

PTM

I love making predictions. It makes me seem smarter than I am when I pontificate about how I'm certain that some trend or some event will happen soon. I also occasionally suck at predictions. Many of you reminded me of this in 2008-2009 after I'd blithely told everyone for years that East Coast private clubs were recession-proof. Ha!

Well, here I go again.

I predict that over the next five years the term "Precision Turf Management" is going to begin to dominate our conversations about the way golf courses are maintained. In fact, five years from now the term will be so overused that it will become like "sustainability" – a word that means nothing yet is used to suit whatever purpose someone is trying to achieve.

But, in the near future, it's going to be a rolling revolution in the way we approach both information gathering and using inputs. A few quick thoughts:

In my mind, Precision Turf Management (gotta start the trend of calling it PTM right now!) is simply applying the lessons that farming learned years ago about using field mapping, various sensing devices and other measuring tools to gather as much information as possible about the real-time agronomic needs of a piece of land and then using advanced application and cultivation equipment to manage those needs more precisely.

That's a lot of words to say that we're going to start measuring EVERYTHING and only using the inputs we need to keep turf health at whatever is defined as "optimum."

The decade ahead will be the decade of metrics. The art of greenkeeping won't be 100 percent crowded out by science, but there's going to be a huge emphasis on using advanced data to get the art right.

Our cover story examines the beginnings

of this phenomenon and I hope it stirs the pot for conversation and perhaps even accelerates the technology transfer process to bring practices and techniques to our business that farmers have been using for 15 years. It's time we got more precise.

This, however, raises a bunch of questions:

- How many facilities will be able to make the large initial investment or otherwise qualify for the technology? Companies like Toro are testing it as an added-value service for their largest customers while others are coming to market to sell, lease or otherwise distribute the technology directly into the hands of supers. It's expensive and, even if the ROI of reduced inputs is clear, it's hard for many to make that kind of leap of faith.

- Will many superintendents resist the idea of relying on measuring hundreds of factors and

plugging them into some kind of diagnostic system instead of simply using their eyes and noses to spot or smell problems? Like all new technologies, there will be an adoption curve. Will resistance be smart or futile?

- Finally, will the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" grow wider at PTM becomes the standard and the vast majority of facilities won't be able to afford it? And, more ominously, will regulatory bodies see what some courses are able to do with PTM technology and simply assume it should be the standard?

All that said, the most crucial issue facing the long-term sustainability (there, I said it) is using water more efficiently. PTM offers metrics far beyond evapotranspiration and other current standards to deliver this precious resource so carefully that golf will be hailed as a leader in water management. That, my friends, is a hope...not a prediction. GCI



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GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

Serving the Business of Golf Course Management

Vol. 26 No. 2

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