

**T**he one drawback to having children is that once they reach school, they can make you feel ignorant at times. Of course, that's because they're learning things that you learned some time ago but have since forgotten. That's the situation I'm running into with my 10-year-old son, Ryan.

Recently, he reminded me about an important lesson about machines. As part of his fifth-grade science curriculum, he's learning that levers and fulcrums make up simple machines. Those simple machines can be grouped to produce complex machines that can do large volumes of work more efficiently.

The lesson, of course, is that machines are more powerful working together than they are individually. The same lesson should apply to the computers that have taken over superintendents' lives, but it doesn't. For that, the golf industry should feel ignorant, too.

Computers help you do your job daily. They provide you access to the Web, help you produce budgets and streamline communication. They run your irrigation systems and can map your golf course using global positioning so you can locate every tree, bunker and sprinkler head.

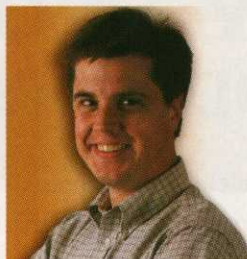
Yet no one in this industry has designed a way for all those disparate computers to communicate with one another. Computers that can't coordinate with each other are no better than the rudimentary machines that Ryan is working with in his class.

Dan Dinelli, certified superintendent at North Shore CC in Glenview, Ill., says his club researched having computer programmers write software to integrate all of his stand-alone machines into one network to achieve the goal of all superintendents — top-notch golf course maintenance. He even convinced the owners that the cost — between \$15,000 and \$20,000 — would be a good investment. But then he learned one of the major difficulties of computer integration.

"The programmers told us that once we had this system in place, it would be risky to upgrade any individual part of the system," Dinelli says. "One upgrade on one part of the system could mess the whole integration up."

## Why Can't They Work Together?

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.



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Dinelli says it's frustrating to have all these computer controls available to him without having the ability to wield them as an integrated system. He wishes he could collect data about problems on his course, download them to a central site and have the computer make the adjustments necessary to solve them.

"We're still not even scratching the surface with the power of these machines," Dinelli says. "Integration would allow you to micro-manage your golf course in a way that's practically unthinkable right now."

Dinelli says the computerization of certain aspects of course maintenance would allow superintendents to be more proactive. Once superintendents can collect historical data about problems on their courses and store it on their desktops, they will harness more fully the power of the computers to predict when problems might arise. Armed with this information, superintendents would be able to prevent the problems before they became the crises that plague them during their day-to-day operations. Unfortunately, that day seems a long way off, Dinelli says.

"We don't have the tools available to us to integrate all the computers from the different systems," Dinelli says. "I don't see why, as an industry, we can't do that."

I can't either. With all the advances in the Internet and computers, why is that we in the golf industry can't get our computers to talk to each other? It's done in other industries all the time, and it's time the golf industry joined them.

Maybe I'll go back to Ryan and see if he can't devise a system to get all these computers on the same page. It's a solution that can't come too soon.

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