DEEP ACCESS

Providing users with more detailed data, Toro's recently released Lynx irrigation control system has begun to make waves. By John Torsiello

It may be a bit too early to label it as a game-changer, but Toro's Lynx Control System has been making waves in the golf course turf management industry since its formal launch early this year.

After spending more than two years in development and a year in testing, Toro's Lynx Control System sets new levels for ease-of-use and integration, says John Fuller, the company's senior product manager. "Simply put, customers will be able to do more and spend less time and effort using it," he says.

Perhaps a bit biased, Fuller doesn't hold back judgment when he says, "It's a game changer for us and the industry."

So what sets Lynx apart? It differs from other systems in several key areas.

According to Toro, the system's software is presented in a "flat" display, where all of the information needed is available to the user for a given operation without having to open and close additional windows, thus reducing the amount of time the user spends going between screens, thus improving efficiency.

The control of the system is based on a "hierarchy" that is organized along the same lines as a golf course. Areas (greens, tees, fairways) followed by holes (1 through 28), followed by the individual sprinklers.

This is not necessarily a new concept, Fuller says, but the way the hierarchy is presented to the user, with the ability to view the system at any of the three levels (area, hole, sprinkler) by clicking on a plus/minus box (similar to Windows Explorer), gives a superintendent a level of control and ease of access that they've not had before, Fuller says.

Lynx also allows a superintendent to control a facility's irrigation system by either minutes of runtime or application amount, and shows the corresponding values.

For instance, if a superintendent enters a runtime in minutes, the system will calculate and display the corresponding inches of application. If he enters an application amount in inches, it calculates and displays the corresponding minutes of runtime. "Users can decide to run their systems by either minutes or inches, for each individual area of the golf course," Fuller says. "But in either case, they get to see the corresponding minutes/inches, and this helps in understanding just how much water is being used in each area."

Superintendents can create and edit their own digital map and employ it in controlling their irrigation system.

"Digital maps have tended to be more static in the past but the golf course changes over time – the addition of a sprinkler head, moving a tee box, modifying a bunker," Fuller says. "Now the map can change as the course changes."

In addition, Lynx reports scheduled activity and actual activity results to the end user. "When they are setting up their irrigation for the upcoming night, superintendents have a clear picture of how much water was put out the previous night and how much water was put out manually during the previous 24 hours, regardless of whether the manual activity was initiated at the computer, on the handheld radio, or at the satellite's faceplate," Fuller adds. "It all gets captured and reported to users, allowing them to make more informed decisions about the upcoming night's irrigation needs."

Lynx calculates and executes station runtimes to the second rather than rounding to the whole minute, with the turf getting precisely the amount of water it needs.

A "pump profile" allows a superintendent to limit the amount of irrigation that takes place on an hourly basis, based on the amount of electricity that the pump station will consume. This allows him to avoid penalty charges for consuming excess electricity during peak hours.

The system is tightly integrated with the company's Turf Guard soil monitoring system, which allows the sensors to report when an area needs water and when it doesn't. "It's all about better information, better decisions, and more efficient watering," Fuller says.

Cost for a Lynx system is in keeping with typical purchase prices for golf irrigation control systems, according to the company, and varies based on the size of the system and field hardware selected.

There is sure to be some reaction to the new Toro irrigation control system from other high-end tech control companies. Fuller quipped, "Our competition is nervous. They were hovering around our booth at the Golf Industry Show."

Rob Tanaka, superintendent at Oak Creek Golf Club in Irvine, Calif., which has been a Lynx testing site since last November, has been happy with the new system. Lynx's system architecture is different than what the company offered superintendents in the past and it includes a number of technical improvements."

Tanaka believes Lynx allows for significant integration, adaptability and simplicity, which he says are key improvements in irrigation control. "As superintendents, we want to have a system that is easy to operate but also something that we can dig deeper into for information when we need it," he says. "This is

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Davis

a well thought out system that allows a great efficiency of use and reduces the amount of time we need to spend on running our irrigation. We can look at the different facets of the system – weather conditions, course mapping – and make changes very quickly if we need to. Simply put, it's very user friendly."

Training staff to either manage or merely understand how the new system works has been easy, Tanaka says.

Lynx should create efficiencies in Tanaka's water management program, which he adds will translate into cost savings for his course in the long run.

Old Chatham Golf Club in Durham, N.C. has been another test site for Lynx. Head golf course superintendent Brian Powell says his experience with the system so far has been positive. His facility has been a test site for the system since last winter. From his experience using the system, he describes it as easy to use, intuitive and flexible.

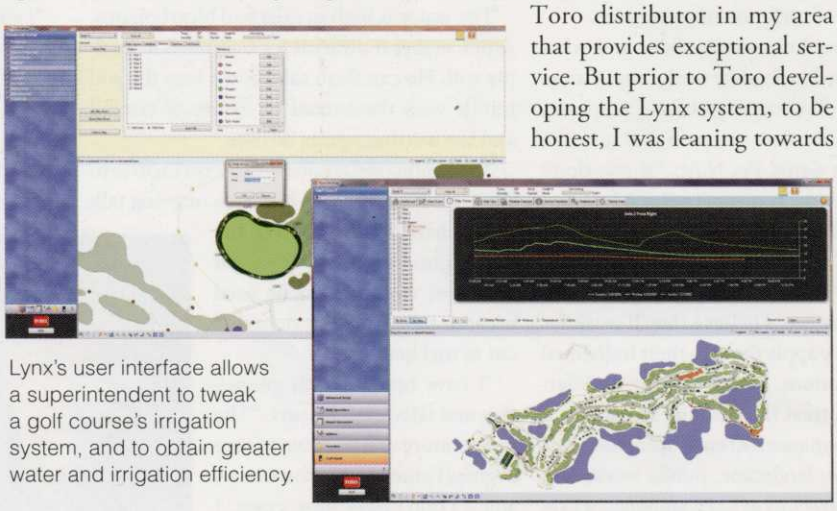
"It is a time saving, powerful tool that can be expandable when needed," he says. "I'm a second generation golf course superintendent and I have not seen anything that has the strength and easy-to-use features that Lynx has."

Powell says Lynx's user interface almost invites a superintendent to want to explore ways to tweak a golf course's irrigation system, and to obtain greater water and irrigation efficiency by targeting specific areas of the facility.

"One of the greatest benefits is that you can create programs in a fraction of the time it takes other systems to create," Powell says. "It's very powerful in that regard. I honestly don't see any disadvantages at this point. We are setting up ours to use permanently."

Asked whether he would recommend course superintendents and general managers consider investing in a Lynx system, Powell says, "Absolutely. As a matter of fact, I have already done just that."

When Darren Davis, director of golf operations at Olde Florida Golf Club in Naples, Fla., and his staff were planning for renovations on the course's existing irrigation system they went to work, doing their homework on finding what they felt was the best irrigation control system on the market. They became sold on Lynx after close examination and analysis.


Lynx's user interface allows a superintendent to tweak a golf course's irrigation system, and to obtain greater water and irrigation efficiency.

"This summer, 18 years after the original installation, we embarked on a significant irrigation renovation and upgrade to the course," Davis says. "In 1992, I made the decision to install a Rain Bird hydraulically actuated system at Olde Florida. At the time we used the Maxi control system, which we eventually upgraded with the Cirrus software system. In 1992, a significant factor in my choice to go with a Rain Bird system was my familiarity and preference for the Rain Bird software. I was comfortable that both the Rain Bird and Toro products would perform, but Rain Bird was selected because I felt the control software was significantly less complex. It is extremely easy to learn and operate."

Despite being quite pleased with the overall operation of the Rain Bird system, Davis decided to make a switch.

"With the development of the Lynx software, Toro has designed a product that I am extremely comfortable will provide the ease of use of my Rain Bird system," he says. "I am fortunate to have an excellent Toro distributor in my area that provides exceptional service. But prior to Toro developing the Lynx system, to be honest, I was leaning towards renovating the golf course with Toro irrigation heads and utilizing the Rain Bird control system. However, the Lynx software made the decision to go with a complete Toro system an easy one."

He adds, "Some of my peers that have been using existing Toro software and have seen the Lynx software have told me that the new (Lynx) system allows them to do all of the things that they were able to do with their previous Toro systems, but with more ease. For me, having been a Rain Bird user for so many years, the Lynx system will provide a very smooth transition to the Toro system for myself and my staff." SI

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