

FALSE ASSUMPTIONS

I write to point out some of the false assumptions in the article written by John Jinks (Osprey Irrigation) published in the October issue of GI.

The main premise of the article is that irrigation consultants present a significant additional expenditure to the project cost of an irrigation installation, "adding a further 10% or so to the total bill".

Firstly, while I can't speak for our competitors, I can assure your readers that our fees to design and specify an irrigation system are considerably less than half the amount asserted by the author of the article.

The second fallacy, which is inferred by the article, is that a design submitted by a contractor, distributor or manufacturer is somehow "free".

The reality is that a free design submitted by a contractor is no such thing. The cost of producing that design has to be covered somehow. In the case of a contractor the cost is built in to the quotation to supply and install the system. In other words it is a buy-now-pay-later design.

To some this might sound an attractive proposition, especially considering that if the project does not go ahead it hasn't cost the client any money to get an irrigation design. However this method of procurement is not so attractive when the full picture is revealed.

For every five "buy-now-pay-later" designs that a contractor, distributor or manufacturer produces and submits to the customer, he may be successful on at best one of those bids. This is because some projects never go ahead and some projects are lost to competitors (no contractor wins every job they bid on). So when covering the cost of the irrigation design in a bid, the contractor has to cover the cost not only of the design pertinent to that particular project but also the designs that never got built or were lost to competitors.

In the bad old days of when the industry was predominantly based on "free" design and build, for every 10 irrigation systems that were installed perhaps 50 designs were actually produced, most ending up in the dustbin (I have witnessed projects where, over a period of time, seven separate irrigation designs were solicited for a golf course).

Somebody has to pay for the cost of those discarded designs. Since there are no irrigation design charities producing free designs and since in business the customer pays for everything the cost of these rejected designs is paid for in higher construction costs, which is ultimately paid for by the industry's end-users.

Actually what a customer gets with this model of procurement is a "get-one-now-pay-for-five-later" design.

When hiring an independent irrigation consultant the client pays for only one irrigation design, the one pertinent to their project. So even if a consultant was only half as efficient or competitive at producing an irrigation design as the "free" design and build model, he still works out at less than half the cost of the so called "free" route.

There are obviously many more advantages to hiring an independent engineer to design an irrigation system. These are too numerous to include in this letter but explained in the FAQ section of our website www.irriplan.net.

Yours sincerely,

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GREENS SPEED! OR DO THEY?

The daftest question any greenkeeper will hear is, 'What speed are your greens?' It's obvious to us all that the green has no speed at all, 'it never moves', but most of us will answer by giving a stimpmeter reading. What we don't say is that the stimpmeter measures the resistance of the grass, not its speed. The less resistance the grass offers, the further the ball will roll. The problem that we keep to ourselves is that if we lower the grass's resistance for too long it's more prone to drought, temperature, disease and insect stress.

Loss of leaf blade is the greatest stress that grass faces, yet in the last 20 years, we have started to cut lower, more frequently and more efficiently than we've ever done before. We've moved from the Troon Open of 1962 when it seems the greens were cut at 1/4 inch (6mm) twice in the week, to today when many courses are cut at 3mm at least daily and often double cut, for ordinary members' play. These modern mowing practices are extremely stressful to our greens, so why is it being done.

The answer given is that golfers want fast greens at any cost and it is our duty to give it to them! This might be acceptable if the speeds we are providing at these low heights were pleasing the leading golfers, but from a recent trade survey it appears that many greenkeepers feel they need to provide greens one foot quicker than at present. I'm worried what they might do in future to get that extra foot and even then will we satisfy the demand for speed? or will it simply increase? We've had very mild winters in the past 10 years and I fear what would happen to our greens cut low and stressed if we return to cold ones, or have another foul spring like this year.

Most golfers don't care about speed and few understand it. One asked what that was in feet and inches when told the stimp reading, so why should we stress our greens to please those who may never be satisfied. The lower we cut our greens the less resistance they have. Is this what we want?

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YOUR LETTERS ARE REQUESTED!

Send to: Scott MacCallum, Editor, Greenkeeper International, BIGGA HOUSE, Aldwark, Alne, York YO61 1UF, or email them to: scott@bigga.co.uk.