

A PURCHASING AGENT, TOO?

A golf course superintendent gets called various names, especially after closing the course on Saturday afternoon; however, seldom is he referred to as a "Purchasing Agent". Nevertheless, along with titles such as agronomist, pathologist, plumber, and electrician, "Purchasing Agent" is apropos.

A young superintendent soon learns that the role of purchasing agent is another arduous task that college courses somehow never even mentioned. Consequently, he often tries to take buying decisions without proper criterion. Every course has different needs, but all superintendents face the same questions: When do I purchase? How much do I purchase? What is a fair price?

The answer to each question is bound to vary — the reasoning behind each answer is similar. How much to purchase is relevant to the size of your budget and the course. However, the proportion is similar for all courses. No office buys a yearly supply of stamps, envelopes, and stationary at the beginning of the year; and no factory purchases all the steel, tires, and raw goods it will need at the beginning of the year, simply because needs change and cash flow will not allow it. As manager of a golf course, your job is similar to a purchasing agent in a factory. You know you will need certain fungicides, herbicides, and fertilizer; however, you never know what the weather will bring. Keeping this in mind, it may be helpful to use a "benchmark" method. Pick a time in the season and purchase up to that time, for instance June 15. You know what new machinery you need to begin the year, your pre-emergent and spring fertilizer programs are underway, and fungicides are usually standard up to that time. Then when June rolls around, you can start purchasing on a monthly basis. This allows you to always have needed products on hand, but if the situation calls for pythium control, you won't have your budget wrapped up in Daconil. This method also had advantages for the club. They don't have to invest money in March for products that won't be used until August. (Sure, the question of early-order discounts plays a small part here, but if you look at it closely, it's a very small part.)

As you can see, "How much" and "when" are tightly linked together. You can't really decide when you are going to purchase without giving equal consideration to how much. "How much" is usually a mathematical question. Since most of you are probably thinking ahead of me on this one, I'll state it briefly. Your course has a given area in greens, tees, and fairways, and you have a given budget.

If you have chosen which products you feel will perform the best, then look up the rates and have at it on your J.C. Penny calculator. But you may want to back up one step. I have noticed three mistakes being made when figuring how much. First of all, the areas to be treated are not known exactly. Or perhaps, you are using figures from Fred who used to be the super, and Fred got them from Bill before him, who got them from the "green chairman". Then there is the question of budgeting to treat the greens and tees for a given program, but forgetting that the collars and aprons are usually treated the same.

Price is a sticky subject for someone in the business end to discuss, but I will attempt to do it as candidly as possible. Since Gort sold saber toothed tiger skins out of a corner cave, there has been the question "What is a fair price?". No doubt this will vary depending on whether you are the buyer or the seller,

but the key word is "fair". Almost all products in our industry carry only an ordinary markup. Therefore, list price is actually a pretty fair deal. However, early order and quantity discounts are standard and should be considered. It is a purchasing agent's job to take advantage of discounts when they coincide with cash flow, but don't get caught up in the "mexican bargaining" syndrome. If you try to drive the price down as far as possible, you may jeopardize future services. Service is a slightly ambiguous term. Only you can decide how much and what kind of services you need from a distributor. For instance, if you want distributors to call often, provide the marketplace with skillful and knowledgeable representatives, and stock a full supply of parts and chemicals, remember, he will have to get a "fair price" for his products. As a simple case in point, in Central Illinois, a distributor salesman can call on about five golf courses per day. Considering salary, benefits, truck expenses, et cetera, it averages out to a cost of \$25 per call.

I'll close with one final thought, I have yet to observe any industry that has managed to extract more service from its suppliers than has the golf course superintendents. As purchasing agents, you have, as a whole, performed way above par. With knowledge gained through efforts such as this magazine, you have managed to keep well informed about products and gain full cooperation from suppliers. In no other business that I know of, can you get free delivery across the state, and many times, the next day. You can't buy a car downtown and ever have the salesman stop by the house to see how its running; but you can buy a \$2000 mower and have the turf distributor salesman stop by and adjust it a year after you bought it, and at no charge!

Keep these things in mind. The next time a board member asks you to shop around or you hear discussions about having a general manager do all the purchasing, point out what a good job you are doing as purchasing agent. You might even discuss changing buying habits to help cash flow during the next board meeting.

Steve Derrick
Professional Turf Specialties

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WHERE DO YOU FIT IN?

There are two kinds of member ...

- Some keep their organization strong,
While others join, just to belong.
- Some volunteer and do their share
While others rest and never care.
- On Meeting days, some always show,
While some there are who never go.
- Some always pay their dues ahead;
Some get behind for months, instead.
- Some do their best; some build, some make.
Some never do — just sit and take.
- Some lag behind, just let things go,
And never help their group to grow.
- Some drag, some pull. Some don't, some do.
Consider: Which of these are **you**?