

# Sometimes, the story changes in midstream



Hal Phillips,  
editor

Reporters will tell you that, sometimes, a news story begins and ends exactly as you might expect. Other times the research and conversations lead you to more interesting subjects, changing the story and the reporter's original line of inquiry.

Such was the case with this month's front-page story on factory direct sales, which started as an analysis of direct marketing in the golf course industry and wound up detailing the slow-but-sure consolidation of distribution channels.

The two phenomena are related, of course. As smaller independent distributorships are gobbled up by larger firms searching for ever more efficiencies, access to the marketplace narrows — especially for smaller manufacturers whose lines might not be lucrative enough to command space on the shelves.

This last point I discovered while researching the subject of direct marketing. The epiphany? All these smaller companies were going factory-direct because they **had** to go factory-direct. They were losing access to distributors, and thus losing access to superintendents.

Of course, many on the floor in the San Francisco will be golf course distributors. I look forward to hearing their strong opinions on the subject.

One name that kept cropping up during my research was Terra International, Inc. This Sioux City, Iowa-based firm has been on a spending spree lately, adding staff (the firm has gone from 27 to 62 sales representatives since 1992) and buying up distributorships: Turf World of Houston, Bi-State Turf of Danville, Ill., Androc Products of Medford, Minn., and Asgrow Florida with its 15 in-state locations.

Two things to keep in mind as we gather in San Francisco:

- First, firms like Terra will become increasingly common as the millennium approaches. Larger firms have growth on the brain and many will go public to fund strategic, market-segmented expansions like Terra's.

- Second, Chuck Champion of Kalo, Inc. was right: Some day superintendents will have the option of buying everything via catalog. The increasing sophistication of mower and irrigation technology will always bind superintendents to their distributors. But that relationship will become less important over time, as superintendents make more and more purchases over the phone.

Hey, that's a great idea! The Course Shopping Network. Where's Barry Diller when you need him? Maybe they can get time on the new Golf Channel...

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## Letters

### GREENS ROLLING SYSTEMS ARE NOT THE SAME

To the editor:

*Golf Course News*, over the past couple of years, published several stories on greens rolling techniques [GCN August & October '94]. However, we at Turfline know all superintendents have not been educated in comparing our True Surface Vibratory Greens Rolling System apart from other rollers. Quickly, here's the difference.

True-Surface units are installed on triplex mowers in place of the cutting units and they produce high-frequency, minimal weight vibrations. The following are a few key advantages of vibration:

- Low roller weight: We use a 55-pound roller that will not strain the frame or lift cylinders on the greensmower. Vibration will firm and true the surface better than physical weight.

- Speed: You can roll a green with units faster than it can be mowed with a triplex mower. No

operator training required.

- Controllable results: Vibration allows you to vary the results of the operation to match the requirements. Rolling speed can be controlled either with the hydrostatic foot pedal or with variable-speed kits. This feature allows you to control the green speed, and true the surface following aerification, spiking, topdressing or overseeding.

- Grow in: Vibration allows

new greens to be in playing condition 30 days earlier. Walk mowers were not used and greens were firm and smooth enough to use triplex mowers.

- Topdressing: Vibration following dragging or brushing virtually eliminates sand from the turf canopy. The sand falls through just before the roller gets to it, thus minimizing bruising.

Greens rolling, a practice re-introduced in recent years pri-

marily as a speed enhancing device, has now become an integral tool for overall greens management.

The development of the True-Surface Greens Rolling System is the next step. It is the direct result of the imagination, innovation and effort typical of golf course superintendents.

Steve Wilson, sales manager  
Turfline, Inc.  
St. Charles, Mo.

### COMMERCIAL PUMP SETS RECORD STRAIGHT

To the editor:

I am writing to you in regards to your article in the October issue titled, "Irrigation design, pump house technology continue to meet, or exceed, industry standards." In the listing you provided of pump station manufacturers, Commercial Pump was not included. We feel this was a major oversight and would like to be included in any upcoming articles relating to our industry.

Commercial Pump has been manufacturing pre-fabricated pumping stations, automated control packages and control components for turf irrigation systems for over 13 years and

has over 1,000 customers.

Thank you for allowing us to introduce ourselves. We look forward to the prospect of contributing to your next golf course irrigation article.

Whittnae Schultz  
Marketing Administrator  
Commercial Pump Services, Inc.  
Swanton, Ohio

Ed. We regret the error. The staff here at Golf Course News was under the impression that *Commercial Pump Service, Inc.* had continued its strategic marketing alliance with *Hartland, Wis.-based Watertronics, Inc.*, and so listed only the latter. According to Schultz, this agreement has since expired.

## Golf and its opponents are finally listening; to each other

Could January's meeting of the environmental and golf communities at Pebble Beach signify a new leaf? Can the association (National Wildlife Federation) whose former President Jay Hair once declared, "This big, booming business, agriculture, is also killing the world; I mean that literally" have come to its senses? Indeed, it co-organized the conference.

Can the organization (Sierra Club) which once accused the Farm Bureau and other groups of conducting a "massive and brutally destructive anti-environmental onslaught" have recognized the fallacies of its past? Indeed, it was represented at the meeting.

Can the group (Friends of the Earth) whose founder, David Brower, once said: "Loggers losing their jobs because of spotted owl legislation is, in my eyes, no different than people being out of work after the furnaces of Dachau shut down" actually speak coherently less than three years after that Sept. 23, 1992, statement? Indeed, the Friends' current president, Brent Blackwelder, is an intelligent guy who even knows something about golf — he reportedly attended college on a golf scholarship.

Hey, anything can happen when reconciliation — no, make that a willingness to listen — is in the air.

"In many ways they ought to be allies," said Paul Parker of the Center for Resource Management of Salt Lake City, conference co-organizer. "One thing that may surprise people is the fact that a lot of environmental people are golfers and a lot of golfers are environmentalists. There is a common bond there."

The fact that a lot of golfers are environmentalists would surprise exactly no one in the golf industry. But the fact it might surprise environmentalists illustrates, in part, the great divide that has existed between the two groups.

Boy, is there a lot of garbage (an appropriate term) at issue between them. But unless you're dealing with the devil, if you want to cohabitate, it's best you at least meet. So, meet they have. Now we shall watch and decipher the fallout from the Pebble Beach session (see story, page 4).

The sensible people in both communities would harbor the same hopes as Ron Dodson, president of the progressive New York Audubon Society, which has worked cooperatively with the golf industry for several years now.



Mark Leslie,  
managing editor

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