

Take Advantage of the Web

back in 1998, I was one of the first landscape professionals to realize the value of the Internet. Since then, I've never looked back.

As a 23-year-old owner of my own lawn care company, Lawnicure, I could already feel my knees and back giving out. So I decided to work smarter, not harder. With an initial investment of \$300, I created a Web page that described my company and the services I offered, and put my Web domain name (www.lawnicure.com) on my business cards. I also put that domain name in with my Yellow Pages advertisements to stretch my advertising dollars.

A month later, I added a lawn care message forum to my Web page so that landscape professionals who visited the site could say hello or ask me a question. This forum became popular, so in January 1999 I registered the domain www.lawnsite.com, sold my lawn care company and started selling advertising space on the site.

As hundreds of thousands of lawn care company owners started visiting my site monthly, manufacturers saw the value of sponsoring LawnSite.com with a banner (a small rectangle with the sponsor's company advertisement in it). Some people who see a certain product advertised might have something negative to say about it in the public discussion forum, but others with different experiences will talk highly about it. The great thing is that the manufacturer can jump into the discussion as well.

Today, LawnSite.com is the most popular lawn care message forum on the Internet with more than 600,000 monthly page views, 20,000 different discussions on commercial lawn care and 1,100 registered lawn care company owners.

Forum participants enjoy the interaction with their peers. Ed Wagner of www.turfquip.com sums it up nicely: "Lawn care operators nationwide share a common set of industry specific problems — poor public perception, lack of profitability, availability of labor and changing technology, to name a few. By sharing common concerns, LawnSite members are able to reach common solutions by saving time, money and shortening the learning curve."

Moving forward, I've invested \$10,000 additional dollars in hiring a software programming company to add a lawn care company directory and online marketplace to my site. I'm also creating LawnSites.com, which will offer web page design services to lawn care companies.

All landscape professionals will eventually use e-commerce to benefit themselves and their companies. Watch out, local parts dealers, because you can't compete with the low overhead the Internet offers — LCOs will buy directly from wholesale outlets for big savings and the product will be delivered to their doorsteps. LCOs will also be able to research before they buy by talking to thousands of their peers across the country, not to mention getting industry news and events in minutes. Manufacturers will be able to reach a new market and get insight from LCOs on what they're looking for in equipment. Consumers will be able to find lawn companies and receive bids in minutes.

If your company is not using the Internet, your competition is. You're missing out on a vast amount of knowledge and giving extra money to your local parts dealer to cover his overhead. If you're looking for an excuse to buy a new computer, the Internet is one you should take advantage of. ■



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