

# WHAT MESSAGE ARE YOU SENDING?

GCI's **exclusive study** shows how the generations interact on the course.

**T**he typical maintenance team is a mix of grizzled ag vets and wet-behind-the-ears turf school grads.

This motley generational makeup can be the source of a number of problems, namely how to communicate and/or interact with one another to achieve and accomplish both short- and long-term goals at a facility.

If you're of the Boomer set, you may have gazed in bewilderment at a seemingly disconnected Gen Y'er, phone in hand, thumbs flailing over a miniature keyboard smaller than a business card. Then again, if you're a Gen X'er stuck in the generational middle, you may look around you and wonder how anything gets done.

During the last quarter of 2011, Golf Course Industry, in conjunction with research being conducted by the Syngenta Business Institute, conducted research about the generational differences among superintendents, assistants and workers of different ages, particularly in how they interacted with one another and how they utilized technology to not only better communicate, but to better themselves professionally.

We sent out 4,000 online survey links to superintendents randomly selected from our

circulation list and received about 250 valid responses. We asked supers a number of questions regarding hiring practices, information-mining and interpersonal communication.

We then compiled all of the data and broke it down along generational lines – separating Baby Boomers (1945-1964), from Generation X (1965-1979) and Generation Y (1980 to present). We also provided comparative results from all respondents to represent all superintendents regardless of generational makeup.

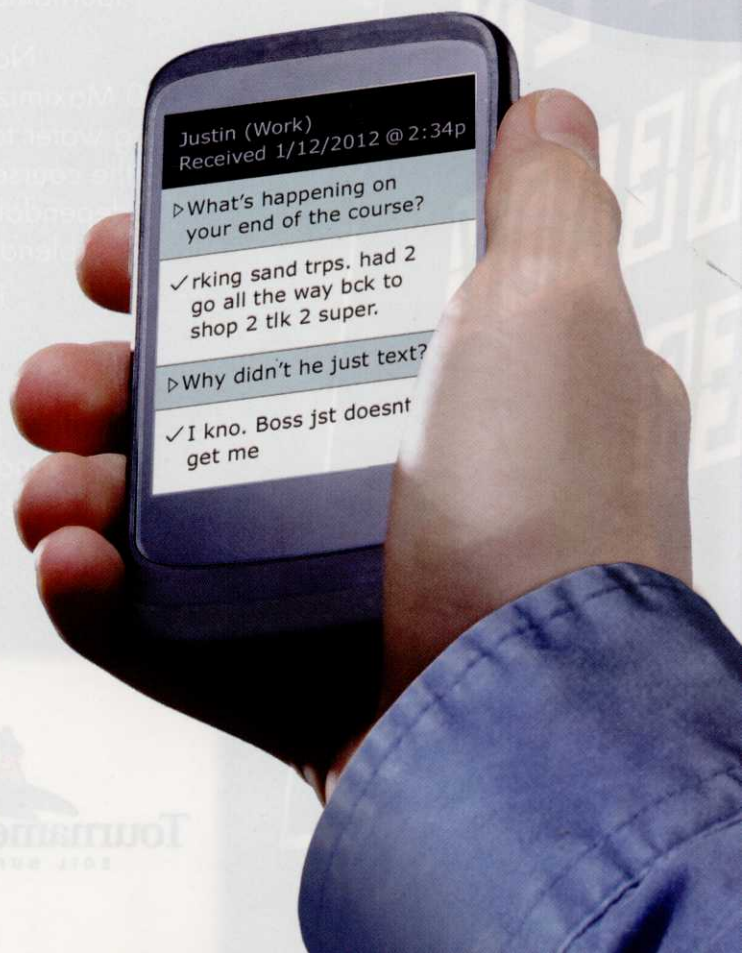
Some of the results weren't surprising, as the responses broke along generational lines as you'd typically expect. Others, though, did offer some food for thought and served as a catalyst for further analysis. So we went ahead and conducted one-on-one interviews with respondents from the different generations to root out particular management challenges and showcase how superintendents better communicate intergenerationally and navigate through generational boundaries.

We'd be remiss, though, if we didn't point out some possible flaws or areas of contention with our survey results. For example, our survey was conducted online, so it predisposes that all respondents regularly

used the Internet, and therefore, had basic tech and social media knowledge. In addition, by sheer numbers and makeup of the industry, there are more Boomers than Gen Y. Therefore, their percentage of respondents were higher. Lastly, we chose many of our technology questions based on our direct interaction with superintendents in the industry

and the trends we perceived as current and influential.

At the very least, the following results are interesting and conversation provoking food for thought – regardless of your generational affiliation. Hopefully, though, it helps give you a better understanding, and maybe a better appreciation, of those you work with on a daily basis.



## YOU'RE HIRED!

Often it is “who you know” when it comes to seeking qualified job candidates to fill out your maintenance team.

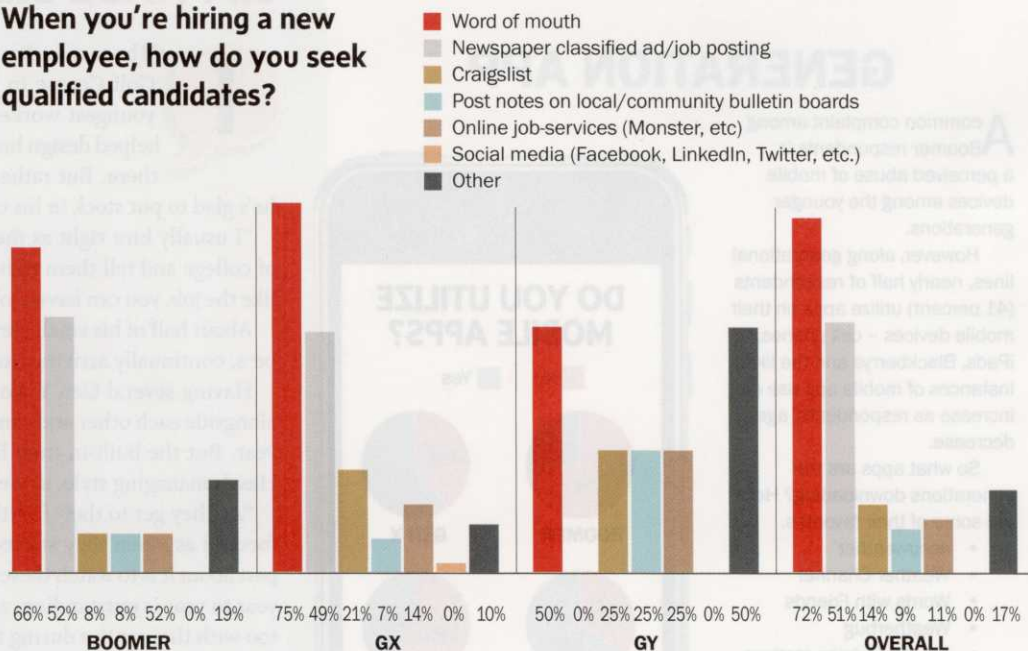
Across generational lines, word-of-mouth networking is the preferred way to find quality hires with nearly three quarters (72 percent) preferring this method, according to the research data. Conversely, new-fangled social media outlets were a resounding flop when it came to soliciting quality workers.

Broken down generationally, the trends remained relatively consistent among the different age groups but with a few notable exceptions. For example, Boomers and Gen X favored placing ads in newspapers, a practice Gen Y did not subscribe to. Likewise, Gen X and Gen Y showed some affinity toward Craigslist, the popular free online classifieds service, as a source for quality candidates; however, very few Boomers were logging on.

Also, Gen Y respondents liked community and online job boards, a practice Boomers weren't entirely sold on when finding workers.

“Other” responses included the course's own website, both national and local association websites, college and high school job boards, internal HR departments, and even simply placing a “hiring” sign out in front of the facility.

### When you're hiring a new employee, how do you seek qualified candidates?



### KEVIN HICKS COEUR D'ALENE RESORT GOLF COURSE

**F**or Kevin Hicks, the difficult part isn't in handling the rifts between the generations in the grounds crew at Coeur d'Alene Resort Golf Course in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Regardless of how they're getting along, his biggest concern is keeping their work up to his standards, and that means motivation.

The biggest difference he sees among the generations in his crew is where the motivation for each group lies, he says.

“The people who work here who are coming back every year who are in their upper 40s and early 50s, they crave a little more stability than the younger sets, and they're motivated differently,” he says. “My toughest group is my college-and-under group because they're a little fickle, and they're motivated differently, too. For some, they've got an entitlement mentality that can be tough to get over.”

Stability is tough to emulate on a course, and Hicks can't make the job look any more appealing to younger workers than it really is.

“It's really important to communicate about what the job is right at the start,” says Hicks. “It's not a glamorous job and you're not going to get rich doing it.”

But rather than splitting his time between reaching to each generation's general desires,

he finds a middle ground to promote the overall group.

“You've got to find other ways to motivate them,” he says. “A lot of things we do are pretty universally motivating. We'll cook hamburgers once in a while or have an outing on another local course together.”

But his most successful team-building motivator trades the golf ball for something slightly larger. His team takes part in a softball league populated by other local golf club crews throughout the season.



Hicks

“It was a great motivator that kept people interested, and had a cheesy little trophy, but it was something to talk about. All you have to do is add a ball, and your team can have a lot of fun. It bridges the whole group really well; we had our 60-year old guys playing along with our college guys.”

On the flipside of motivation is discipline, which can be a little more divisive across those lines, says Hicks.

“I think discipline is the biggest one you have to adjust for the different generations,” he says, as every age group needs a different style, even

(continued on page 73)

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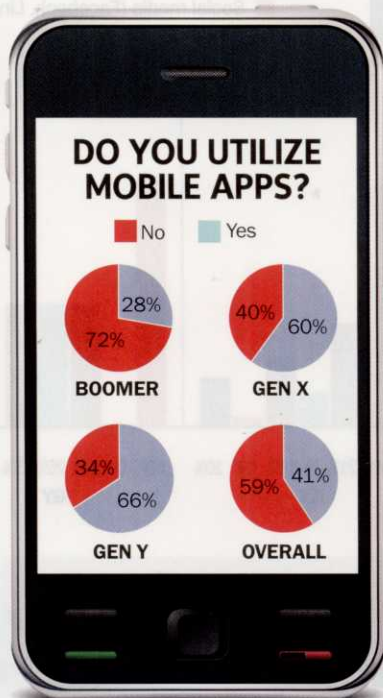
## GENERATION APP

A common complaint among Boomer respondents is a perceived abuse of mobile devices among the younger generations.

However, along generational lines, nearly half of respondents (41 percent) utilize apps on their mobile devices – cell phones, iPads, Blackberrys and the like. Instances of mobile app use do increase as respondents' ages decrease.

So what apps are the generations downloading? Here are some of their favorites.

- Accuweather
- Weather Channel
- Words with Friends
- Weatherbug
- Local television stations
- Maps
- ESPN
- Gas Buddy
- Toro NSN
- DropBucket
- Sunseeker
- Agrian Mobile
- GIS 2012
- TweetDeck



## GETTING THE WORD OUT

Nothing beats a one-on-one conversation when conveying important work-related information, according to survey respondents.

Overall, a phone call (72 percent) was the go-to method across generational lines, followed by face-to-face meetings and email (both 66 percent). The gap widened when it came to text messaging, with only a third (34 percent) of respondents choosing that method. Social media venues ranked considerably lower among favored forms of critical communication.

These trends remained relatively consistent when the data was broken down generationaly.

### When you need to communicate critical work-related information, what do you use?

	BOOMER	GEN X	GEN Y	OVERALL
Email	62%	70%	50%	66%
Text message	34%	32%	25%	34%
Phone call	69%	72%	75%	72%
In-person visit/meeting	65%	61%	75%	66%
Social media	5%	10	25%	6%
Other	0	1%	0	2

## JIM HASZ LAKE BREEZE GOLF COURSE

It'd be easy for Jim Hasz, superintendent at Lake Breeze Golf Course in Winneconne, Wis., to write off his youngest workers as lazy. A Boomer himself, Hasz helped design his course 21 years ago when he started there. But rather than regale them with his stories, he's glad to put stock in his college-age employees.

"I usually hire right as they're going into their freshman year of college and tell them right off the bat, if it works out and you like the job, you can have a job for four years if you want," he says.

About half of his small crew is made up of younger crew members, continually arriving from the nearby college.

Having several Gen Y workers at one time means they work alongside each other and can help train the newcomers year after year. But the built-in time limit with a college hire fits in with Hasz's managing style, as well, he says.

"As they get to their fourth or fifth year, their interest isn't as focused as when they started out," he says. "But the rewarding part about it is to watch these kids grow. Their maturity level from year to year is outstanding, and they keep the retired guys young too with their antics during the breaks."

Though he doesn't look for a particular type of hire, Hasz says the new workers generally fit in with the group.

"The overriding thing is if you're involved in sports or like sports, everything will work out fine. Now the older guys accept pretty much everybody," he says. "I haven't had any problems between my older guys and my younger guys; but maybe it's in the people I hire, people who can get along with other people."

Hasz spends at least a whole morning working with each of the new recruits to make certain they understand what needs to be done for a chore to keep the course operating smoothly.

"You have to explain everything with them," he says. "I'll teach them how I want it done and explain why I want it done that way. I find if you explain it, they're more accepting to do it your way rather than just telling them you want it that way."

Once they have the hang of it, he'll start them out with some of the smaller jobs, using positive reinforcement to guide them.

"Experience is the best teacher," he says. "With my older guys, they've been with me for years and they're much more dependable. But I'm finding that sometimes they're starting to feel a little like they know it all. They do stray away from what I want and I have to reel them in a little bit now and again."

But when it comes to the technical side of turf, Hasz keeps his message the same regardless of the age group.

"To me, I don't have to change all that much. If I've got an older gentleman, I teach him in the same way as I do the younger kids," he says. "It's just the process I go through. The thing that may change is that they may have more experience on some equipment whereas the younger guy may not, so you just spend a little more time with the younger guy."

Hasz also splits up his teams to give each the best balance for the job assigned, he says. He'll put the younger workers together sometimes, or have one of the older crew members help keep them in line. Together, they usually get through the assignment more quickly. But the college crew members help keep the job fun.

"We get our work done and have a good time," he says. "When it's fun, it's not work."

## GENERATIONAL GAP

As the age gap widens, so does a disconnect between the generations, according to the survey data.

For example, Boomers report that they are relatively comfortable working with Gen X coworkers, with only 1 percent feeling a disconnect. That gap widens, though, when it comes to dealing with Gen Y workers, with more than a quarter of Boomer respondents (26 percent) feeling a disconnect. No love is lost with Gen Y and their attitudes toward Boomer coworkers, either. According to the data, a third (34 percent) of Gen Y find it difficult to relate to their Boomer colleagues.

Interestingly enough, Gen X workers feel some disconnect with colleagues on both sides of the generational gap. More than 10 percent feel some generational distance between themselves and Boomers and 20 percent sense a gap between themselves and Gen Y colleagues.

### Who do you feel a disconnect with?

BOOMERS ON WORKING WITH...			
	Boomers	GenX	GenY
Don't work with	2%	4%	3%
No	<b>96%</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>71%</b>
Yes	2%	1%	26%

GEN X ON WORKING WITH...			
	Boomers	GenX	GenY
Don't work with	0	0	0
No	<b>89%</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>80%</b>
Yes	11%	2%	20%

GEN Y ON WORKING WITH...			
	Boomers	GenX	GenY
Don't work with	0	0	0
No	<b>66%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Yes	34%	0	0

## MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

We asked respondents what they believed were their top challenges when managing across generation lines. Here are some of the top or most frequent responses.

- Getting them to show for work on time. Keeping people off mobile phones during work activities.
- Boosting morale without using bonuses or raises based on merit.
- Finding staff that doesn't look at the job as just a paycheck.
- Getting the Boomers and Gen Y working together.
- Being able to provide them with great enough challenges.
- Motivating (workers) in a down golf market.
- As a boss, making sure they understand that I understand their issues.
- Employees not listening to how I want things done.
- Pride in work and attention to detail, self-motivation.



### RYAN CUMMINGS PLYMOUTH COUNTRY CLUB

Even though Ryan Cummings, superintendent of Plymouth Country Club in Plymouth, Ind., is just a year or so shy of Gen Y himself, he's always heard he's got the spirit and drive of a Boomer or beyond.

"I don't normally fit the mold of the generation I'm defined in," he says. "I have maybe a different work ethic, but you're always going to have those differences even within a generation. You have to look at your crew and figure out how best to communicate with them on an individual basis."

There are a few differences in how each generation communicates on the course, though.

"A Boomer wants more of a formal, direct communication style," he says. "A Gen X or Y'er wants more of a social, indirect form of communication. For instance, I'll allow them to use their cell phones to text me or my assistant rather than driving to the other end of the course. From the initial hire, I try to sit down and figure out the best way to communicate with them to get the job done."

Within his small team, they span four generations, reaching from college-aged workers to before the end of World War II. Sometimes, they split along generation lines based on what they assume about each other even when working together, he says.

"There's the old cliché that the older generations see the younger with that negative connotation that they're all wild and they just don't get it," he says.

"The older generations sometimes don't see the work ethic in the younger generation because it's just a different work ethic. The older generations just come to do the work and have a tremendous amount of pride in what they do. They take more of a pride in their use of the equipment, maybe because they've worked on that particular piece for 20 years.

"The X and Y'ers look at things with a more holistic approach," he says. "They really don't see it as a job, but taking care of a green space. They view their job as exercise."

Cummings blends those strengths to get the best out of his whole crew's efforts, he says.

"They all do take pride in their work," he says. "It's just a matter of how it's accomplished that's different. The Boomers and Vets can take a leadership and teaching role, and they can learn a lot from the younger generations as far as tech goes and maybe re-instilling that freer spirit they had years ago."

Cummings strengthens that team dynamic by using a rewards system and course outings to create a bond between crew members even if they aren't part of the same generation. There's also the monthly barbecue or some grabbed time on a rain delay morning when they can all discuss what's happening in the world and on the course. He makes use of the daily five-minute staff meeting to talk about issues facing the whole crew, but also

(continued on page 73)

## How often do you read or access the following for job-/career-/trade-related news and information?

### FACEBOOK

	Boomers	GX	GY	Overall
Never	69%	47%	67%	60%
Daily	9%	16%	0	10%
Once a week	15%	27%	33%	21%
Once month	7%	10%	0	9%
I don't know what this is	0	0	0	0

### LINKEDIN

	Boomers	GX	GY	Overall
Never	75%	56%	100%	68%
Daily	2%	4%	0	2%
Once a week	14%	26%	0	19%
Once month	6%	10%	0	8%
I don't know what this is	3%	4%	0	3%

### TWITTER

	Boomers	GX	GY	Overall
Never	89%	84%	100%	87%
Daily	0	7%	0	3%
Once a week	8%	7%	0	7%
Once month	2%	2%	0	2%
I don't know what this is	1%	0	0	1%

### YOUTUBE

	Boomers	GX	GY	Overall
Never	47%	29%	34%	39%
Daily	0	0	0	0%
Once a week	26%	41%	0	32%
Once month	27%	30%	66%	29%
I don't know what this is	0	0	0	0%

### CRAIGSLIST

	Boomers	GX	GY	Overall
Never	70%	54%	67%	63%
Daily	0	2%	0	1%
Once a week	9%	21%	33%	14%
Once month	20%	23%	0	21%
I don't know what this is	1%	0	0	1%

### TEXT MESSAGING

	Boomers	GX	GY	Overall
Never	49%	36%	33%	43%
Daily	29%	43%	34%	34%
Once a week	18%	21%	33%	20%
Once month	4%	0	0	3%
I don't know what this is	0%	0	0	0%

### BLOGS

	Boomers	GX	GY	Overall
Never	74%	49%	33%	63%
Daily	4%	0	0	4%
Once a week	12%	35%	34%	22%
Once month	10%	12%	33%	10%
I don't know what this is	0	4%	0	1%

## WEEDING THROUGH DATA

Without a doubt, there's a lot of information out there, but how are superintendents regularly aggregating and accessing the job, career or golf trade data they need?

Hands down, YouTube, the popular video-hosting website, was the go-to source for career- and job-related information across generations (61 percent) with the majority participants accessing it at least once a week. Generationally, YouTube is a big hit with Gen X superintendents with nearly three quarters (71 percent) using the site on a regular basis to consume or share information.

Text message was the next favored source for plucking and distributing career and trade information, with 57 percent across the generations sending or receiving career and job text with colleagues at least once a week. There was also a high frequency of daily use among 34 percent of Gen Y and 43 percent of Gen X saying they do this on a daily basis, compared to 29 percent of Boomers.

Facebook was another favorite venue, with 40 percent of participants indicating they use the social media site for informational purposes on a regular basis. Generationally, more than half (53 percent) of Gen X and about a third (33 percent) of Gen Y used the site with the same relative frequency, with a little less than a third (31 percent) of Boomers utilizing their Facebook accounts.

On the flip side, Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y all indicated they don't utilize Twitter for communicating this type of data.

Surprisingly, though, blogs did not fare as well as expected, especially with the seemingly strong blog presence among the superintendent community. Across generations, more than half (63 percent) indicated they don't use blogs to cull useful information and data. And while blog use was greatest among Gen X supers (47 percent), we suspect that the 4 percent who answered that they didn't know what a blog was were, in truth, pulling our legs or experiencing survey fatigue. **GCI**

(HICKS continued from page 25)

among his own small children. "You take a 17-year-old kid who's abusing equipment, he could a lot of the time care less if you give him a day off without pay. But if you do that to a 50-year-old, they're crushed."

Regardless of behavior or age, a superintendent needs to know how to work with each of his employees simply because so much of his time is spent handling them.

"That's the difficulty of our job, and the travesty of what the universities aren't teaching the kids coming out here. People management is the number one time-eater of this job," he says. "Administration and human resources are what you spend the bulk of your time on."

Some of that time can be made up just by looking for the right crew member for the job during the hiring process. While it doesn't mean that different generations are outright better at certain jobs than others, sometimes they fit more appropriately.

"For our part time work, if we can, we'll look a little more

toward the older set because they don't necessarily need the 40-hour week, and they're usually motivated a little differently than just cash," says Hicks. "We've benefited in the last 10 years in this area from a lot of early retirees.

"When we're hiring seasonal people, I don't mind looking at somebody with zero experience rather than past golf experience. A lot of the time you spend deprogramming them from how they do it elsewhere rather than teaching them how we do it."

But regardless of what position a superintendent is looking to fill, there's one criteria he should hope for in any generation.

"You definitely want to find people who seek a little bit of intrinsic value in what they're doing rather than what the paycheck looks like," Hicks says. Finding that quality means, "When I'm hiring, I'm always trying to be brutally honest and truthful up front. If you ask a lot of questions, you tend to weed out the people who are just looking for that paycheck." **GCI**

(CUMMINGS continued from page 27)

to give crew members an opportunity to give positive feedback to each other.

"A lot of my college kids will take a minute and tell the older workers how much they liked how the course looked after they had done a particular task," he says. "I've found that the younger generation is a little more apt to give that positive feedback. We've been pretty successful in opening up that team dialogue."

He also spends time one-on-one with each person on his crew, going over the work and finding ways to improve the job.

"Out on the course, I try to meet with each employee and give some feedback on what

they're doing," says Cummings. "The older generations like that direct feedback. The younger guys, they accept it. That one-on-one feedback is very important to the success of our operation."

Regardless of how he handles crew members individually by their age group, there are some things all of his employees respond to, he says.

"Each has their own set of strengths that you try to identify and how they work best within the team, but you first have to find some similarities that every generation has," he says. "They all want a leader that's trustworthy, and they all want respect for their opinions." **GCI**

COMPANY	WEBSITE	PAGE
Bayer Environmental Science	www.backedbybayer.com	35
Becker Underwood	www.beckerunderwood.com	29
Champion Turf	www.championturfarms.com	22-23*
Club Car	www.clubcar.com	4-5
F&F Composite Group - Fiberfence	www.fiberfence.com	65
First Products	www.1stproducts.com	20
FMC Corp	www.fmc.com	31
Jacobsen	www.jacobsengolf.com	76
John Deere	www.johndeere.com	7
JRM	www.jrmonline.com	71
Kalo	www.kalo.com	22-23*
Lebanon Turf Products	www.lebanonturf.com	41
New England Regional Turfgrass Conference	www.turfshow.com	61
Nufarm	www.nufarm.com	16-17, 19
Otterbine Barebo	www.otterbine.com/golf	42
PBI/Gordon	www.pbigordon.com	49
Plant Food Systems	www.plantfoodsystems.com	10
Professional Turf Products	www.proturfproducts.com	53
Rain Bird	www.rainbird.com	39
Range Cart	www.rangecart.com	18
SePro Corp	www.sepro.com	43
Sipcam/Advan	www.sipcamadvan.com	75
STEC	www.stecequipment.com	67
Syngenta Professional Products	www.syngentaprofessionalproducts.com	2-3
Toro	www.toro.com	47
Trojan Battery Co	www.trojanbattery.com	9
Turfco	www.turfco.com	55, 69
Valent	www.valentpro.com	11

\*Denotes regional advertising