to manage the event a lot better from a labor and operational standpoint while reducing our dependency on bulk rock salt.

It's important to note that liquids are a weather game and you must consider how temperature and moisture will impact performance. We typically apply product pre-event at a 50% rate, which allows the product to crystallize inside the pavement where it will be the most effective.

Likewise, it's our experience that a liquid pretreatment can melt upwards to 1 inch of snow before diluting and becoming ineffective. Again, in a tight labor market, strategic liquid pretreatments alleviate some of the strain on labor. Since liquids afford us the ability to extend the amount of time before we must react to an event, we don't have personnel waiting around to fight the storm. We can let it snow for an hour or two before dispatching and deploying people to their assignments, which lessens the amount of time they're active during an event.

SAFETY. Liquid pretreating affords us the ability to jump on an event and get product on the ground where it can resist the buildup of ice at the pavement surface. Ice buildup is what makes snow and ice professionals

– and their clients – vulnerable to slip-and-fall claims. Strategically managing this at an event's onset lessens that risk for your clients, their constituents, and ultimately for the contractor.

Again, it's important to monitor temperatures and precipitation rates to properly assess the effectiveness of your liquid application before, during and after a winter event.

SUSTAINABILITY. A liquid approach increases our ability to manage a storm more effectively, and as a result, reduces our dependence on bulk rock salt. Most snow professionals have experienced material shortages at one time or another along with record pricing for scant product. Integrating liquids into our strategy allows us to significantly reduce our dependency on rock salt.

Likewise, liquid applications are more targeted and direct than bulk salt spreading practices. In addition, the technology and equipment used in liquid apps applies product at a much more precise rate than bulk salt running out of a spreader and bouncing and rolling when it hits the pavement.

Finally, a lot of attention has been directed toward the negative impact chlorides have on the surrounding environment – including damage to building infrastructures and green spaces. Liquid products balance out the safety aspect of what we need to do, reduces some of the litigious risk we face, as well as reduces the amount of chlorides we're releasing into the environment.

For example, we manage snow and ice on a very large and complex live-work-play property in suburban Cleveland. While using rock salt as the primary ice management tool it was not unheard of to have to replace upward to 30 trees and ornamentals damaged and killed by winter chloride use. As the contractor, we're on the hook to replace the plant material lost to winter services. After the switch to liquid and the ability to better target and control applications, we haven't lost any of the plants. **L&L**

Jerry Schill is the president of Schill Grounds Management in North Ridgeville, Ohio. He is a frequent Snow Magazine contributor and a 2011 Leadership Award recipient.

Q&A WITH THE EXPERT

SIDEWALK SNOW AND ICE CONTROL



Q&A WITH MARK KLOSSNER

VP Marketing – Boss Snow & Ice Products

1 Why do sidewalks pose such a challenge to today's contractors?

A: You can break it down to time and money. You know, recent studies show that contractors can spend more than 30% of their operating expenses just on managing sidewalks. So we asked our customers, and one of the biggest pain points in their operations is the shovelers they rely on. We hear time and time again about the number of people who call off or are no shows, which hurts any contractor's efficiency and productivity, especially small business owners who have more to lose than some of the bigger fleets. That's why mechanizing is a growing trend and a smart option to increase response times while reducing the need for shovelers who may or may not answer their phone.

2 What materials are best for sidewalks?

A: Having a full range of materials that work together at your disposal helps contractors get more done. By using pretreatment and deicing solutions, granular materials and a quality plow, contractors can work smarter and maximize productivity.

3 What is the best product solution for managing sidewalks?

A: There's no one right answer when it comes to clearing any surface. Every account is different and so are the challenges. Clearing a sidewalk or a driveway can be much different than clearing the entrance to a hospital. The different angles, longer surface areas, amount of foot traffic and landscaping all impact



what type of solution will work best.

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4 What are some of the benefits of using mechanized sidewalk solutions for both snow and ice?

A: The biggest is speed. These days, contractors face a lot of competition, and

the crews who can respond the quickest and get the job done the right the fastest have a clear advantage in earning more of a profit. Most contractors want to hire quality people, but those workers can be few and far between. Again, that's why a mechanized solution is such an asset. Contractors can reduce labor and crew sizes, save time and customize the way they work for different accounts. An investment in a mechanized solution like a Snowrator can quickly pay for itself in the first season of use—making operations more efficient—and more profitable.

Contractors should not be spending up to or more than 30% of their operating costs on sidewalks alone. So finding ways to be more effective and efficient should be something on every contractor's mind.



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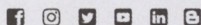


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DIRECTOR'S NOTE



DOWN TO BUSINESS

With the sales season approaching, it's vital to impress upon clients the value and safety are the ROI for snow and ice, and not price.

By Kevin Gilbride

I took a call recently from a property owner who had questions about industry standards. I initially thought they were going to ask about operational standards and the ASCA's ANSI standards. Instead, what they were really after were standards for bidding contracts. And as I dug deeper, what they were really looking to do was save money.

The exact question: What is the standard trigger throughout the country?

Rather than answering the question directly, I began to ask questions. I needed to know where they were operating out of (Colorado), and then I asked what sort of properties they owned and what was located on the property. It turned out the property owner had a variety of properties housing various business establishments. One was strip mall with a Dollar Store, while another was a party/reception venue. A few others had businesses that generated plenty of foot traffic.

As the property owner continued to describe what they were trying to accomplish – save money – I began to contemplate how often snow professionals were going to have this same conversation this year.

So, I cut right to the big question: How much liability are you willing to take on?

Of course, the ASCA's model legislation, the Snow Removal Limited Liability Act, passed in Colorado in 2018. I asked what would happen if a pedestrian slipped and fell while traversing one of the properties where he had decided to enact a 6-inch trigger (yes, this is what he was contemplating). I explained that even if they attempted to use a hold-harmless agreement to pass on their liability to the snow contractor, that would be null and void in Colorado and, as the property owner, he would still hold the liability.

Needless to say, the property owner was no longer enamored with the idea of a 6-inch trigger.

The conversation switched topics to fluctuating seasonal

weather. The property owner didn't want to be on the hook if they got a huge winter, but he didn't want to pay for services if they had a very low-snow winter, either. I explained we traditionally see winter weather as a three-season cycle – one heavy/active, one light/non-active and the third moderate/average – and you need to stick with it. If you go with a seasonal contract you are going to underpay some years and overpay in others, but in the end it all evens out. If you go with a per-event pricing structure, you are not going to have to pay much in low-snow years, but you will pay out big when you get that huge snowfall winter.

I then introduced him to the weather insurance concept and advised him to investigate that option on his own. I also encouraged him to find a snow and ice professional in his market who understood everything we discussed

because if he did, then he would be working with an educated professional. In the end, he thanked me for the information and my time and that he now had a fresh perspective on what he needed to do.

As the upcoming sales season approaches, we'll never know what winter has in store for us. However, as snow professionals, it's vital to communicate to your clients – both existing and would be – that you're selling winter services based on value, not price. And for property owners, the return on that investment is partnering with an educated professional who now only knows the business of snow and ice management, but also has their best interests in mind as they establish a safe environment for property owners and their clients to conduct business. **L&L**

Kevin Gilbride is the Executive Director of the Accredited Snow Contractors Association (ASCA).

“As the property owner continued to describe what they were trying to accomplish – save money – I began to contemplate how often snow professionals were going to have this same conversation this year.”

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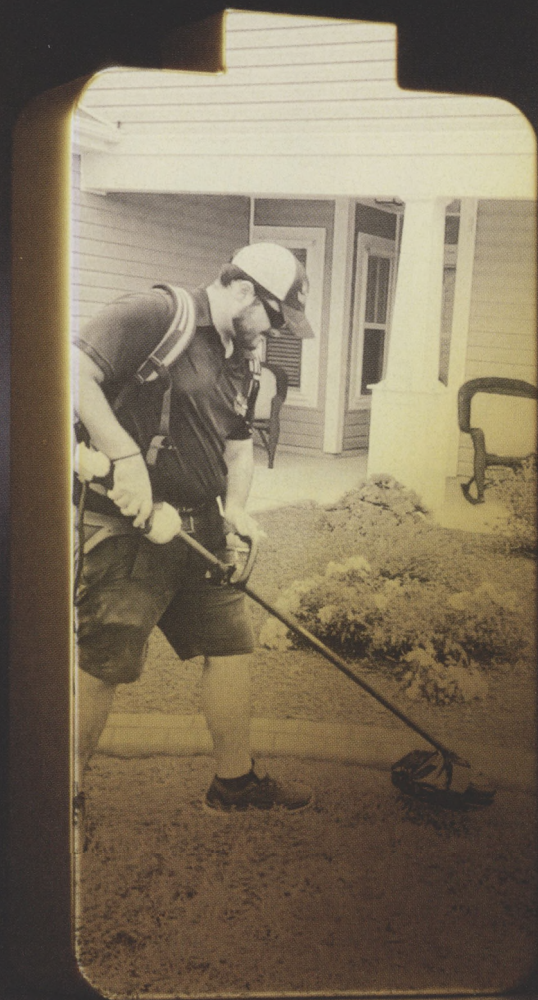
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Charging up change

As battery-powered equipment continues to advance, more landscapers may be open to making the investment.

By Kim Lux



Could battery-powered equipment be the future of the industry?

Austin Hall, president of Greenwise in Evanston, Illinois, and Michael Reed, owner of Quiet Lawn in Longs, South Carolina, believe that's where things are headed.

The primary advantages of the equipment seem to be threefold – better for the environment, better for crews and less noise pollution.

Hall, who admits Greenwise is still using a mix of gas- and battery-powered equipment as they make the transition to fully electric, says making a conscience effort to help the environment was the motivating factor.

“Our company is an organic lawn care company and sustainable landscape maintenance and design business,” he says. “Sort of everything we do is around the idea of sustainability and our tagline is ‘lighten your footprint.’ We use organic fertilizer, all-natural weed control products and have been thinking about ways we can lighten our footprint in respect to our emissions.”

Reed says he chose to use battery-powered equipment to stand out from the competition.

“It was so different than what anybody else was doing,” he says. “That’s what really pushed me in this direction.”

GETTING THE RIGHT GEAR. Reed says that as more electric equipment hits the market, Quiet Lawn uses a wide range of it.

“We use a standard, zero-turn commercial mower and handheld electric equipment,” he says. “Pretty much everything we use is electric – from our blowers, edgers, trimmers and chainsaws. It’s rare that we have to use a piece of gas-powered equipment. If we have to rent a piece of heavy equipment, that’d be our only exception.”

Greenwise also continues to add battery-powered equipment.

“We’ve been using battery-powered hand tools, primarily blowers, for the past four or five years,” he says. “We also have two battery-powered mowers. They are 33-inch mowers and we find them very effective. Increasing, over time, we’re going to transition our propane-powered mowers to battery-powered ones. Eventually, we expect to be 100% battery-powered.”

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While some doubt the strength of battery-powered equipment, Reed says in his experience it's been comparable to gas-powered, and appeals to him.

"When I used gas equipment, I'd get headaches from smelling the fumes all day," he says. "You don't get that with the electric."

NO NOISE, NO PROBLEM. As Greenwise continues to transition to fully electric, they launched a new route.

"This year, we've launched an all-electric maintenance crew, which uses battery-powered mowers, battery-powered line trimmers, hedge trimmers and edgers. Basically, everything that comes out of the trailer is battery-powered for that specific crew."

Robyn McMurray Hurtig, director of community engagement at Greenwise, says the new service couldn't have come at a better time.

"People are home trying to have conference calls and working from home and they're hearing landscapers with these gas-powered blowers and it's



Quiet Lawn, in Longs, South Carolina, utilizes a full fleet of electric equipment.

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“Three years ago, people would almost laugh at you when they heard you had an electric lawn service. Now, people come up to you like you’re a rock star and are asking about your equipment.”

MICHAEL REED, owner, Quiet Lawn

driving people crazy,” she says. “We’ve had a lot of requests for electric and we wanted to honor that and lead the charge in our area.”

McMurray Hurtig adds Greenwise started piloting the new route in the spring, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

“It’s been very well received,” she says. “I’ve talked to a few of the customers, and one in particular talked about how she really used to dread the day her landscape service would come because it was so loud. When we came with our all electric crew, she couldn’t even tell when we left.”

Reed says that having no noise pollution is also what leads clients to his company as well.

“Our customers really appreciate it,” he says. “We are a lot less intrusive on their lives. We’re in a big area for retirees. Probably 95% of our customers are retired, so we don’t want to be waking them up at 8 a.m.

We try not to disturb them.”

CHANGE ISN’T EASY. While Hall and Reed are certainly happy to sing the praises of battery-powered equipment, they do recognize that it can pose some challenges.

“I think one thing that might prevent certain companies from adopting this technology is just the upfront investment that’s required for mowing equipment,” Hall says. “If you’re going to buy a typical 36-inch walk-behind mower, it may be double the cost.”

Reed says that while the upfront costs are indeed higher, the equipment tends to pay for itself in the long run with less maintenance costs and not having to purchase fuel.

In addition to price, Reed says that companies could run into problems if they aren’t keeping up with charging.

“You can’t stop at a battery station if you

run out of battery. That’s the only thing. You’ve got to have plenty of batteries and a good charging system,” he says.

Hall and Reed also say they’ve had to work hard to get their crews on board with the electric equipment.

“There is a bit of a learning curve because it does feel different then a piece of gas equipment when it’s in your hand. There’s also a different procedure because you’ve got to make sure everything is charging overnight,” Reed says.

Hall says getting his crews to slow down and recognize the benefits of the equipment was difficult at first.

“Culturally, we’ve had to work through with our crews on what it means to use battery-powered equipment because the work gets done, in some cases, a bit more slowly,”

Continues on pg. 48



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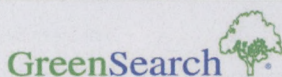
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he says. "It's typical in the industry that crews want to use the equipment that has the most power so they can work efficiently, so it's been a mindset change with our employees."

PRICING IT RIGHT. Both Reed and Hall say that location plays a major role in pricing and determining whether to charge a premium for electric lawn care.

"We're in a unique geography, in some of the villages, in and around Evanston, we're actually restricted from using gas-powered blowers for a period of the season," he says. "So, it's been the standard for some time. In that case, we don't price the service higher."

However, Hall says there is a pricing premium for the new, all-electric service.

"(It's) not really because of the cost of the equipment...but because we find it takes more time to complete the service," he says.

Reed chooses not to charge more for electric lawn care and keeps his prices competitive.

"It depends on the area someone is in. In my area, being environmentally friendly isn't really a hot thing. If I was in an urban area where that's much more of a big deal, I would definitely market the environmental aspect and try to charge a premium," he says. "For me, I'm right there with the other good companies around here. We aren't the lowest and we aren't the highest."

GREEN GROWTH. According to Reed and Hall, the technology behind electric equipment has come a long way, and they expect it to continue improving.

Hall said that he's had his crews demoing some of the latest equipment and they've been pleased with the results.

"For some time, we thought battery-powered blowers just didn't have the muscle for spring and fall cleanups," he says. "Our crews are telling us they could be, and it's been very encouraging for us."

Hall suggests anyone considering using the equipment give it a test run first.

"There are a lot of companies out there that are willing to allow landscape contractors to demo equipment," he says. "It helps you understand the range of options."

Reed says he goes to trade shows every year and each year he is seeing battery-powered equipment have more of a presence.

"It's amazing the switch in the industry and how fast the industry is heading toward electric," he says. "Three years ago, people would almost laugh at you when they heard you had an electric lawn service. Now, people come up to you like you're a rock star and are asking about your equipment."

He feels the industry will continue to get behind the technology and says eventually it will become the norm.

"Within 10 years, the majority of the industry will be headed in this direction," he says. "People who pay attention can read the tea leaves and see that's where it's headed. It just makes sense with the price going down and the capacity going up." **L&L**

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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Alexander Martin

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

brings you the perspectives of horticulture students and insights into the future of the industry.

By Jimmy Miller



All it took to hook Alexander Martin

was a STIHL MS271 chainsaw. From there, he has taken his interest in tree care all over the place, including a stint abroad in Germany.

Martin still remembers the exact make and model of the chainsaw his neighbor showed him at age 13. Martin and his father had been cutting firewood, but his neighbor – an arborist – implored Martin’s dad to buy a better chainsaw. The neighbor promised that if Martin would take the lessons seriously, he’d teach Martin the basics of arboriculture.

Martin was young, but once he learned he could climb trees for a living, he fell in love with the idea. It didn’t hurt that using the equipment looked like a lot of fun.

“At 13 years old, I thought, ‘Well, that’s the coolest thing I’ve ever heard,’” he says. “I still think chip-pers and trucks are the coolest things you get to use.”

At 16, Martin started working part-time as a contracted arborist. The gig worked out well because, as he puts it, he weighed just 110 pounds and climbing came easy.

But Martin’s biggest move had yet to come. Prompted by curiosity in his family’s heritage and in learning a new language, Martin left his home in Manitoba, Canada, to spend six months in Germany. Though he wasn’t necessarily there strictly for arboriculture, he was immersed in the differences between their practices and those in Canada.

For example, Martin learned that arboriculture is a much more social experience with clients in Europe. When they’d do tree removals, there’d be people with natural discontent with having trees removed. They’d come out and ask questions about what was happening, why a tree needed to come down and what they hoped to see there in the future.

Martin says that understanding the sentimental, emotional value behind these trees has led him to approach removals with compassion. Sometimes, trees have been up in a client’s yard for decades. Seeing it go can be difficult, and because of his experience in Germany, Martin has gained an understanding of these complex emotions from clients and brings more compassion to jobsites.

“Germany’s outlook on urban forestry is a lot different,” he says. “I don’t think I was ever disadvantaged by moving around so much, but I do think that it was overly ben-

eficial because I experienced stuff in Germany... that can be slightly be mimicked here.”

In 2017, Martin landed a job at Timerland Tree Service, and in 2019, he enrolled in the urban forestry program at the University of British Columbia. He intends to earn both a Master’s degree and a PhD, but for now, he’s enjoying his time at the UBC program. It only started a few years ago, but Martin says they’ve enlisted the help from some of the industry’s best to serve as professors.

“Now that I’m at UBC, it’s one of the best decisions I’ve ever made,” he says. “There are professors who are just outstanding in their field. There were people that I heard of through my professional career and now I get to learn from them and study from them.”

Martin is interested in one day running a consulting-type company. While he’ll always be the 13-year-old kid who fell in love with the cool chainsaws, chippers and trucks, he’s finding a new calling in teaching others about trees. Just recently, he was looking at a client’s tree that had mites in it, but if they had simply Googled what the issue with their tree was, they’d have never successfully identified the problem.

“I really like consulting because it’s one thing to talk to other professionals, but there’s something really nice about talking with folks and educating them about trees,” Martin says. “The whole industry’s exciting to me. It’s hugely dynamic, and it keeps changing. Learning with those changes to the industry is the most unique part of it. There’s constantly new information coming out. Staying on top of it... is a critical, important role for horticulturalists.” **L&L**



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