

ENGAGEMENT PULSE POINTS PG. 16 GET TO KNOW SEO PG. 36 PLUS: FINDING FRANCHISES PG. 42

JANUARY 2021

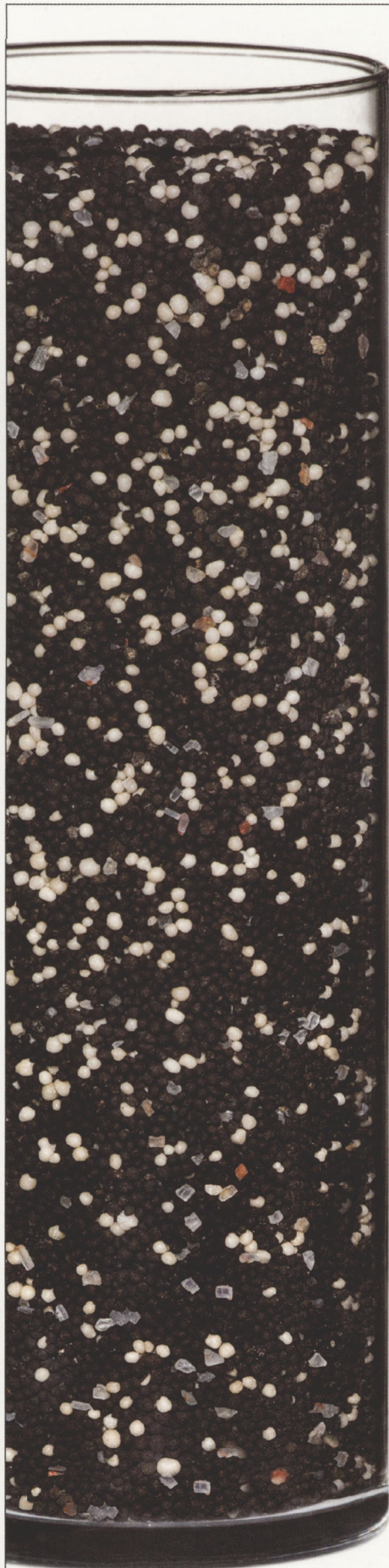
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Cover and above photos courtesy of Lawn Butler

DOWNTURN TO
DOMINATION

Jena and Rudy Larsen started Lawn Butler during the Great Recession, but still have grown it by 50% every year.

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Brian Horn
Editor, Lawn & Landscape

"The next big development expected to come to market is the wireless technology for robotic mowers."

Bring on the bots

Since I first heard about robotic mowing, the reality of it becoming mainstream always seemed similar to being a fan of a bad sports franchise. It's always, "wait until next year." Well, it seems that next year really could be the year – and if not this year, we're getting very close. That was a takeaway from a virtual panel I moderated on the topic with Logan Fahey, CEO of Robin Autopilot; Tony Hopp, CEO of Mowbot; and Jen Lemcke, CEO of TurfBot.

Visit bit.ly/lawnrobotic to view the discussion. Here are a few more takeaways:

EDUCATION ENHANCEMENTS. Hopp says there is still educating to be done on the topic, but he says when he started Mowbot 5 years ago, people laughed at the idea of a robot mowing a lawn. Now, consumers are taking it seriously, although he says some landscapers are still skeptical the machines can mow lawns effectively.

DON'T GET STUCK. One of the main issues with robotic mowers is when they get stuck on hills, in holes or under things, etc. But all panelists said the software to detect obstacles is improving at a rapid rate.

GREENER GROW. Robotic mowers can mow multiple times a week, which makes for a

healthier lawn because it doesn't put as much stress on the grass blades. Lemcke said she did a test with two lawns, side by side. Both were treated the same, but one was mowed by a regular mower and the other by a robomower. She said she was surprised at how much greener the robomowed lawn looked.

NO STRIPES. The mowers aren't able to mow in a back-and-forth pattern, so it doesn't produce those striped lawns that people love so much. "My answer to that is with a traditional company, they come in and they stripe your lawn and two days later, you have no stripes. Under a robotic mower, the property is consistently maintained, and it looks perfect all the time," Fahey says.

TIRED OF WIRES. The next big development expected to come to market is the wireless technology for robotic mowers. This will eliminate the need to install guides wires to create a boundary for the mowers. Fahey expects to see beta-testing from some manufacturers as soon as 2021 on specific types of properties. Hopp says for sports fields and open fields, the wireless technology is here now, but to have it successfully navigate around houses, bushes, trees, sidewalks is where the challenge lies. – *Brian Horn*

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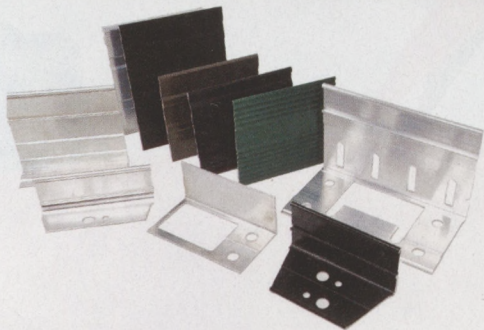
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Bridging the gap

The recent “Lost in Translation” webinar explained ways to navigate cultural differences with Latinx workers.

By Jimmy Miller

From handshakes to hard work, understanding the nuanced differences between the American and Latinx cultures can lead to a more productive workplace.

This was the message during the webinar “Lost in Translation: The Five Things Businesses Must Understand About the Latinx Culture.”

The education was sponsored by the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association and went live earlier in November. Given that Spanish-speakers and Latinx employees make up roughly half of the landscaping industry’s workforce, understanding ways to bridge cultural gaps became imperative to speaker Bernie Carranza, the manager at Lotus Farms Chicago. Latinx is



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a more recent term that replaces the "a" or the "o" in Latina and Latino to make the term gender-neutral. But before Carranza told attendees some of the lessons he's learned as both a manager and member of the Latinx community, Donna Vignocchi Zych, ILCA president, opened up the webinar.

"I deeply believe that this seminar isn't just about getting more performance out of our teams," she said. "It's about bridging an essential gap and how our different cultures interpret words, actions, gestures, hierarchies and traditions. When employees feel safe, they have the ability to excel and better their collective lives."

Here's some of what was discussed during the webinar:

DIVERSE CULTURES. First, it's important to understand exactly what demographic of people you're referring to when you say "Latinx." In this case, it's anyone from a Spanish-speaking country.

In his experience, Carranza said people who were originally born in one of these Spanish-speaking countries identify themselves as Hispanic, while those born in the U.S. with familial ties to other countries label themselves as Latinx. He made it clear, however, that they can ultimately determine how they'd like to be identified.

The presentation was more geared toward Latinxs who had not acculturated to American culture. Many are from Mexico; the complicating factor is that their experiences and cultural influences are different depending on what area of Mexico they're from.

"The employer, when appropriate, should discuss with their Latino employees the cultural differences that exist and how to make everyone comfortable," he said. "There are differences in simple, everyday interactions. The more we become familiar with these, the (better) communication we have."

As it pertains to showing these employees respect, simple things like hand gestures and body language go a long way. Directly looking at someone's eyes during serious conversations can be viewed as a challenge to his authority, and handshakes for Latinxs are supposed to be soft to the touch rather than firm and rigid. Greetings in American culture are brief and to the point, while in Latinx culture, they're more warm, welcoming and expected.

Employers should talk about those differences and clarify with the employee that they're not trying to upstage them with direct eye contact, for example.

EDUCATION. Latinxs prefer cooperative learning environments rather than competitive. As an example, Carranza recalled helping other cousins through school lessons growing up rather than trying to outdo them. This carries into the workplace, as training at a company should be done in more of a group setting than individually.

Carranza recommended allowing for smaller meetings to go on during larger meetings for those who learn most comfortably in a communal way. In his experience, these smaller groups lead to more productivity from his Latinx workers as they explain to one another what they've learned. Another challenge is understanding that

Latinxs “don’t know,” even when they do, Carranza said. This means that they’d rather not embarrass somebody leading a meeting by upstaging them with the correct answer, even if it means sitting on vital information. This can be avoided by encouraging them to speak up often.

“We should encourage them to ask questions,” Carranza said. “Our style is more formal. What that means is that if you’re the presenter, if you’re the authority of the person presenting, there is this tendency to not interrupt you.”

UNDERSTANDING AMBITION. Latinxs often credit their achievements to fate or religious circumstances rather than their own ability, Carranza said. “We look down at our shoes – we downplay our successes,” he said. “When something good happens to us, we don’t credit our own hard work.”

He said because of this humility, Latinxs are often labeled as unambitious. Some miss out on raises or bonuses because of this trait. Their politeness can lead to Americans viewing them as subservient.

As Carranza put it, the squeaky wheel gets the grease, and sometimes, people with bad manners get what they want. Latinxs’ ambition for career progression is demonstrated quietly, he said, and “the key for you is recognizing that ambition and directing it.”

Carranza said sometimes, Latinxs struggle to speak up when things get difficult because they have adopted a culture of hard work and pride in their company. He said it’s up to employers to listen to employees and ask them proactively how the work is going.

“Working hard is in our culture, it’s in our DNA,” he said. “What can we do? We encourage them, we empower them.”

LANDSCAPE WORKSHOP ACQUIRES GREAT OAK IN ATLANTA

Great Oak founder Tim Christie, who started the company in 2000, will join the team as GM of Atlanta operations.

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. – Landscape Workshop recently acquired the landscape maintenance and enhancement operations of Great Oak Landscape Group, based in Atlanta. Great Oak founder Tim Christie will be joining the Landscape Workshop team as general manager of Atlanta operations.

“We are incredibly excited to have Tim and his team of talented managers and landscapers join Landscape Workshop,” said J. T. Price, Landscape Workshop CEO.

“Tim worked with several of LW’s operational leaders in the past. We knew we wanted him on our team.”

Christie started in the landscape industry as a crew member over 30 years ago and

founded Great Oak Landscape Group in 2000 in the garage of his home. Christie built Great Oak to three locations in greater Atlanta with 40 employees. Landscape Workshop, meanwhile, ranked No. 43 on Lawn & Landscape’s Top 100 list last year.

“I’m excited to stay on in my new role as general manager for Landscape Workshop and to expand on what Great Oak Landscape Group has accomplished in the Atlanta market,” Christie said. “The people I know at Landscape Workshop share the same values of customer service and responsiveness that my team and I do, and I know we will be a good fit.”

Landscape Workshop is a full-service grounds management company that has been



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With the addition of Great Oak, Landscape Workshop now serves 10 Southeastern markets in Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia and the Florida panhandle. Landscape Workshop is backed by Carousel Capital and McKinney Capital.

The Bradley law firm served as Landscape Workshop's legal counsel in this transaction.

DAVEY RESOURCE GROUP ACQUIRES ASSETS OF EEE CONSULTING

Founded in 1998, 3e operates in the Richmond and Blacksburg areas in Virginia.

KENT, Ohio – Davey Resource Group, a subsidiary of The Davey Tree Expert Company, has acquired assets of EEE Consulting (3e) in Virginia.

Founded in 1998, 3e operates in the Richmond and Blacksburg areas and provides environmental and engineering services to the public and private sectors. Those services include: site assessment and remediation; water resource and stormwater management; landscape architecture; Geographic Information System (GIS) services; wetland delineation; mitigation design; stream restoration; threatened and endangered species consultation; brownfield redevelopment; certified drone surface modeling; National Environmental Policy Act document preparation and a variety of other services.

The acquisition was made by Wetland Studies and Solutions, a Davey company, which is a subsidiary of DRG. The 3e offices in Mechanicsville and Blacksburg, Virginia, will become new offices for WSSI, also based in Virginia.

"Davey Resource Group and WSSI are excited to welcome the employees of 3e into the Davey family," said Ken Joehlin, vice president and general manager, DRG Environmental Consulting. "3e brings a broad range of expertise and experience partnering with municipal and government clients that will enhance the environmental consulting services WSSI offers to clients in Virginia. This acquisition also strengthens Davey's commitment to providing diverse consulting solutions to our clients."

Like Davey, 3e has been employee owned. Under employee ownership, staff members are given the opportunity to become owners

through an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP), an employee benefit plan that gives workers ownership interest in the company through stocks. Davey has been employee-owned since 1979 and is the ninth largest employee-owned firm in the U.S.

3e has 36 employees working out of offices in Richmond, Blacksburg and Newport News. All employees will continue employment under the WSSI brand. Andrew Kassoff, president of 3e, will continue as director of WSSI.

"Davey Tree is a leader in the tree care and environmental consulting industry, and we are thrilled to join the Davey family," Kas-



DAVEY HAS BEEN EMPLOYEE-OWNED SINCE 1979 AND IS THE NINTH-LARGEST ESOP FIRM IN THE UNITED STATES.

soff said. "This is a great opportunity for our clients as well. The only major changes they will notice will be an expansion of our talent, expertise, and an increased diversity in the services we can offer. Also, 3e employees will benefit from Davey's legacy and culture of employee ownership. We are truly excited for what the future holds."

HOFFMAN NAMED CEO AT FISHER BARTON

Scott A. Hoffman has more than 30 years of leadership experience.

WATERTOWN, Wis. – Scott A. Hoffman has been named CEO of Fisher Barton, a Watertown-based group of eight businesses that has operations in Wisconsin, Illinois, Texas and Vietnam.

Hoffman, who previously was vice president of the municipal products group at Neenah Enterprises, Inc. and president of the Wise Company, a Memphis-based seating system manufacturer, fills the post that has been held on an interim basis since July by Craig Smith, who will return to his position as president of Fisher Barton TST in Sun Prairie.

Hoffman has more than 30 years of leadership experience, largely in casting, stamping and precision machined products in the heavy truck, marine and foundry industries and has a track record of success in sales and marketing, supply chain and product development.

"Scott's record of leadership and demonstrated expertise in the manufacturing sector make him an ideal person to lead our organization," said David Wilkey, board chair of Fisher Barton. "He understands the advantages that a well-run family business offers both to its associates and customers as well as to the communities in which it operates. We are pleased to have him join our team.

"We also appreciate Craig's efforts while we



HOFFMAN REPLACES CRAIG SMITH, WHO WAS INTERIM CEO.

conducted a search for our new leader. He has served us well, and we are glad that he will continue to be part of our leadership team by guiding Fisher Barton TST in Sun Prairie," he added.

Besides serving as president at the Wise Company and as a senior executive at Neenah Enterprises, Hoffman also was a vice president at the Brunswick Boat Group's operations in Poland and vice president and general manager at Mercury Marine in Fond du Lac.

He also served as president of a Brunswick unit in New Zealand and as vice president of supply chain for the Mercury Marine Group.

"I am honored to have been selected to lead the team at Fisher Barton at this critical time, and I look forward to working with such a talented group of people," Hoffman said.

"I am especially grateful for the steady hand of Craig Smith during these past four months. He has led the Fisher Barton Group admirably since July, and I am glad we can count on his continued contributions to our growth and success."



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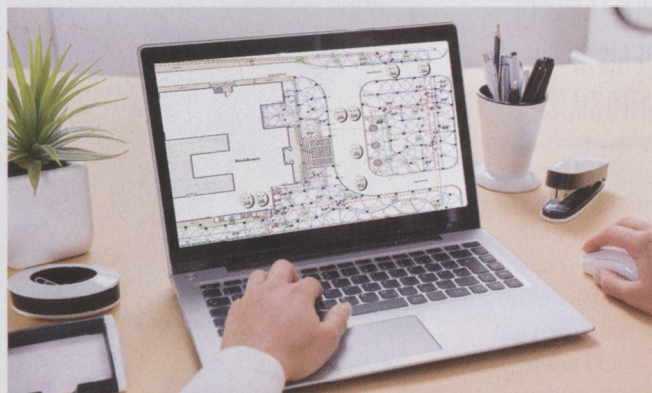
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HUSQVARNA INTRODUCES ROBOTIC MOWER CEORA

The CEORA is capable of mowing more than 12 acres and is equipped with EPOS technology.

The CEORA is a commercial robotic mower coming in 2022 that will cover more than 12 acres with one mow, the largest total area for any of the brand's robotic mowers.

CEORA is designed to be a low-noise, zero-emissions solution that will allow facility management companies, municipalities and sports field managers to bring more efficiency and consistency to the overall land maintenance process.

In the future, it can be tailored to specific needs by adding accessories like a lawn striper, fairway deck or line painter and can be paired with other robotic mowers. Husqvarna's suite of connectivity and fleet services will also allow the operator instant and continuous digital monitoring and control of multiple units.

CEORA joins a line-up of commercial Husqvarna Automower products - Husqvarna Automower 550 and 550H - that are designed specifically for demanding professional applications. One machine can cover areas of more than 12 acres.

The new CEORA will be available with Husqvarna's recently introduced EPOS technology - a satellite-based navigation system enabling mowing with virtual boundaries. This navigation system delivers an accuracy down to an inch and is used to create virtual boundaries for professional robotic mowers. The new system will increase the flexibility and use of professional robotic mowers in green spaces.

Husqvarna professional robotic mowers with Husqvarna EPOS integrate with Husqvarna Fleet Services, a digital fleet management control system, and make the management of large lawns and green spaces easier.

More details about the pricing for the new Husqvarna CEORA will be available in the summer of 2021 and mowers will start shipping to customers in early 2022.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION
ON ROBOTIC MOWERS,**

**TURN TO PAGE 4 TO READ A
RECAP OF LAWN & LANDSCAPE'S
VIRTUAL PANEL ON THE TOPIC.**

ROBIN AUTOPILOT PARTNERS WITH TURFBOT MOWING

TurfBot operates under the Weed Man umbrella, which ranked No. 8 on our recent Lawn & Landscape Top 100 list.

DALLAS—Robin Autopilot USA, a robotic mowing technology company, entered into a partnership with TurfBot Mowing, a brand under the Weed Man USA ownership umbrella.

Under the new partnership, TurfBot franchises will offer robotic mowing services powered by Robin's technology. TurfBot franchises will have access to all of the tools and resources available through the Robin platform.

Ranked as the eighth-largest company on the 2020 Lawn & Landscape Top 100, based on 2019 revenue, Weed Man expanded into the robotic mowing business when it launched TurfBot in 2018 to test the concept, recognizing the benefits of offering battery-powered and

emissions-free robotic mowing services to customers. TurfBot currently operates in three locations and plans to expand.

"Robin Autopilot was the obvious choice for us in our search for a partner with cutting-edge technology and expertise that would help us grow in the exciting robotic mowing industry," said Jennifer Lemcke, chief executive officer of Weed Man. "We believe robotic mowing has a bright future, and we look forward to working with Robin to continue the transformation of the lawn care industry through the wide-ranging environmental and economic benefits of this new technology."

LANDCARE APPOINTS MARK HOPKINS TO LEAD NEW DIVISION

A LandCare employee since 2014, he will join the company's newly formed Central Division as executive vice president.

LandCare tapped Mark Hopkins to lead the company's newly formed Central Division as executive vice president.

Hopkins will continue to guide the branch teams in Texas and Oklahoma, with the addition of the teams in Tennessee, Georgia and North Carolina, while joining LandCare's executive committee.

Since joining LandCare in 2014, Hopkins served as regional vice president in Texas and Oklahoma, leading his region through six consecutive years of robust growth.

Hopkins helped teams build sustainable portfolios and an engaging environment for team members, plus numerous advancement opportunities to budding young leaders.

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PRICING A LAWN MAINTENANCE PACKAGE

→ **TOO MANY LAWN MAINTENANCE CONTRACTORS** “wing” it when it comes to determining how much to charge for their services. Calculating an accurate hourly rate is essential if you are going to cover all of your costs and earn a reasonable net profit.

Editor's Note: You can see the worksheet for these scenarios by visiting bit.ly/lawnwebextras.

I'll use both a bottom-up and a top-down approach to determine how much to charge. By bottom-up, I mean that I'll calculate all of the field costs (field labor, labor burden and equipment) for this service. Then I'll add general and administrative overhead and a reasonable net profit margin.

By top-down, I mean that once I calculate what I think is a reasonable hourly rate, I'll then ask if my market will accept that rate. Will the market support such an hourly rate?

HOW IT WORKS IN THE FIELD. First, we calculate how much we need to charge for a day for this package (see my **MS Excel worksheet “181.0 Two man mow crew.xls”**). The costs for this scenario are as follows:

- The average wage for the crew is \$16.00
- Overtime adds 10% to this figure or \$1.60.
- We apply a 10% risk factor to the hourly rate or another \$1.60.
- Total cost per man-hour is \$19.20 (16 + 1.60 + 1.60).
- Labor burden (FICA, FUTA, SUTA, payroll taxes, insurances for workers' compensation and liability, paid time off, etc.) adds 20% to this cost or \$3.84.
- The truck and trailer costs \$15 per hour or \$120 (8 hours x \$15) per day.
- The general and administrative (G&A) overhead cost per man-hour is \$12. We use a unit cost per man-hour of \$12 because applying G&A overhead as a percent isn't accurate.
- We desire a minimum 10% net profit margin (NPM) for this package. A 10% margin is equivalent to an 11.1% markup. You calculate the 10% margin by dividing the break-even point (BEP) by one minus the desired NPM (1 - .10 = .9).

Next, we add up all of the costs:

- 8 Mhrs on site + 2 Mhrs mobilization per person at \$19.20 per man-hour totals: **\$384.00**
- To this we add the 20% labor burden or \$3.84 per man-hour: **\$76.80**
- Next we add the field equipment costs by multiplying the average run-time hours per day by the cost per hour (CPH) for each machine.
 - 5 hours for the 48-inch ride-on mower @ \$12 CPH: **\$60**
 - 3 hours for the 36-inch walk-behind mower @ \$6.50 CPH: **\$19.50**
 - 1 hours for the 21-inch push mower @ \$5 CPH: **\$5**
 - 5 hours for edgers, trimmers, blowers, etc. @ \$4 CPH: **\$20**
 - Total cost for field equipment: **\$104.50**
- Eight hours of truck and trailer time @ \$15 per hour totals: **120**
- The total direct costs (TDC) are **\$685.30**

- Add the G&A overhead cost at \$12 per man-hour (20 x \$12.): **\$240.00**
- This gives us our break-even point (BEP): **\$925.30**
- We then add a 10% margin to the BEP ($\$925.30 \div (1 - .1) = (\$925.30 \div .9)$): **\$102.81**
- Our daily revenue goal for this crew is just over \$1,000: **\$1,028.11**

ANALYZING OUR DAILY REVENUE GOAL.

This two-person crew needs to generate just over \$1,000 per day in 20 man-hours to achieve a 10% net profit margin. This is a little over \$500 per day per person. If this crew can cut an average of eighteen lawns per day, the average price per lawn at 10% NPM is \$57.12. At 15% NPM, the average lawn price would be \$60.48.

Many (probably most) contractors would have a minimum one man-hour charge to drop their tailgate. In our scenario, it would probably be \$50 or 55.

A 20% benchmark for “windshield” time (load/unload, drive time, etc.) is a good goal for such a crew. This translates into an 80% curb-time (time on-site) benchmark.

If you felt confident about your daily amount of curb-time, you could charge a curb-time rate.

To calculate your curb-time rate, simply divide your daily revenue figures by the average curb-time man-hours per day.

- Curb-time Man-hour TDC is **\$42.83**
- Curb-time Man-hour BEP is **\$57.83**
- Curb-time Man-hour 10% NPM is **\$64.26**
- Curb-time Man-hour 15% NPM is **\$68.04**

I'd argue that given the costs in our scenario, a bottom-up analysis of the rates that we've calculated shows that they are reasonable and accurate. You have to apply them to specific markets to determine if they will fly in a given market. **L&L**

CALCULATING HOW MUCH TO CHARGE

should include considerations on “windshield” time and field equipment costs per hour.



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WITH BRUCE WILSON
FOUNDER AND CONSULTANT

WORDS OF WILSON features a rotating panel of consultants from Bruce Wilson & Company, a landscape consulting firm.

ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH CHECK: TAKING ENGAGEMENT'S PULSE

→ **OF THE MANY WAYS** we reshaped our organizations last year, the most important turns out to be how we focused on helping our people and our communities thrive through crisis. The attention we gave to health, safety and well-being – and the high level of communicating we did with employees and customers – made every company one where people came first.

There are countless reasons people-first engagement needs to continue as we move into a post-pandemic reset. Boosted morale, a cohesive culture, everyone connected and aligned with digital processes and systems and improved protocols for service delivery, safety and hygiene.

Once people experience engagement, no one wants to give it up. Keeping teams and customers engaged will not only be essential in this new year, but a key metric for ranking organizational health overall and future success.

Many companies approach 'happiness' as a benchmark or rely on happiness, i.e., happy customers/happy employees, to improve retention. But happiness is not the same as engagement. Happiness is an abstraction and subjective. Engagement is based on how much people care.

For example, a company that focuses only on happiness does, in fact, generate high levels of optimism; but optimism does not necessarily translate to caring about the wider business or contributing to the bigger picture. Sometimes an employee is happy if they simply take home a paycheck. Engaged employees, on the other hand, do whatever it takes.

A lot of companies spend valuable resources on 'touchy-feely' things to foster happiness. Everyone loves good barbecue or a gift. But afterwards, are people left with feelings of engagement or are they merely satisfied in the moment?

The difference matters. Engaged people drive innovation and are in it to win it. Disengaged people – customers and employees – have an 8-to-5 mentality and do not seek involvement or inclusion.

An example of a disengaged customer, for example, is one that may decline to participate in a service feedback survey. They don't care enough to further your performance by giving you information you need to improve. For maintenance companies, customers that invest in frequent enhancements is a sign of engagement, as are renewals with price increases.

If your team relishes challenges and jumps in to drive revenue, it's a sign of good organizational health. On the contrary, if they complain that goals are not realistic, assuming that they are attainable, this is not a good sign.

Many owners sense a loss of urgency in their team. I think some of this is a normal evolution of business maturity, but it is an early warning of declining company health. It is a result of complacency. It's probably a time to make sure you have some young talent coming up to push those that are starting to get too comfortable.

If engaged people will consistently push your business forward, where do we find these people? Better yet, how do we create and inspire them? How can we lay the foundation for engagement, and shape the experience people have with our companies that not only benefits them, but is a return on investment for us?

Engagement pulse points:

1. Improve satisfaction. Coincidentally, this will also increase happiness and morale.
2. Communicate. Involve people in outcomes, problem-solving and planning, and include them in things that matter.
3. Delegate. Give people room to work and think in the way they work and think best.
4. Create a continual, consistent feedback loop; make recognition and course correction a conversation.
5. Make training, career growth and professional development a priority. **L&L**

PEOPLE-FIRST ENGAGEMENT

leads to boosted morale, a cohesive culture and improved team organization.



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CREAM OF THE CROP
WITH ED LAFLAMME
CO-FOUNDER, HARVEST GROUP

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

DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOUR COMPANY IS STUCK?

→ **QUITE OFTEN, I GET CALLS** from landscape company owners telling me they feel stuck. For example, this past week, an owner told me he started his business 15 years ago and felt like quitting.

He said he was exhausted, not physically but mentally. His sales were projected to be around \$1.5 million and "I'm running around like a nut and can't take it anymore." He sounded really frustrated. He said, "if this continues, then at the end of the next 10 or 15 years, I'll be ready for the funny farm and my company won't be worth anything. I would have worked all these years and have nothing to show for it. Can you help?"

Why is this happening to him? Wow, where to start! **There are numerous reasons. Let me give you some.**

NO VISION, NO END GOAL. "If you don't know where you're going, you won't know when you get there." This is my version of what the great Yogi Berra said. Funny but, oh, so true. My friend, Ret. Commander Mary Kelly said, "Vision is like having a picture on the box of a jigsaw puzzle. If there was no picture, can you imagine how difficult it would be to put the puzzle together?" Her point is, operating a business without a vision is like trying to put those puzzle pieces together without a picture; not only do your people not know where they're going... you don't, either.

The other saying that comes to mind when thinking about "vision" is from the Stephen Covey book, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People." The second habit in his book is "begin with the end in mind."

In other words, know where you want to end up and then plan out what needs to be done to get there.

So, if you're a business owner reading this, ask yourself: Do I have a vision and know where I'm going? Do I know what type of company I'm trying to build? How large, how profitable, what type of work are we best at doing? If you don't know, it's not too late.

GET OUT OF THE SWAMP. I use this metaphor because it's appropriate for many business owners, including myself when I had my company. I was stuck in the proverbial swamp trudging around and around for years not knowing what was going on with other companies outside of the swamp. Not until I went to my first national trade association convention and met owners with much larger companies did I have my eye's opened. The exposure to these awesome people who were non-competitors, and who shared with me whatever I

wanted to know, was totally amazing. That first convention was in the early '90s and I haven't missed a year since. What friends I made over the years! I just wish I had started earlier.

GET OUTSIDE ADVICE. Another thing that changed my company and helped me get out of the swamp was hiring my first consultant. I felt just like the company owner I described above when I hired my first consultant... frustrated, running around like a nut and preparing myself for the funny farm! The experience was amazing; he was amazing. I learned so much and it was incredible. From then on, I became a firm believer in hiring consultants because they helped me understand my finances, operations, marketing and planning. I really became conscious of what I didn't know. Shortly after his first engagement, my company began to grow and prosper twice as fast as before.

WORTH YOUR TIME. If you feel you're in the swamp I described above, think seriously about the items I mentioned. Take the time and learn all you can about the landscaping business.

Learn all you can about people. I've said many times that we are not in the landscaping business, but in the people business doing landscaping.

Read trade journals, like this one, from cover to cover every month. Be curious. Read business books, attend seminars and network with other company owners. Learn how to grow and maximize your profits. If you do these things, you will feel in control of your destiny and you'll get great satisfaction from building a great company you will be proud of. **L&L**

↓
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LEGISLATIVE LANDSCAPE is an occasional column by Andrew Bray, vice president, government relations, for the National Association of Landscape Professionals.

BIDEN'S POTENTIAL IMPACT

The November elections were just like everything else in 2020. Pundits/pollsters/media had a lot wrong, results were contested and the nation remains hotly divided. The one area of agreement for most Americans is that 2020 couldn't end soon enough, so we now turn the page toward 2021.

On Nov. 3, Americans submitted ballots in person or by mail in historic numbers. It took several days (in some cases weeks) for elections to be called, but the most important election was called by all major media outlets on Nov. 7 in favor of President-Elect Joe Biden by an electoral margin of 306 to 232, which is the exact same margin that President Trump beat Hillary Clinton in 2016. The similarities and closeness of both races (in the electoral college, not the popular vote) are remarkable. Whether this electoral map holds true in 2024 will remain to be seen, but it is important to note that the nation remains hyper polarized and nearly deadlocked in multiple key electoral states.

During the next four years, will the partisan divides deepen or will compromise prevail? We hope the latter but want to turn toward what the Biden Administration means for the landscape industry.

H-2B

Opportunities

- Biden hails from the state of Delaware which is a state with strong seasonal labor demands in landscaping, tourism, hospitality and seafood. The two senators from Delaware, Coons and Carper, have been staunch supporters of H-2B reform and will hopefully continue to garner influence with the President on the need for H-2B reform.
- Biden has openly stated on his transition website "Biden will work with Congress to reform the current system of work visas."
- Biden is committed to pushing immigration reform through Congress.
- Biden has nominated Alejandro Mayorkas to head the Department of Homeland Security. Previously, Mayorkas headed USCIS during the Obama administration and he has a track record of understanding the importance of the H-2B program.

Challenges

- Biden has strong connections with labor unions who fundamentally oppose guest worker programs. Unions will have significant influence in this administration.

- Labor unions are likely to hold key position at the Department of Labor and there are concerns over how strongly they will support and validate the labor certification process.

LAWN CARE/ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Opportunities

- Work with EPA personnel to further defend the Federal Insecticide Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA).
- Biden's EPA will be more credible at the state and local level rather than Trump's EPA, which was maligned as bad for the environment.
- Climate change will take center stage and the landscape industry can use this as an opportunity to demonstrate how we are part of the solution.

Challenges

- EPA could become less receptive to industry input on benefits when evaluating pesticides.
- Biden may roll back some EPA decisions that may make lawn care practices increasingly burdensome.
- The environmentalist anti-pesticide community that fundamentally opposes some of the practices and tools the lawn care industry uses will have strong influence inside the EPA and the White House.

In addition to our primary issues, we anticipate Biden pushing forward with a bold agenda on COVID-19 relief and economic stimulus; infrastructure; health care; and employment protections.

But President Biden's ability to pass a bold agenda will hinge on his ability to work with a Congress that, like the country, is divided along partisan lines with razor-thin majorities.

All of this will unfold in the following weeks and months but there will certainly be opportunities and challenges ahead for the landscape industry as we turn the page on 2020 and begin 2021 with the newly inaugurated President Joe Biden and the 117th Congress. **L&L**

Editor's note: This article was written by NALP Government Affairs Department on Dec. 4, 2020. You can contact Bray at andrew@landscapeprofessionals.org for the most current information.

BETWEEN H-2B AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES, the Biden Administration presents opportunities and challenges for landscapers.

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DOWNTURN TO **DOMINATION**

Jena and Rudy Larsen
started Lawn Butler during
the Great Recession, but still
have grown it by 50% every year.

By Kristen Hampshire



In 2007, “everything was collapsing,” says Rudy Larsen, CEO of Lawn Butler in Centerville, Utah, of the economy. But while talking to potential customers, they beefed about getting landscape guys to call them back or deliver bids. They told him, “We can’t get anyone to do what they said they were going to do.”

Larsen thought, “**I can do that.**” —→

“There were enough landscape companies out there that were not concerned about taking care of their customers,” he says, jumping ahead to today and his \$18-million firm, which has grown an average of 57% every year during the last decade.

Larsen started his business that year with his wife, Jena. Then, Larsen was fresh out of high school and determined to grow his mowing side gig into a legitimate, profitable business.

Larsen maxed out credit cards, purposely broke a bank covenant, barely made payroll and questioned whether he should be in this business. He hired the wrong people, completed jobs that weren’t profitable and stayed up worrying if he would make payroll. In other words, his experience is “like any true entrepreneurial story” in many ways, he says.

But he focused. And, he refocused, recognizing that “the single push on the flywheel”

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that his favorite author Jim Collins writes about in *Good to Great*, was adopting a guiding principle – this idea of a family culture. Certainly, labor keeps most owners in the landscape industry up at night. But for Larsen, his concern is about “making sure people are happy.”

“I don’t want people to feel left out or like they are not important,” he says. “If I lose my people, I lose my business.”

Here is how he grew Lawn Butler to be attractive enough to sell and continue to grow.

THE FIRST FIVE YEARS. “We weren’t making any money,” Larsen says. “We didn’t know our pricing structure, we didn’t know how to bid. But I had a desire to take care of customers, so we were growing.”

Larsen can count a good 15 times when Lawn Butler should have gone out of business.

“We weren’t making any money. We didn’t know our pricing structure, we didn’t know how to bid. But I had a desire to take care of customers, so we were growing.”

Rudy Larsen, CEO of Lawn Butler



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One of those was after a struggle to make payroll. Larsen was driving his truck on Utah's I-250 and he wanted to quit. Just forget it all and move on. "I thought, 'I need to be done

and just do something different. I'm not making any money, and this is going nowhere.'"

He kept driving.

He kept thinking, too.

TOUGHING IT OUT. Larsen says there were 15 times his company should have shut down, but he made a promise to himself to never quit.

"I said to myself, 'I'm going to make the decision right now to never consider quitting, ever again,'" he says. "That was a moment of 'passing through,' and once I passed through, I never went through that again. I was determined to make my business work and to stop worrying about whether I should or shouldn't."

This was 2010, and the business was only three years old. The moment changed Larsen's mindset. With a full-boar attitude, Lawn Butler grew from \$30,000 in 2007 to \$2.5 million in 2012.

Getting there was a grind. The company began to dig into its bidding process and finetune pricing. In 2009, Larsen's wife who was working as a dental hygienist and doing the books off-hours – came into the business full-time to focus on production processes. She also began focusing on team-building.

Jena says, "Rudy is good at the big picture and the vision, and I'm good at the details of how to make his vision happen."

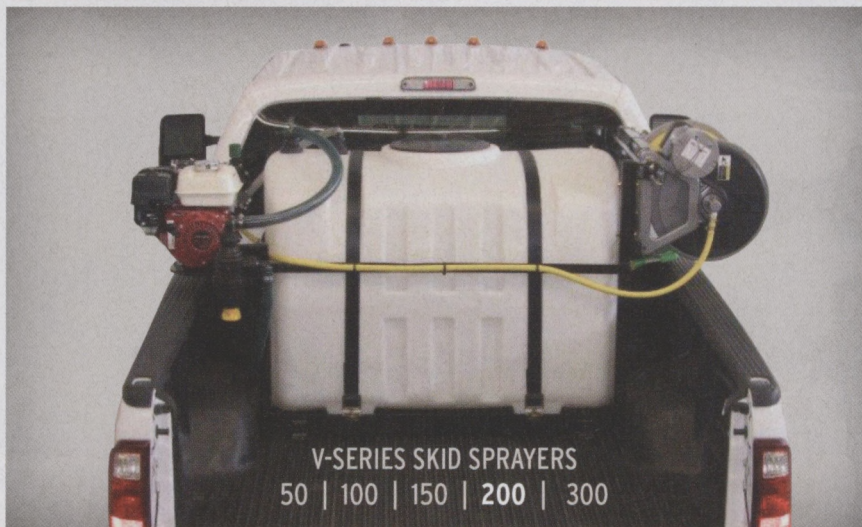
Organizing field labor and keeping an eye on expenses positioned Lawn Butler to support its growing customer base. The team had grown to about 20 with five trucks in the fleet by 2011 when Dario Benitez joined the company. He had been working as a junior accountant and ran into his high school friend – Larsen – only to learn his buddy was still in the landscaping business. "I told him I was contemplating a career change and he told me about his business and the opportunity," Benitez says.

At Lawn Butler, there is a formal Culture of Family philosophy, and though it wasn't written down in a core values format at that time, Larsen had been operating that way since the beginning. It was just in a more casual way. "Rudy painted this picture and shared the goals he had for the business, and knowing him, I trusted that. Whenever he says he will do something, he accomplishes it. So, that is why I made the leap," Benitez recalls.

Benitez came on board as operations manager and soon evolved into an account manager role, focused on sales as Lawn Butler aimed to increase its commercial maintenance business.

Today, Benitez manages a team of 12 account managers and two estimators as vice president of sales. And, Lawn Butler is

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Mulch

Fill 20%

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Depth 1 in

Units

Length

Area

Volume

ft

ft²

yd²

Show

Parent Group

None

Services

Bed Maintenance / Weeding

Measurement: 12,383.12 sq ft

Time: 1h 14m

Edging Mulch Beds

Measurement: 3,219.77 ft

Time: 9h 45m

Mulch Bed Pre-Emergent Applic

Measurement: 12,383.12 sq ft

Time: 1h 14m

Mulching

Measurement: 38.22 cu yd

Time: 47h 46m

Vertical Edging

Measurement: 3,219.77 ft

Time: 1h 10m

Select a service:

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Area



primarily commercial maintenance, servicing retail sites, HOAs, commercial offices and industrial facilities. In ramp-up mode, Larsen recognized how much capital his

business required to keep up with growth.

"Free cash flow is a great way to grow, and a lot of businesses do that," he says. "There are plenty of articles out there about, 'Why I

ON THE HOOK. The Larsens decided they wanted to grow fast, so they took on debt with the confidence that they'd pay it back.

never took out a truck loan,' or 'Why I have no debt.' It's slower and safer to grow with cash. But I can't go slow. I can't."

THE SECOND FIVE YEARS. Larsen wanted to grow fast. "I wanted to build something timely," he says. He and Jena considered bringing on a minority investor, but losing control of the business was a concern. "A lot of investors have a horizon," he says. "They want to invest for five years, and after that, they want to sell and get their money back. You might be able to pick your first investor, but you likely will not be able to pick the second one. You may hate their guts, but you're stuck."

With private equity or an outside investor, "You share the risk – but you share the returns," Larsen says.

"We think we can do this on our own," the Larsens concluded.

Well, that is – they could do it with the bank. Deciding that cash-only was too slow and an outside investor would be too overbearing, the only reasonable third option was debt.

"Debt is an accelerator – for better and for worse," Larsen says. "We had to get good at managing the business and growing our company because with debt, you're on the hook. You have to perform and deliver."

Lawn Butler did just that.

Larsen describes the company's financial approach as "offensive," so banks never had to ask him to provide statements or stay compliant. "We approached the banks and negotiated lines of credit – and we approached them with the perspective that we wanted to continue to grow," Larsen says.

Larsen fine-tuned Lawn Butler's financial best practices, committing to detailed month-end reporting and meetings with managers to discuss performance. "Our average growth over the last 10 years has been 57%, so we had to produce 57% more working capital every year and service that debt," he explains, adding that, "if you don't know where you are financially, how can you make good decisions when it comes to debt?"

There was a point when Lawn Butler broke a debt covenant. "And, we were the first ones to tell the bank we broke it," Larsen says. The company purchased a bunch of equipment from a different bank than the one that held



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COVER STORY



Early on with his fledgling company, Rudy Larsen told himself he'd never consider quitting. Since that moment, Lawn Butler has only rapidly grown.

its existing credit lines. "So, we had two banks," he continues. "We went to the second bank and said, 'We are going to break this covenant for about 90 days. Here are our projections. Here is what we are doing. We want you to know we are in total control of the situation and we are making a good decision.'"

Within 90 days, Lawn Butler went from breaking that covenant to dropping its debt to far below the required 3-to-1 ratio. After taking on the second loan, the company's debt ratio was 5-to-1, higher than allowed. Post-90 days, its debt ratio was 1.8-to-1. The company had cut its debt to one-third of the total requirement.

Businesses need to think of debt as a responsibility to generate income, he says. "We weren't just adding debt, we could service it with our customers because we understood that every customer generates X dollars, and every bit of debt is Y," Larsen says. "(When) we increased our customer base, the X would outweigh the Y and we would be compliant."

To further manage processes, Lawn Butler adopted Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software. "We started tracking everything so we could review production data and performance numbers," Larsen says.

Jena adds, "Every one of our processes has been developed because

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TAKE TIME FOR YOU. Lawn Butler doesn't have a set PTO policy, but as long as production goals are met, schedules remain flexible.

we learned the hard way. We started the business from nothing, and whenever we encountered a roadblock, we solved it by creating a process to bypass that situation."

Larsen calls this five-year period of time in the business, "the years when we started making money."

Meanwhile, people were always central to Lawn Butler's operation – and just as the company evolved its financial and production processes, it also paid close attention to how people were given opportunities to thrive.

As Vice President of Operations Clayton Phillips, who joined the team in 2011, describes: "Because we are like a family, we can be more open and direct with each other. As managers, we focus on a 'sandwich system,' which is to compliment something they are doing well, address the issues we need to talk about, and remind them we support them and want to see them succeed."

Developing Culture of Family is a work in progress. "We always have to adapt and make changes as we grow," Phillips says.

ALL ABOUT PEOPLE. The biggest change Larsen names is Lawn Butler's intentional focus on people and doing what's right for the team – even if that means doing things that would make a typical HR manager cringe.

Case in point: Lawn Butler does not have a PTO policy and never has. "Our policy is, you take the time you need for your family and we expect you to show up and work and create a successful company – to do your part and carry your weight," Larsen says. "And if you don't, you won't work here."

To determine whether employees are "carrying their weight," each crew member and manager is assigned a production goal that is measured monthly, quarterly and annually through the ERP system. If a team member is not meeting his or her goal, a manager will hold a meeting to find out what's going on. "Sometimes, they have a good reason why – and we ask, 'How can we help?'" Larsen says.

You'll always have people who abuse freedom. Lawn Butler has a "slow, managed exit process" in those cases, where the company gives a team member who is underperforming a few chances to meet goals. Because production goals are based on specific job production times that have been tested and tweaked, they are realistic.

By managing performance and giving people the time they need when they need it, Larsen says 90% of the time team members make the right decisions on their own. "You empower people when you say, 'I trust you to make the right decision.'"

Operating in Utah, where winters can demand long hours through the night for snow and ice removal, Larsen also expects that employees will give to the company. "We expect you to work with the company if we need you and it's snowing at 2 a.m.," Larsen says. "But when you need that same courtesy when it comes to time off, we will be there for you as well."

Another key component of Lawn Butler's Culture of Family philosophy is treating employees the same as customers. Twice a year, the company gives customers gifts like calendars or mugs, pens. "We decided we were going to buy the same things for our employees – our team is just as important as our customers," Larsen says.

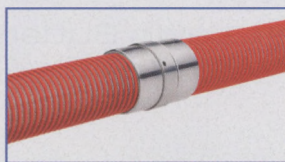
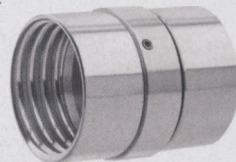


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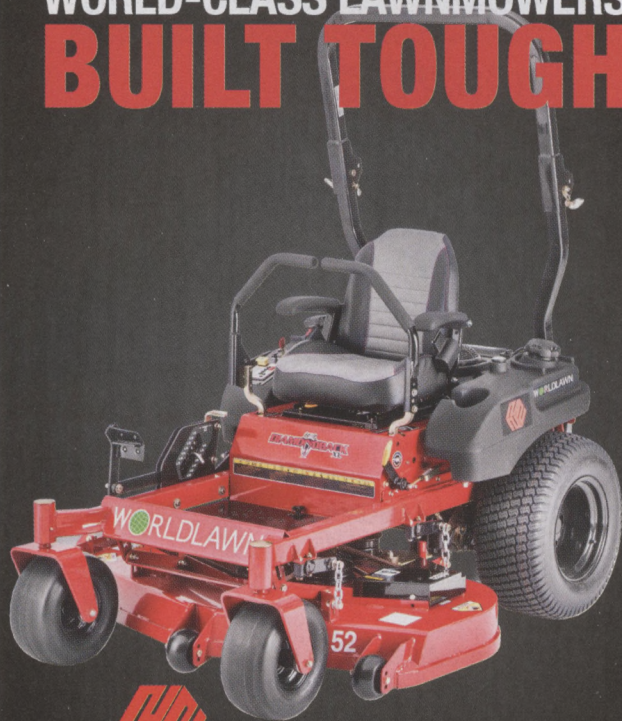
“Every one of our processes has been developed because we learned the hard way. We started the business from nothing, and whenever we encountered a roadblock, we solved it by creating a process to bypass that situation.”

Jena Larsen, Lawn Butler co-founder

Every year, Lawn Butler hosts a family barbecue, a company swim party and multiple team-building events – axe-throwing, going to the movies, etc. Employees look forward to the annual holiday party. “These little things quantify into something much bigger,” Larsen says. “We hope it shows people we care about them – we genuinely care about them.”

This culture goes a long way toward attracting labor in a tough market. Specifically, Lawn Butler shows invested, hard-working individuals who are H-2B workers or interested in a work visa that the company cares by sponsoring their journey toward citizenship. It costs about \$10,000 per permanent resident card. They move to the U.S. with their families and essentially take a loan from Lawn Butler to pay back some of the initial housing and setup expenses over time.

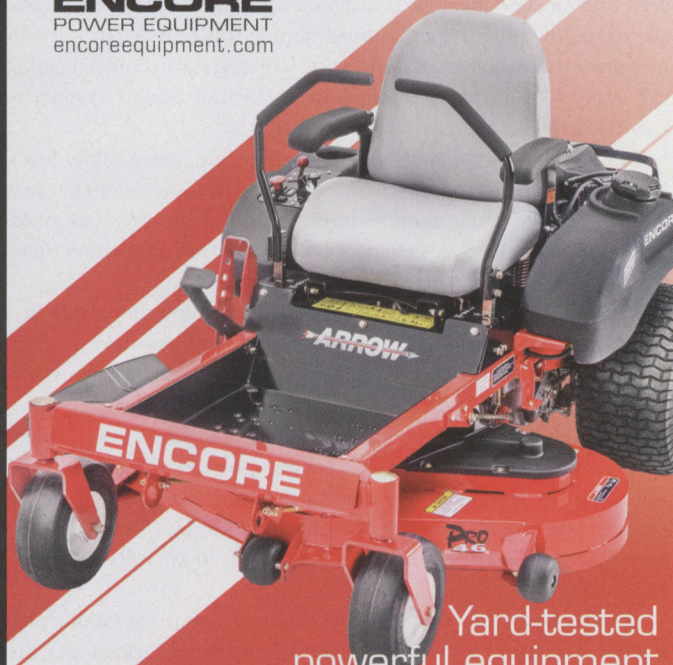
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ADOPTING TECH. Larsen expected crews to hate mobile tracking, but they've come back and said they like not filling out timesheets.

"It's a long-term investment," Larsen says of this project and recruiting, in general.

THE LAST THREE YEARS. Just as wise debt is a growth accelerator for Lawn Butler, so is smart technology. After starting Smart Rain in 2012, an irrigation platform to help scale the company's remote irrigation management business, Larsen began exploring other tech options.

Recently, Lawn Butler introduced a custom-built mobile app. It tracks photos and infield work, progress on jobs and prevents "time theft." Previously, the company relied on paper time sheets that crewmembers filled out. The pay-per-day sheet had a significant human error risk, though. If an employee forgot to fill it out, he or she would not get paid. In addition, there was a risk to the business, too, if a team member wasn't completely accurate since Lawn Butler is

so focused on managing production time.

"When we implemented the mobile tracking app, we figured our guys would hate it, but they came back and said, 'We like the app better!'" Larsen says. "I asked, 'Why?' They said, 'We don't have to spend time filling out paper day sheets.' And, they are getting paid like clockwork because the recording is happening like clockwork."

As for in-field technology, Lawn Butler invested \$100,000 in a pilot robotics program and hired a dedicated employee to manage it. The company has a few commercial-grade mowers that also perform sidewalk clearing in winter. So far, customers are receptive.

"Everything we have figured from a dollar-savings perspective tells us this makes sense, and we are always looking at ways to reduce production times," Larsen says. "We are looking at how we might be able to replace

an individual for a task like mowing and use that person for another aspect of the business that generates more profit."

All the hard work paid off for the Larsens and their employees and has set the company up for even more growth. In April of 2020, Lawn Butler was acquired by Outworx Group, a facility services management company that's part of the New York-based Mill Point Capital portfolio. Larsen will still be involved with Lawn Butler and has no plans of leaving anytime soon.

"I plan to stay engaged in helping them grow my company and their company into a successful industry leader," he says. "I chose to partner with them because I felt at the time, and still do, that together we are much better than we are apart. We can do more and accomplish more in a shorter time than we could apart." **L&L**

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Hitting the right buttons

SEO is complicated, but getting started can be simple.

By Jimmy Miller

Practicing strong search engine optimization is like tending to a landscape: There's multiple important components that make up the whole.

That's how Jack Jostes likens it to his clients in the green industry. He's the president and CEO of Ramblin' Jackson, a digital marketing agency based in Boulder, Colorado. Between getting strong Google reviews and properly listing your company's contact information online, Jostes says there's not one clear-cut path to strong SEO.

"There are multiple components that need to work together to get found online," Jostes says. "There isn't any one single thing that you do, just like there isn't any one single thing you're going to do if you're in a landscape."

While there's no secret formula to finding success online, SEO experts say there's certainly several steps that convert website users into leads. And here's the positive: Chris Darnell with The Harvest Group believes there's very little competition online because landscapers simply haven't put in the time as an industry to learn about SEO.

"I would say if somebody would spend four or five hours a month on it, they'd be ahead of 90% of the other competitors," Darnell says. "It takes very little to move the needle in our industry because people don't take advantage of digital marketing."

TWO (GREEN) THUMBS UP. Getting strong reviews online is among the first things landscapers can do to improve their SEO. Jostes says clients look at the reviews online before deciding to invest money in a company, and three out of five stars doesn't look good when someone else has five out of five.

So, Jostes recommends asking for an online review while building that relationship with the client. He's told companies to make it a part of their process, where managers will ask clients for a Google review before final walkthrough of the property. Others can secure the review months in advance by getting an agreement that they'll leave their feedback at the end of the process.

Jostes says it's important to get Google reviews, but it's also important to give clients options in the event they don't have a Google account. Put a reviews section on the company website where people can write first-





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Don't just tell people what services you offer – tell them how their solutions will help them get what they want. For example, the writing is often something like, “we provide mowing” when it should be, “we’re giving you your weekends back.”

CHAD DILLER,
director of client success,
Landscape Leadership



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hand feedback without needing to create an account. Reviews on social media also factor into the SEO equation, so he says landscapers can't ignore those, either.

"The clients who are not getting strong results from the internet don't have reviews yet," Jostes says. "They all say that word of mouth is their number one source of business. Online reviews is still word of mouth."

A WORK IN PROGRESS. Chad Diller says it's easy for companies to forget that people – not computers – are on the other end of a Google search. Real, live humans are the ones viewing a website, so the site should be as user-friendly as possible.

"Every move that I've seen in Google over the last 10 years has been rewarding websites that provide a meaningful, valuable user experience," Diller says. "If a person finds your

website and they stay there...that is a big, big indicator to Google that things are going good."

Diller is the director of client success at Landscape Leadership, which focuses on improving marketing and sales for companies in the green industry. He tells his clients to ensure their websites look good on both desktop and mobile devices, plus warns them to watch for slow loading times.

He also urges companies to consider what's on their website. Don't just tell people what services you offer – tell them how their solutions will help them get what they want. For example, the writing is often something like, "we provide mowing" when it should be, "we're giving you your weekends back."

"(The best sites) are writing for a human. It's actually funny or clever or meaningful," Diller says. "This looks different than the 12 other lawn care websites we went to."

ASK FOR FEEDBACK. Getting strong reviews online is among the first things landscapers can do to improve their SEO.

CREATING SOLUTIONS. Tone is not the only important factor to consider when evaluating a website's content. Darnell says it's important, and for a prime example of why, landscapers should look at Apple's website. They're not posting photos of the latest chip that goes in their phone; they post photos of people dancing and having a good time.

But he also reminds landscapers that creating original, unique content is vital to success online. Darnell says SEO is like your digital reputation, and creating a strong reputation means doing and saying the right things over a period of time to establish yourself online. Showing off how many awards your company has won or that you can take nice photographs in front of a truck is not enough – potential clients want to see expertise.

"The misconception is that you want to talk about yourself a lot. You don't," Darnell says.

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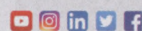
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“I would say if somebody would spend four or five hours a month on (SEO), they’d be ahead of 90% of the other competitors.”

CHRIS DARNELL, The Harvest Group

“You want to identify the issue, the solution and basically why you’re the best choice to provide that solution.”

There are some elements to SEO that can’t

really be changed: Search location proximity factors into what people search, so a landscaper in Ohio is always going to show up higher than a landscaper in Hawaii if that

Google user is searching “landscapers.” But Jostes says creating several web pages on a website helps build up SEO and including relevant links and keywords like the city names or services that the company offers will help. A four-page website won’t stand up against a 50-page website, especially if the pages on the latter are relevant.

Developed pages answer questions a client might have and provide education, while underdeveloped pages focus simply on why that company is so great – a marketing pitch.

“If you don’t mention the individual cities and pages, you’re not going to stand out online,” Jostes says. “And you could, because most landscapers have a very thin, weak website with no content. If you build out the content, you will rank (and get) those leads.”

MONITORING CHANGES. Diller urges landscapers to remember that SEO work is never really done. Not all a company’s problems will disappear if they reach the coveted top landing spot for when someone searches “landscapers near me.” He reminds companies that the goal is to get quality leads, not simply to get views.

“I think companies are looking for shortcuts,” Diller says. “They want someone to do this for them. They don’t want to be tied up with it.”

There are other search engines out there but Diller says landscapers should max out what they can do with Google first since it’s king. Plus, if they do find success on Google, landscapers will likely inherently find success on the other search engines.

Monitoring the changes in algorithms can be complicated, Darnell admits, but using tools like Google My Business, Moz and Search Engine Journal will help. Constantly reading about what Google uses in its algorithms helps people stay ahead of the curve in SEO.

Jostes compares SEO to a “tree of good fortune” – you can go out and buy fruit, but if you grow it instead, it’ll be plentiful and more productive in the long run.

“It takes more work to get started and it takes time,” Jostes says. “But once you plant it and nurture it, every season you’re generating those leads, but not necessarily paying as much as you did to build it and plant it.” **L&L**

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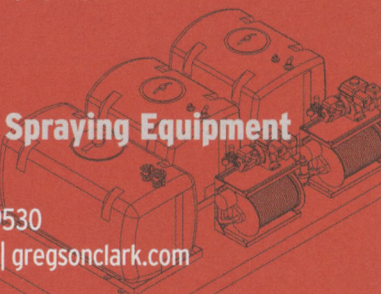


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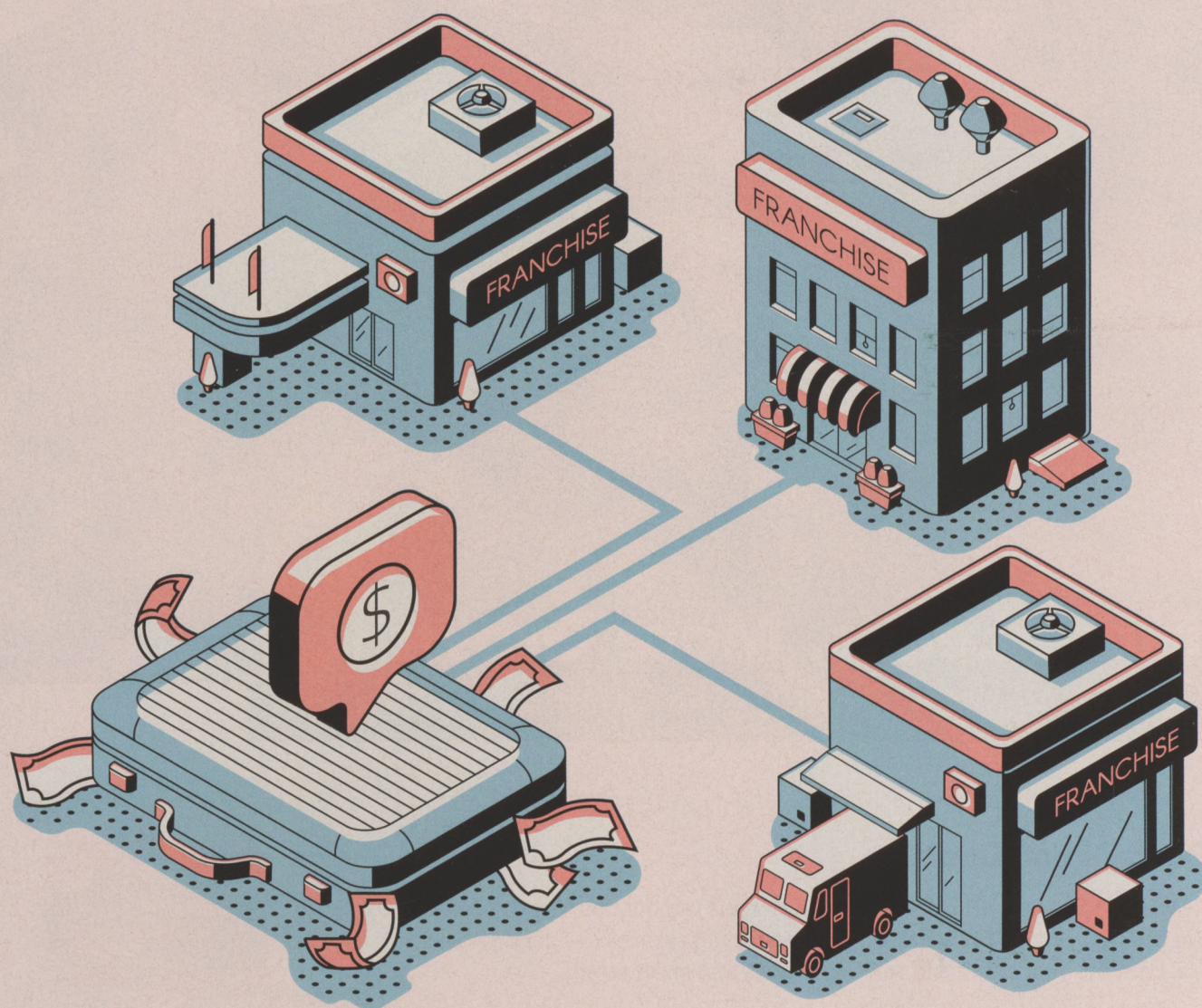
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The green industry has a number of franchise options if you want to break into landscaping or expand your service offerings.



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ENTRY

Archadeck Outdoor Living

- **Franchising since:** 1980
- **Average initial investment and what this covers:** \$130,000-\$150,000 – Start-up capital (Home-based, minimal tools and equipment, software, launch marketing for the first year).
- **Royalty fee:** 6.5% on a sliding scale
- **Franchise fee:** \$49,500
- **Total investment:** \$130,000-\$150,000
- **Number of North American Locations:** 66
- **States/provinces with at least 1 franchise:** 30
- **Services offered:** Residential custom design and build for outdoor living spaces including decks, sunrooms, screened porches, hardscapes, outdoor kitchens and pergolas
- **Closures in the last three fiscal years:** 5
- **Hours of Training:** 116 hours of classroom and 10 hours of field training
- **Website:** Archadeckfranchise.com and Archadeck.com

U.S. Lawns

- **Franchising since:** 1986
- **Average Initial Investment and what this covers:** Between \$45,800 and \$141,300 depending on type of franchise (standard vs. conversion) and desired operational model. Covers the first three months of operation and includes the franchise fee; initial marketing plan; training costs; deposits and payments for facility, truck, trailer and equipment and additional operating capital.
- **Royalty Fee:** Begins at 6% of gross monthly sales and declines to 5% and then 4% as certain revenue thresholds are achieved.
- **Franchise Fee:** Initial franchise fee is \$34,000 – discounts are available for existing landscape business operators looking to convert their business.
- **Total Investment:** Same as average initial investment listed above
- **Number of North American Locations:** 250
- **Services offered:** Core services includes maintenance, tree trimming; fertilization, lawn care and shrub and tree insect and disease control, lawn and ornamental consultation; irrigation services; installation of landscape materials; arborist services; and snow management and other snow-related services
- **Closures in the last three fiscal years:** 41
- **Hours of Training:** 47
- **Website:** uslawnsfranchise.com

Clintar

- **Franchising since:** 1982
- **Average Initial Investment and what this covers:** \$400,000 - \$600,000 covers set-up, real estate planning, training and operations and marketing.
- **Royalty Fee:** 8%
- **Franchise Fee:** \$40,000
- **Total Investment:** \$440,000 – \$640,000
- **Number of North American Locations:** 26
- **States/Provinces with at least 1 franchise:** 6
- **Services offered:** Snow and ice control, landscape management, landscape enhancements, parking lot maintenance, other services such as window cleaning, noxious weed and invasive species control
- **Closures in the last three fiscal years:** 0
- **Hours of Training:** Seasonal
- **Website:** Clintar.com

Weed Man

- **Franchising since:** In Canada in 1976 and expanded to offer franchising to the United States in 1996.
- **Average initial investment and what this covers:** \$69,490 - \$86,550. Initial franchise fee, training expenses, travel, real estate improvements, equipment and fixtures, truck and spray package lease, computer hardware and software, insurance, miscellaneous operating costs and additional funds for three months.
- **Royalty Fee:** \$12,558.98 annually for each of the first two production vehicles; \$8,791.29 annually for the third production vehicle; and \$6,279.49 annually for each subsequent production vehicle used during the year. Each year, these amounts may be adjusted for inflation, according to the Consumer Price index. The Base Year is Nov. 1, 1995. The amounts stated are for 2020.
- **Franchise Fee:** Single territory (population up to 150,000): \$20,000; double territory (population up to 300,000): \$33,750
- **Total Investment:** \$69,490 to \$86,550
- **Number of North American Locations:** 306 License Agreements & 683 Territory Counts
- **Services offered:** Fertilizer, weed control, insect control, mosquito control, aeration, seeding
- **Closures in the last 3 fiscal years:** 7
- **Hours of training:** 10-day training - 70 hours
- **Website:** Weedmanfranchise.com or Weedman.com

The Grounds Guys

- **Franchising since:** 2010
- **Average Initial Investment and what this covers:** \$81,220 - \$200,070. This includes the initial franchise fee, software, vehicle(s), equipment, supplies, inventory, insurance, local marketing and promotions, training, travel, lodging, deposits, permits/licenses, real estate. The Grounds Guys estimated initial investment range includes the franchise fee; however, the initial franchise fee may vary depending on the size of the territory purchased.
- **Royalty Fee:** 5-6%
- **Franchise Fee:** \$35,000 (minimum initial)
- **Total investment:** Not available
- **Number of North American Locations:** 213
- **Services offered:** Residential and commercial services include: lawn and bed maintenance; landscape and hardscape; pest, weed and fertilization, irrigation, outdoor lighting, snow and ice management; gutter cleaning
- **Hours of Training:** 110 hours over a 12-13 week onboarding process from signing to opening. Ongoing learning opportunities: 48-plus annual training opportunities, all day training events, weekly webinars and more.
- **Websites:** Franchise.groundsguys.com and Groundsguys.com

Freedom Lawns USA

- **Franchising since:** 2007
- **Average Initial Investment and what this covers:** Ranges from \$45,000 - \$60,000 excluding franchise fee. This includes vehicle, spray unit, computer software program, miscellaneous equipment, training, marketing, customized website, paper supplies, start-up product, insurance licensing.
- **Royalty Fee:** 6% - Also offers franchise owners an incentive program for reducing their monthly royalty based on annual growth.
- **Franchise Fee:** \$15,000 - \$25,000 based on territory
- **Total Investment:** \$60,000 - \$70,000
- **Number of North American Locations:** 11
- **States/Provinces with at least 1 franchise:** 4
- **Services offered:** Organic based lawn care, plant health care, natural mosquito control, many other optional lawn care services.
- **Closures in the last three fiscal years:** 1
- **Hours of Training:** 2 weeks- 80 hours- training is conducted at the corporate office and on franchise site
- **Website:** Freedomlawnsusa.com

Spring-Green Lawn Care

- **Franchising since:** 1977
- **Average initial investment and what this covers:** \$87,424 – Franchise fee, down payment on vehicle and equipment, technology and software, opening supplies, initial marketing campaign, initial data fee, three months working capital.
- **Royalty Fee:** 10-8% (5-3% first season for qualifying green industry business)
- **Franchise Fee:** \$25,000 with qualifying green industry business; (\$40,000 without)
- **Total Investment:** \$89,982-\$106,262
- **Number of North American Locations:** 126 independently operated locations, plus 26 company owned locations
- **States/Provinces with at least 1 franchise:** 26
- **Services offered:** Lawn fertilization and weed control, lime treatment, lawn disease control, brown patch control, aeration and overseed, core aeration, grassy weed control, ornamental bed weed control, irrigation maintenance, moss control, root feeding, specialty injections, two-step tree program, perimeter pest control, mosquito mitigation, fire ant, control, flea and tick control, crane fly control, grub/subsurface insect control, surface feeding insect control (services may vary by region)
- **Closures in the last three fiscal years:** 3
- **Hours of Training:** 40
- **Website:** Spring-green.com

Outdoor Lighting Perspectives

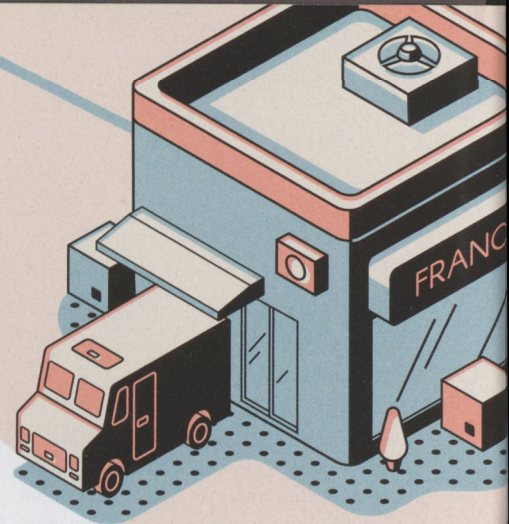
- **Franchising since:** 1998
- **Average initial investment and what this covers:** \$150,00 start-up capital (initial inventory, tools, equipment, launch marketing leasing program is available for the vehicle.)
- **Royalty fee:** 7% sales
- **Franchise fee:** \$49,500
- **Total investment:** \$150,000
- **Number of North American locations:** 90
- **States/provinces with at least 1 franchise:** 32
- **Services offered:** Residential LED low voltage lighting, holiday lighting (for commercial and residential) and commercial and hospitality lighting solutions
- **Closures in the last three fiscal years:** 19
- **Hours of Training:** 61 hours of classroom and 36 hours of field training
- **Website:** Outdoorlightingfranchise.com and Outdoorlights.com

Naturalawn

- **Franchising since:** 1989
- **Average Initial Investment and what this covers:** Visit bit.ly/naturalinvest
- **Royalty Fee:** Service fees start at 9% until you reach \$500,000 annual revenue, and once \$500,000 is achieved the fee drops to 7%. Service fees are based on deposits, not on sales.
- **Franchise Fee:** \$29,500 (new start up) – for conversions (current lawn care companies) the fee is adjusted based on revenue. It could be as low as \$9,500.
- **Total Investment:** \$47,500 to \$112,650 – depends on a new start-up vs a conversion.
- **Number of North American Locations:** 49 physical locations / 93 licenses
- **Services offered:** Lawn care, flea and tick, mosquito and aeration and seed
- **Closures in the last three fiscal years:** 0
- **Hours of Training:** Classroom 120 hours (3 weeks) and on the job 51-90.
- **Website:** Naturalawnfranchise.com and Naturalawn.com

Conserva Irrigation

- **Franchising since:** June of 2017
- **Average Initial Investment and what this covers:** First 90 days - \$81,800 - \$102,250 covers territory fee, travel for training, tools and equipment, computer hardware and software, inventory, storage, vehicle, vehicle signage, marketing investment and additional funds
- **Royalty Fee:** Tiered 8%, 7%, 6%, 5%
- **Franchise Fee:** First territory - \$49,500; Second territory - \$40,000
- **Total Investment:** Initial investment (first 90 days) - \$81,800 - \$102,250; Total Capital (first year) \$150,000 - \$200,000.
- **Number of North American Locations:** 105
- **Services offered:** For residential and commercial properties: Irrigation system installation, irrigation service and repair, irrigation annual/seasonal maintenance packages, annual inspection of backflow devices, government water rebate incentives, upgrading and retrofitting irrigation systems, system inspections and assessments, drainage solutions
- **Closures in the last three fiscal years:** 4 franchisees, 7 territories.
- **Hours of Training:** 10 days of training – 80 hours. 5 days in person; 5 days virtual
- **Website:** Conservairrigation.com



Nutrilawn Ecology Friendly Lawn Care/ Mosquito.Buzz

- **Franchising since:** 1988
- **Average initial investment and what this covers:** N/A
- **Royalty fee:** 6%
- **Franchise fee:** \$20,000
- **Total Investment:** \$80,000 in working capital which is applied to start-up costs, marketing and equipment
- **Number of North American Locations:** 30
- **Services offered:** Lawn fertilization and weed control with additional services including overseeding, lawn renovation, irrigation; insect control – turf insects and mosquito, ticks; perimeter pest control
- **Closures in the last three fiscal years:** 0
- **Hours of Training:** 120 hours start up training plus ongoing e-training and support
- **Website:** Nutrilawn.com and Mosquito.buzz

Mowbot

- **Franchising since:** 2018
- **Average Initial Investment and what this covers:** \$69,000 includes: franchise fee, opening assistance fee, initial equipment package.
- **Royalty Fee:** 7%
- **Franchise Fee:** \$39,000
- **Total Investment:** \$61,510 - \$129,680
- **Number of North American Locations:** 17 franchises (total of 47 territories)
- **States/Provinces with at least 1 franchise:** 11
- **Services offered:** Robotic mowing services and additional lawn care and seasonal services (varies per location).
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A WINTER CHECK-UP

Keeping winter turf diseases off your properties all comes down to proper maintenance.

✕
By Jimmy Miller

ABOVE: Pink snow mold, spotted in the image above, is one of several winter turf diseases to monitor when your crews hit the field again this spring.

Turfgrass experts say most winter turfgrass diseases won't be catastrophic this year – particularly the various type of snow mold that spring up when 2021 rolls around.

And while proper prevention methods are the best ways to tackle turfgrass diseases, there are some ways to keep lawns healthy even after temperatures rise again.

"By the time we get to January, there's not a lot we're doing to prevent those diseases, so now we're at the point where we're trying to recover as quickly as we can," says Paul Koch, an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin – Madison.

Koch says the winter diseases can really be defined by whether or not there's snow cover in that particular region of the country. Where there is snow, the snow molds – speckled, gray and pink – are all more likely to pop up. In areas of the country where there isn't much snow, contractors could deal with more leafspot or large patch diseases.



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ABOVE: Gray snow mold, found here on a bluegrass lawn, is often mixed up with pink or speckled snow molds.

"If we get snow down here, it's generally here today and gone tomorrow," says Clint Waltz, an extension specialist at University of Georgia Extension. "It's more wet conditions than anything else, and then compound that with possible drying conditions, that generally doesn't facilitate disease when it gets dry."

IDENTIFYING THE DISEASES. By the time landscapers start encouraging turf growth in the spring, Koch says plants usually are recovering from their dormant periods.

The issue with finding the right treatment is that many of the diseases look similar at first glance, particularly snow molds. They all produce circular patches about one to three feet in diameter, though pink snow mold contains a reddish ring around the outside while gray snow mold produces structures called sclerotia, which survive in dead leaf tissue. These look like red pebbles or sand granules. Meanwhile, speckled snow mold simply looks like somebody sprinkled pepper on the turf.

Other cool-season turf diseases found up

north or in colder parts of the western United States are *Pythium* blight, which produces slick, brownish blotches in the turf, and powdery mildew, a more serious issue that leaves the turf looking like it's been sprayed with white dust.

Koch says leaf spot can affect both cool- and warm-season turf, though it seems to be a little more common in areas that don't experience much snowfall. These can be identified by finding spots on leaves as the name implies.

Diseases like large patch, meanwhile, are also a little easier to decide because the issue is obviously spread right across the turf. These are often found on St. Augustine, zoysiagrass, centipede and Bermudagrass turfs. Dollar spot and brown patch are also issues for these types of turf.

But Koch also says talking with an extension specialist, particularly locally, can help contractors best navigate these winter diseases. It's easy to get one disease confused for another, and treatments can vary. He

recommends treating and monitoring the infected areas for about a month before then reaching out for help to see if someone knows what to do.

"It always helps to know what you're dealing with," Koch says. "You may think the issue that you had was snow mold, but it may be something else. You want to make sure that you have an accurate diagnosis."

A YEAR-ROUND AFFAIR. In areas with warmer climates, turf disease is an ongoing fight, though wintertime actually provides some much-needed reprieve.

Waltz says most warm-season grasses are more susceptible to diseases during transition seasons like fall and winter. There are some exceptions, he notes, but generally, this time of year actually slows down diseases for folks down south. In fact, if contractors are just noticing winter turfgrass diseases during the winter months, chances are strong that they're seeing the remnants of a fall disease, Waltz says.

“It always helps to know what you’re dealing with...You want to make sure that you have an accurate diagnosis.”

PAUL KOCH, associate professor with the University of Wisconsin-Madison

“It’s not going to get better over the wintertime,” Waltz says. “If you had patch over October, that spot didn’t disappear in December or January. Because it was there in the fall, it still will be there in the spring.

The issue is knowing when to apply product – it’s easier to go too early in places where it’s relatively warm all the time. Waltz recommends waiting until temperatures are a little more consistent. To be specific, he says soil temperatures four inches deep in the ground should be about 65 degrees or higher.

Fertilizing too soon will only invite turfgrass diseases to come in during the spring, Waltz says.

“Disease doesn’t go to zero, but it certainly slows down this time of year for us,” he says.

Ways to constantly combat turfgrass diseases include raking off leaves and debris from the turf constantly. Allowing the turf to retain all the moisture from beneath the leaves over an extended period of time is often what causes the diseases in the first place.

“I think getting that off can help mitigate disease as much as anything,” Waltz says. Regarding raking, Koch adds that it increases the temperature of the grass, fending off any further damage from the disease.

“It’s going to have sunlight penetrate deeper into the canopy and increase oxygen flow in the area,” Koch says.

THERE’S ALWAYS NEXT YEAR. As far as turfgrass diseases go, Koch says the best way to avoid them is simply taking preventative measures. Applying nitrogen products, for instance, should stop by the end of September or end of October.

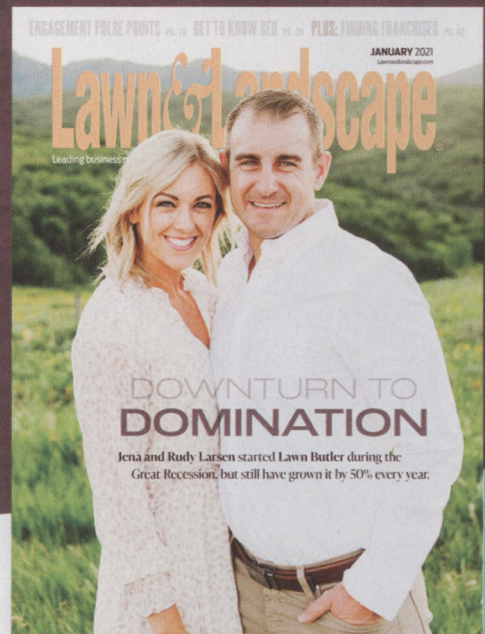
“When we get later in the fall, you’re stimulating growth when it really should be slowing down,” Koch says, adding that the plants are trying to shut themselves down to protect themselves during the winter.

Improving drainage around the turf also helps prevent diseases, as water or other moisture that pools up together in one spot is often a culprit for turf issues. Plus, Koch says once a diseased spot is found, landscapers should avoid walking through it, spreading the disease from one spot to another.

And, of course, mowing at an appropriate height during the season also helps keep the turf healthy. This helps keep conditions bad for fungal growths and good for proper turf growth at the same time. For most types of grasses, keeping lawns at a three-inch height is about right, though this is just the recommended mowing height. It could vary based on the situation or even the type of turf.

“(Treatment is) a matter of changing the environment again to make it less suitable for disease to grow,” Koch says. “If things aren’t healing, you need to reach out to an expert. It’s a case-by-case basis with an extension specialist.” **L&L**

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Last month, we highlighted some of the industry's newest products we didn't see at trade shows this year. Here are more of the products you'll see out in the field in 2021 that we found during virtual events.

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The pitch: Belgard's Tandem Modular Block is a flexible solution for a range of applications, such as retaining walls, curved walls and more.

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For more info: [Belgard.com](https://www.belgard.com)



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- Roto-molded dual fuel tanks on the commercial models – ZT3500 through ZT7000 – which hold up to 15 gallons.
- The machine features a mowing speed of up to 13 MPH and can reach 19 MPH during transportation.
- The ZT7000 can be equipped with various Bobcat attachments, such as the mulching baffle kit, a ZT Hitch Kit and more.

For more info: Bobcat.com



FERRIS IS 6200

The pitch: The largest and most powerful zero-turn in the Ferris lineup, the new IS 6200 brings the company back into the high horsepower diesel market.

- Powered by a Cat 48 gross hp turbo diesel engine, the 72-inch standard cutting deck will mow in the toughest conditions.
- It features include an interactive, three-inch color display screen, a foot-activated hydraulic deck lift and dual-commercial Hydro-Gear pumps.
- The next generation ROPS, suspension seat and patented suspension system come standard for unmatched comfort.

For more info: Ferrismowers.com



ECHO PB9010T BACKPACK BLOWER

The pitch: The PB-9010T is ECHO's biggest backpack blower to date, and it's ready to move anything from light to heavy, wet debris from any jobsite.

- The 79.9 cc blower features a tube throttle and generates 48 Newtons of force.
- Landscapers can use the machine for longer than other backpack blowers with a 83.8-fluid ounce fuel tank.
- The metal ring at the end of the blower pipe reduces wear and tear from daily use.

For more info: Echo-usa.com

FX LUMINAIRE LUXOR CLOUD MANAGEMENT

The pitch: With several technology updates, Luxor can control your outdoor living spaces from anywhere.

- New software features include off-site system control, secure cloud access, custom site management, custom controller naming and smart-product capability.
- Cloud connection eliminates local network limitations to streamline control in the field and enable remote site management from anywhere in the world with an internet connection.
- Activate the Luxor lighting systems with voice-controlled smart home solutions including Amazon Alexa. In 2021, Luxor will also feature total voice integration for Google Home devices.
- Luxor incorporates zoning, dimming and more into a single controller. It also fully integrates with home automation systems including Control4, Lutron, Crestron, Savant and now ELAN.

For more info: fxl.com



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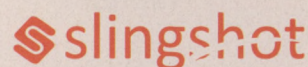
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The pitch: This new slow speed, high torque cutting attachment mounts to Compact Utility Loaders with 10-20 GPM of hydraulic flow and 2,000-3,000 PSI.

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For more info: Fecon.com



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For more info: vec.hunterindustries.com

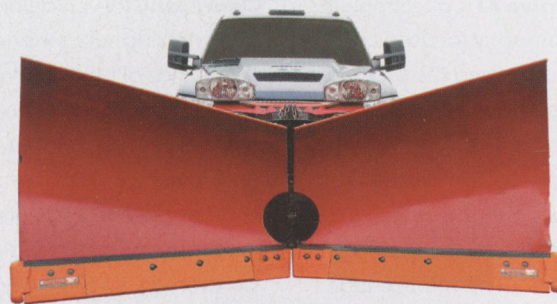


KIOTA CS2220 AND CS2520

The pitch: The new compact tractors include upgraded cabs with more headspace and other premium features.

- They feature an ergonomic operator station with standard features, including a tilt wheel with power steering, a joystick valve with quick attach and detach loaders and a precision-built KIOTA diesel engine.
- The CS2220 and CS2520 are compatible with KIOTA's new SB2420 backhoe and SL2420 front end loader.
- The new models are also compatible with KIOTA's SM2454 and SM2460 mid-mount mowers, both of which include drive-over decks for easy attach and detach.

For more info: Kiota.com



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- Intended for use on city streets and parking lots, the Vulcan system is compatible with Western, Fisher and SnowEx plow models, and additional models are planned.

For more info: Winterequipment.com

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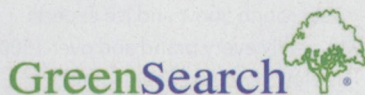
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AN AVERAGE DAY

Stephanie Leonard, co-owner and
vice president, Brad Rose Landscaping



→ **Brad Rose Landscaping** is the definition of a family business. Company co-owner and Vice President Stephanie Leonard; her father, Brad, who started the company; and husband, Eric, work for the company and because of remote learning, Leonard's two daughters, ages 11 and 12, are at the office when they aren't at school.

Interviewed by **Brian Horn**

The 9-month-old daughter of the company's office manager has been coming to office since she was 3 months old because daycare isn't an option due to COVID-19. Oh, and the Leonard's Rottweiler, Apollo, clocks in a few days a week at the Rensselaer, New York-based company.

"So, it's crazy around our office on a daily basis but I wouldn't have it any other way," she says. [Here is Leonard's average day.](#)

Monday through Saturday I am up at 4:45 a.m., but on Sundays, I will sleep until 6:30 or 7 a.m. I go to the gym four times per week and do CrossFit type of training. This is 50 minutes that I block everything out, focus on me and make my mind and body stronger. But before I leave for the gym, my husband and I spend about 45 minutes drinking coffee, planning our day, get caught up on things, etc. After the gym, I either go right to work or head home to get my girls ready for school. They attend school in person two times per week.

My commute is pretty short, only about 12 minutes. I listen to XM Radio Hair Nation Station 39. This brings me back to my teens when life was carefree and stress free.

I arrive between 7:15-7:30 if coming right from the gym. If I am doing drop off to school, I'll get to work around 9 a.m. It is important for me to see the staff before they all roll out, so that is why I really like coming in directly after the gym, but the mom guilt kicks in.

Once the crews roll out, I take about 10-15 minutes to regroup with office staff and make sure all bases are covered. Then, I spend about 10-15 minutes talking with my father about anything and everything. The key ingredient in my life is communication.

Lunch is hit or miss. I generally just have a snack around 11 a.m. and then have a huge dinner when I get home around 5 or 5:30

if I am in the field. If I am in the office, I will eat a heavier lunch and then have a light dinner with the family.

After lunch, I tend to get with my assistant, Emily, and my father to plan the following day and recap on any happenings, weather, equipment, customers, problem solve and plan the next day.

When the girls were in school five days per week, I would leave at the end of the school day which was around 2:30 and finish my day at home in my home office. Now, I'm there until 4-5 p.m. I tend not to do much work from home lately.

COVID-19 has had a few positives and those would be the ability for clients to meet during the day because they, too, are working from home. The other is I get to have my girls with me at work.

I will say that dinner every night with my family is very important. My husband is a phenomenal cook. Growing up, we always ate as a family and my husband's family was the same way, so it is one tradition that we try to hold on to. I like reconnecting with my family, listening to my girls talk about their day and my husband talk about his day. So, unless it is an emergency, I won't answer my phone, but I will check it a few times in the evening. But if a client is calling me or emailing me after hours I will answer or reply because typically that is pretty important.

Usually I am asleep by 8:30 p.m. I do require 7-8 hours of sleep, where my husband can function on 4, so he definitely stays up later and shuts the house down, makes sure kids are good and pets are all set.

Weekends are for family and watching my girls play basketball. I will check emails and spend 1-2 hours doing miscellaneous things but that is before the girls get up or if they are playing with friends. **L&L**



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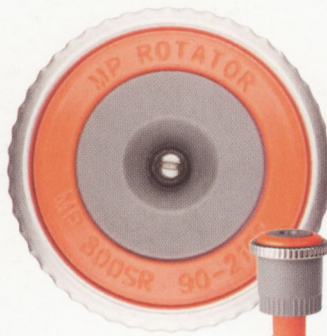


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