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The rise of digital technologies in greenkeeping

Jim Cook looks at how the greenkeeping industry has embraced new technology

In most areas of modern life, digital technology does seem to be king. Be it at home with the internet and also the recent digitising of television, travelling with the aid of satellite navigation systems or communicating with smartphones, it is high on impossible to spend a day without coming into contact with digital technologies in some form or another.

The internet has been used for greenkeeping. We have all kinds of digital devices from small digital timers which make scheduling machinery maintenance schedules easier, through digital thermometers, to the big new digitised irrigation systems.

Another common use is greenkeepers using smartphones to make certain tasks less tedious. Some take pictures of broken machinery parts while out on the course and send an email of the photo to the manufacturer and have a replacement part delivered as soon as possible. Some use them to book out such things as former replacement cutters and send to just have a glance at the website device.

It would be hard to deny that using such methods can be a real time-saver and the benefits with regards communication are obvious.

So then, the question could be asked: is digital technology on the golf course another fad, even just part of the modern day greenkeeper's armoury or is it the grand scheme of things, a fad as history tells us, that will pass quickly than some new phones' batteries?

One greenkeeper who makes full use of digital technologies is Karl

Parry, Course Manager at Denbigh Golf Club, in North Wales. He says: "I use my technology and gadgets and try to incorporate this into my job as much as possible. It makes my life easier and helps everything run smoothly on the golf course. I use a tablet so that when I'm out of the office, in seminars or at home, I can do such things as updating the daily diary, upload pictures onto our Facebook page or communicate with our Chairman."

"One of the best uses I have for the tablet is going Green Connect for meetings. I can have captions and devices on the wide-screen television, in our clubhouse. By playing on the tablet we can make it better. It brings a bit more life to the meetings and can make things close to people who may be unable to come along through the weather. I can show you what I'm doing on screens in pictures, when we do it before we do it and how long it took us," he added.

Karl has developed a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet which allows him to manage other things, to make his club's NPK data.

"It is a simple one which I export out as a report document, what NPK rate was coming out of the ground using various products from different companies. It makes it a lot easier to compare with what we are using and it just makes the application process easier with my suppliers."

Alongside his Excel spreadsheet, he also has a handy application calculator for free. If you haven't got a smartphone, Karl had a link to download both handy applications from karparsyservices.com and he will send you the app.

Karl also had the forward thinking of installing QR codes in his workshop where the machinery is stored. Instead of the current

laborious method of writing down what machine was used and when, the code would be scanned each time a machine is used. This would send a message to an online database and Karl would know everything he needed to know about that machine. The idea of fitting barcodes and binary systems was one which Karl has developed and made sure it is ready to go with the aid of digital technology.

On the golf course, Karl said his touch screen allows pictures of trees in a problem around the course.

It helps things run efficiently on the golf course. When I'm out of the office, in seminars or at home, I can update the diary, upload pics onto Facebook or talk with our Chairman

Karl Parry, Denbigh Golf Club

Another digital tool utilized at Denbigh is the online two-tar booking system by Steve Cook.

"I've set up an administrator on the system so that every Monday morning, I can check my phone to see what times are booked in and if there are any cancellations, then we can set our work schedule around that. It really helps me manage myself and my staff and there has never been a moment where we can't deal with a job," said Karl.

Steve's Green Connect phone application was featured by Karl. "It gives us the ability to open windows of opportunity and often helps things to give you the best timing possible for spraying fungicides. Because fungicides are so expensive, this helps us to save money as well as effort."

Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn continue to grow but are not used with each other in every situation and for professionals they can be an important method of communication.

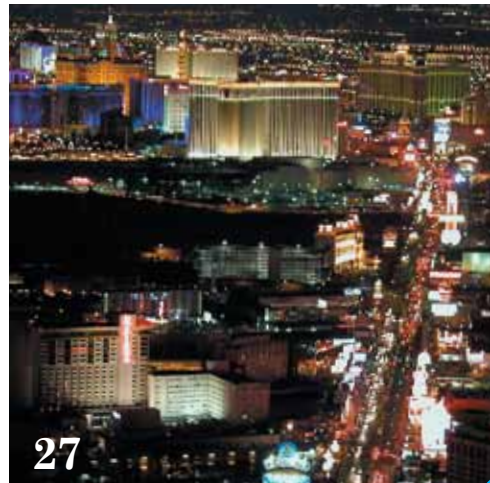
"We have just set up a Denbigh Golf Club maintenance page on Facebook and all the jobs we do around the course will have pictures taken and will be updated straight onto it. It's like a news bulletin page, so everyone knows what we're doing," Karl added.

He ended by saying that he was looking into getting a new irrigation system that can be controlled from a phone.

This deserves a closer look. Irrigation systems have come a long way. The beginning of the road to digital can be traced back to the 1960s. The first electrical control systems appeared on the market in the 1960s and allowed greenkeepers to control watering schedules electronically with an on-course handset. Even though how they now may seem, it was revolutionary in the industry at the time and paved the way for more sophisticated innovations through the following decades.

During the 70s hand held devices opened a system that could control up to several hundred sprinklers from a central base. What followed next was the shining light in irrigation technology and what is seen in a modernised form, the standard on many courses around the world, computer controlled irrigation systems.

Now a Mobile Internet (MI) controller by Rain Bird allows the user, on-the-fly ability to control and monitor your systems from anywhere, as long as you own a smartphone and there is a mobile phone or wireless signal. It can be set up so you can monitor your





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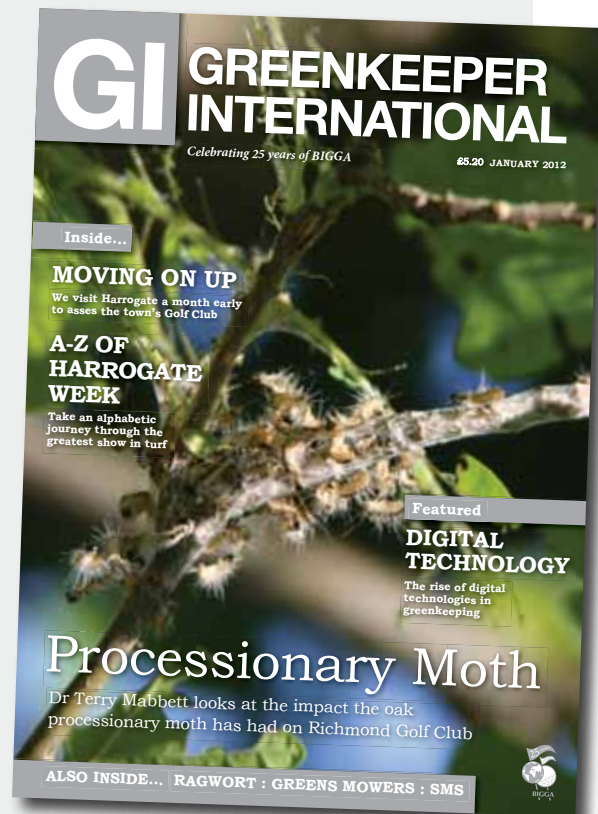
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