

Given the considerable power the Global Positioning System (GPS) can offer superintendents, it's a wonder more of them aren't using it.

According to the 2001 GCSAA Leadership Survey, only 4 percent of superintendents believe the GPS has had a significant impact on the game. It ranks last (1 percent) on the list of what superintendents consider the most important technology to help them do their jobs better.

Those statistics baffle me. The only explanation I have is that maybe it's because people haven't yet experienced GPS firsthand.

My initial experience didn't come until last year. Although I'd read about the system (and casually thrown its name around in stories about futuristic greens mowers), I never understood the power of the system until I observed it firsthand on a wintery Boy Scout campout last year.

While I waited for the feeling to return to my feet after a hike through a forest, I saw two fathers a few feet away, their heads close together. Each periodically pointed at what looked to be a cellular phone.

"See, that's where we are right now," said the scout leader, a doctor when he wasn't tramping around in the woods.

The other father, a photographer, nodded.

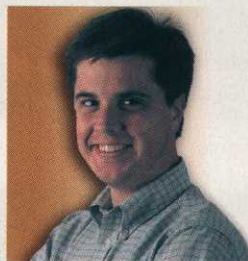
"Let's see if we can calculate the shortest path back to the parking lot from here," he said.

My experience taught me one thing: A personal GPS system (which I later learned was the technological toy these fathers were playing with) sure beats the traditional Boy Scout method of mapping, which involves moss on trees and a compass. These two guys plotted their positions in the campground with frightening accuracy. I thought about what the GPS could do for someone who has a large piece of property to care for — like a superintendent.

Think about the implications of having an accurate, digitized map of your course. It would allow you to communicate maintenance tasks more specifically to your crew. With the help of irrigation controller software, you could turn on irrigation heads with

Jump on the GPS Bandwagon

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.



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the touch of a stylus or the click of a mouse. Renovations would be a breeze because the maps would show the course as it *really* is.

Despite these advantages, however, many superintendents are reluctant to jump on the GPS bandwagon.

Bruce Jasurda, president of Elwood, Ill.-based Tyler Enterprises, is betting on the power of the GPS to increase revenues for his company's custom-fertilizer business. It added a customized GPS mapping option in August 1999 to go with its fertilizer business. The list of courses taking advantage of it grows daily, Jasurda says.

"When people ask us to map their courses, we routinely find their estimated acreage is off by as much as 20 percent," Jasurda says. "When you're buying chemicals or applying water, a 20-percent mistake can cost thousands of dollars. If there's an accurate map, you don't waste that money."

One Midwest course overestimated its total acreage by five acres. Jasurda says that after Tyler's mapping discovered the disparity, the superintendent calculated how much extra money he had spent in the previous year on chemical applications. He found he'd wasted \$9,870.

With that kind of bottom-line impact, it shouldn't be hard sell to your owner or green committee on purchasing a map. The initial outlay for the map may be expensive, but it pays for itself within a year if used properly.

It's time to stop standing on the sidelines and embrace GPS technology as the powerful tool it is. To do otherwise is to miss the forest for the trees.

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