

GOING LIVE

Another day, another media event. That's kind of what I was thinking as I drove through the sunny South Carolina morning to Greenville Country Club for Turf Science Live.

The event is new...but the concept is not. Jacobsen and Syngenta had previously partnered on similar events in the U.K. and they decided to try it here along with two other iron companies, Smithco and Turfco. The idea is to provide short technical updates on products and practices to small groups of superintendents who rotated through various stations. It's speed dating for turf products, basically.

Syngenta showed off new nozzle technology plus disease updates. Jacobsen had a very cool frequency-of-clip demo set up. Turfco has a new seeder unit that maximizes germination and Smithco has a must-see precision sprayer/application system in the works.

About 60 invited supers from the Carolinas and even Georgia participated, including high-profile guys like Mark Esoda from Atlanta Country Club. Here's a guy who basically just needs to snap his fingers and any supplier will instantly deliver a demo unit or test product, yet he drove a couple of hours to Greenville because he liked the format and wanted to interact with colleagues and the technical people from the companies. And, he said, it was the right thing to do to support companies that have supported him. Mr. Esoda is a class act.

Most of the usual suspects from the golf/turf media also attended. We tend to gather at these things because it's interesting, sometimes newsworthy and often subsidized by the companies. (It's not unusual for companies to pay some portion of media travel expenses to get face time with editors.)

And, yes, we are somewhat obliged to attend because companies that host events like this also tend to be the same companies that

advertise in our magazines, underwrite the cost of education, trade shows, research and much more. There are 300+ active supplier/manufacturers in our industry but, historically, about 25 companies account for 75 percent of all the marketing dollars invested in media, shows and sponsorships. All four hosts of Turf Science Live are members of that elite group so boycotting it would be unthinkably dumb.

But that wasn't why I attended. (One of GCI's real editors could have gone and done a much better job covering it since my reporting skills pretty much suck these days.) The official reason I attended Turf Science Live was because I was asked to give a talk to attendees. But I would have come anyway whether I was asked to speak, or it was a free trip, or even if none of the sponsors were among the Top 25 advertisers.

I would have attended because it's a good new idea and we need to support good new ideas.

As national trade shows become harder to justify for suppliers and customers, events like this may emerge as the best way to share new technology, build relationships and continue the camaraderie the big events provided in the past. Successful regional shows like the Carolinas GCSA conference will always have a place, but the intimacy of these small-group demonstrations is something you just can't get in a convention center.

Is this the future of buyer/seller interactions in our market? It's too early to tell, but it's promising. It's kind of expensive but the costs are shared among multiple business partners and attendees are invited because they're strong prospects for pretty much all of the sponsors. Like everything, it's a cost/benefit balancing act.

We constantly try new stuff. Podcasts on iTunes, apps, integrating video into stories, TweetUp, etc. It's awesome to see our partners doing the same. **GCI**



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