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Precision Turf Management (PTM) offers unprecedented control of turf.

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Chapter 2

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TORO.

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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**



Pat Jones
Editorial director and publisher

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[EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK]

Temps down, attendance up

GCI's man-about-the-industry Bruce Williams reports back from the Northern Green Expo

Early January saw record low temperatures throughout the US. Imagine temperatures of 23 below zero during the week of a regional Minnesota turf conference and many would presume attendance would be down.

The Northern Green Expo is organized quite well and managed by Cassie Larson of the Minnesota Nursery and Landscape Association. Even with the temperatures staying in the sub-zero zone attendance numbers were up. Collaboratively, the groups involved offered quality education and the show was a strong anchor for the event, as well.

There were several components of this show which account for its success. The show continues to grow with 6,271 attendees. That number is up 3 percent from 2013. Nearly 44 percent of the attendees are categorized as decision makers and are comprised of owners, managers and superintendents from a myriad of companies in the green industry. With the broad spectrum of attendees it is evident that no one single group makes up an overriding focus therefore resulting in a variety of educational opportunities as well.

In speaking with industry veterans like Roger Stewart and Jim Nicol they both indicated that this was an event not to be missed. It saved a lot of time by connecting the commercial side of the industry with the end user consumers. The exhibition hall was nearly filled with 885 booths occupied, 327 total companies exhibiting and total space used was 178,000 square feet.

While the show was an important part of the event there were many other things going on at the same time. In addition to individual meetings of the various sponsoring organizations there was a very broad set of educational programming.

Topics included small business operations, interpersonal skills, human resources, legal and financial sessions, management solutions, plant materials, water management and of course turf management technical presentations.

The organizers did a wonderful job of putting on some additional hands-on training programs on the show floor. Since we all know that trade shows would not exist without the many commercial companies exhibiting it is important to keep show traffic up for a three-day event. A hosted lunch on the trade show floor enhanced that opportunity for attendees to network with the exhibitors.

Hats off to Minnesota's green industry.



FOR MORE

Check out the app version of this story for Bruce's expanded report on the Northern Green Expo.

From THE FEED



The temperate region doesn't seem very temperate with the polar vortex keeping things chilled.

Almost everyone headed to Orlando for the big show is ready to feel the heat. Of course, some superintendents are up for making the best of things if, say, a few trees are damaged.

The Syngenta Business Institute gave superintendents the chance to learn and network, and some of them did a little networking on Twitter as well! There were plenty of opportunities to share some knowledge – and maybe have a little fun in the process.



Jim Dillard @dillard645

10 day forecast in Orlando looks great!



Andrew Hardy @andrewhardyturf

I was taking shorts already. But now I may take my speedo too #notreally



Jennifer Seevers @jenniferseevers

ahhh as I'm staring outside at the frozen landscape this is like the light at the end of the tunnel!



Turf Republic @turfpublic

The warmth cannot come soon enough!



Clay DuBose @clayhomerun

Potential ice accumulation for the Coastal area through Wednesday morning



Tom Taylor @tom_taylor1421

hopefully no "important" trees get damaged. I'd hate to cut them down



Clay DuBose @clayhomerun

I can think of a few that could/need to get damaged!



Join the conversation
on Twitter @GCIMagazine!



{ EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK }

Time for change

After more than two decades, Club Car rolled out updated versions of its Carryall UTVs.

For more than 20 years, Club Car has hesitated making any major changes to its Carryall line. But that changed recently as the company, in January, rolled out new models with improvements to fuel efficiency, horsepower and other features.

The company invited media members and dealers to Disney's Fort Wilderness Lodge in Orlando, Fla. to get an up-close look at the new vehicles and to test drive them.

Disney has nearly 3,500 Club Car vehicles on its properties and has a 20-plus year relationship with Club Car. What Club Car has learned through its relationship

with Disney (Club Car actually developed a custom solutions department because of Disney) was implemented into the updated Carryall vehicles.

In addition to lessons from Disney, Club Car sent 12 employees across the U.S. and Europe visiting 46 locations that use Club Car or competitor vehicles. What they heard from that research was customers wanted a more powerful engine, more comfort in the vehicle and a fit-to-task-bed box.

Kurt Meyer, commercial/industrial marketing manager, said landscapers specifically asked for a better bed, and they wanted a pick-up truck-like tailgate that is easy to open. The new vehicle now has a single-handed latch and release tailgate, and a protected aluminum bed that will protect the inside from corrosion from any spillage.

Landscaper feedback also led to the implementation of movable bed dividers and cargo tie-down loops to prevent tools and other cargo from shifting. "You are protecting your assets," he says of the upgrades to the truck-bed's storage capabilities.

The company also wanted a more truck-like look to the interior, and a truck-like feel to the seating area. "We tried to decrease the gap between getting out of the truck and transitioning into this vehicle," says Billy Dakuras, director of sales and business development for the Americas.

The company expects sales increase of 24 percent in the commercial utility vehicle market. UTVs can be a less expensive alternative to pick-up trucks and vans when moving people or tools around a facility. "As budgets and teams shrink, they (facility managers) are always trying to do more with less," says Mike Cotter, commercial/industrial and consumer marketing director.

Brian Horn is managing editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.





Henry DeLozier is a principal in the Global Golf Advisors consultancy. DeLozier joined Global Golf Advisors in 2008 after nine years as the vice president of golf for Pulte Homes. He is a past president of the National Golf Course Owners Association's board of directors and serves on the PGA of America's Employers Advisory Council.

RUT BUSTERS

Nine tips to kick start your facility's performance.

Is your club stuck in a rut? Do you find yourself entering the new year preparing to face the same challenges with the same strategies and programs? If so, you may be feeling less than inspired, a condition easily spread to team members. It's not too late to put an actionable plan in place that will make 2014 the year you emerged from the proverbial rut. Here are tips to kick start performance.

Talk to your members or regular customers. Most club members and regular customers at daily fee courses have an opinion about your operation. You want to know what that is,

input and opinion from customers and prospects. So should you. Ask questions about hours of operation, mowing practices, greens speed, soap in the locker room and lunch. Your members are a treasure-trove of knowledge and wisdom. Tap into it.

Highly effective focus groups include six to eight people who will talk with you for 60 to 75 minutes. Listen and let the group talk. There is no requirement for explanations or grand pronouncements. Just listen carefully and ask questions to understand fully the real intent of the comments. Consider an inexpensive form of compensation for their time

learn how they answer the phone. Ask them about your club and learn how they view you as a competitor.

MAKE IT EASY AND FUN TO USE YOUR CLUB. Most clubs have silly rules because they've always had the same silly rules. Stop defaulting to history. Your members – and especially their teenage children – can identify the outdated rules that need to go.

1. Eliminate outdated practices that make it difficult or frustrating to be your guest. Philosophers sometimes ask "Why?" five times. Why? Because simplicity is easy to explain and understand. Complicated and arcane ideas require excessive explanation. Busy people don't join clubs to add complication and stress to their lives, so don't allow an outdated rule to undermine your efforts.

2. Ask members, "When will we see you next?" For some reason, many clubs never think to ask a guest to return. So they don't. Make sure that your members and their guests or the customers at your daily fee course know that you're eager to see them again. Repeat patronage is the ultimate prize. Win it!

3. Reward loyalty with recognition and real value. Introduce programs that make being a "regular" very beneficial to the recipient. Eschew up-front price discounts for continuous engagement. That is the approach that is working well for the airline, hospitality and retail giants. Recruit, retain and build the loyalty of great members and customers.

IMPROVE YOUR PERFORMANCE. With so many choices in an over-supplied

“No one wants to play a course in poor condition. The golf course must be a great shape. There is no forgiveness for dead grass, weeds, mud-holes and unfinished projects.”

so you can do more of the things they like. So, ask them what they think, even if you think their answers might sting a little. There's no better way to learn what matters most and discover where you are wasting money.

1. Use every medium available, from one-on-one interviews and focus groups with members to member surveys to regular social media polling. Make it personal and demonstrate that you intend to be held accountable to their suggestions for improvement. Make sure you include a cross section of membership, and don't overlook your women members, who not only are the decision makers in most families, but also are remarkably observant about club conditions.

2. Gather your own focus groups. Top companies constantly solicit

to encourage a sincere and thoughtful engagement.

3. Be your own "Secret Shopper." When we make calls to our own club, we learn how the club is being presented to members and prospects. That starts with the voice and personality of the person answering the phone and carries over to anyone who might have a member-facing role. Remember, there's no second chance for a first impression.

BUT DON'T STOP THERE. Call realtors in your market area and ask what they know about your club. They talk to people all day every day. Ask the service station attendant down the street for directions to your club. Ask local bankers what they think about your club. Call your competitors and

(DELOZIER continues on page 57)