



A Broken Promise

By Mark Keinert



I was looking over the PC on my desk the other day when I realized that I must confess to you that I'm taking back one of my political promises. This year, being a presidential election year, I figured that you would accept this type of rhetoric and could handle it. I know that your senses, like mine, are numb by all the hollow promises made by now. (Middle income tax cut for anyone??)

For you see, I promised to bring you a chapter sponsored Computer Bulletin Board System (BBS for short). We had even floated a couple of names for this board service as the opening screen welcomed you as you logged on. Bucky Bytes or Cheddar Bytes were my two leading favorites for this superintendent driven service.

I was even in the process of developing on-line forums for superintendents to use. These "chat rooms" would have quickly allowed the user to transfer information of disease problems to fellow superintendents or alert others of a potential tank mix problems that were encountered with the use of two incompatible products.

It would also be an inexpensive way to advertise those secondary pieces of turf or irrigation equipment that take up entirely too much of your warehouse space. All of us have those pieces of idled equipment that are worth more than the trade-in price, less than the price of rebuilding, but have too much life to simply through away.

I wanted this BBS service to supplement (not replace) the Turfgrass Hot-Line that the University of Wisconsin-Madison uses to post messages of a timely nature forewarning us of disease or insect problems. I wanted the professors of various disciplines to monitor our conversations and to feel free to jump right in and post their responses and give users timely feedback.

But now, I've changed my mind. I'm taking it all back (Well some of it anyway. Please read on.). For you see, I've been caught up in a net. Yes, pun intended, the internet. I have marveled at the information that is available to computer users in just a matter of nano seconds. The knowledge base of millions of individual users puts at your finger tips more information than what can be found in all the libraries from around the world. That's right. There is more is more information stored on computers disks today than what can be found written in books in all of recorded history. We are truly becoming a global community.

The problem is you have to learn how to get to that information. It has been written that 85% of the information found on the web is worthless junk and I would have to agree to this to some extent.

But, I have witnessed a changing attitude that is developing by the user of the net. It is an attitude that is very much like every business in the world knows, that if it's going to survive, it had better offer a worthwhile product or the certain laws of economics will prevail, and the people will stop coming. They will be out of business. In other words, you must build a better mouse trap or people will stop buying your product. "If you build it they will come" simply does not work on the internet.

What I have utilized the most is the instantaneous exchange of messages called e-mail. To me this form of communication is simply priceless. My wife tells me that it is too impersonal and she is right. But there is nothing better than getting to the point and having your message answered almost as quickly.

This is the same complaint that many find with the answering machine, that it is too impersonal. For

me, the time saved not playing phone tag or listening to elevator music while you have been parked on hold, has benefits that far outweigh what
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I feel is this perceived impersonality. I can get on with my business.

I've communicated with professors in turfgrass management at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and other turfgrass institutions. This form of communication has allowed me to convey messages to a WGCSA Board member in a rapid manner when we needed to exchange information in a hurry. I've been able to track down manufacturers and ask my questions.

So I have changed my mind. I feel a better use of our time and efforts will be to see that we get a home page set up on the internet. Tom Schwab, Superintendent of the O. J. Noer Turfgrass Facility, has agreed to set up a "list server" network for us on a secured part of the University of Wisconsin-Madison computer network. This will give allow us to inter-

act with one another through the rapid dissemination of e-mail messages via this network. If this list server goes as planned, we will have the ability to ask professors questions and they will not have to pick up a phone.

In the future, I would like to see the WGCSA and the O. J. Noer Turfgrass Facility have their own home page with links to other parts of the university, GCSAA, the USGA, TGIF and other universities as soon as system security issues can be resolved. It has the potential to become a world wide link, to serve as a source of information for superintendents through out the Midwest. Its uses are limited only by the mind.

I have been asked by Dr. Douglas Maxwell to gather as many e-mail addresses as I could possibly find. This would serve as an initial network database for informational exchange. If

you have one, and would like to be a part of this system, please contact Dr. Maxwell (dum@plantpath.wisc.edu) or Steve Blendel (westmoor@globaldialog.com) They are collating the names and e-mail addresses for us.

So what can you do to insure that you are on the leading edge of technology? Take computer classes at your local technical college or university. They are very well worth the investment of your time. Then, subscribe to a local internet server, or one of the subscription services that are stuffing your mail box with free trial offer diskettes. Do your homework before investing as they are changing very quickly.

We are still planning on a computer forum for next Winter. Please let me know what topics you would like to have discussed and I'll see what we can do. Until next time, I can be reached at 4kienert@wctc.net. 🌱

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