

Focus: A Minnesota Company

GIS Technology for Course Management

The golf industry in the Twin Cities has been steadily growing - more golfers, more courses, more competition, and smaller budgets. Golf course superintendents have found increasing need for professional assistance to help them keep up with the demand.

Original Focus Tree Management

In this mix of rapid growth and over the last five years a Minnesota technology oriented service company has emerged. StrataPoint founded by Jason Bass an arborist providing tree inventories and consulting, has taken on a far larger role. Bringing the power of computer technology in the form of a grounds management application has lead to many unintended avenues.

For many years trees have been growing in and around landscapes. Superintendents are facing "what to do questions" regarding these maturing giants. Today's problematic tree situations relate to size, health conditions, over-planting, improper planting/location and turf competition for sun and essential nutrients. Just managing trees is a full time job. Yet at every golf course turf is the number one priority and trees usually take a back seat until one dies or fails. Superintendents are asked to provide records to justify budgets for a large number of trees. These data generally have not been collected and/or maintained. Understanding the trees and planning for their well being requires

having access to records. Not having data on these assets, some over 100 years old, is critical to good management and liabilities. It is important to know what has been done and why.

Integrated Technology

Focused on trees and knowing that courses have lots of them StrataPoint began its design for a tree management program. Any program of value would have to inventory every tree and track its status. It was obvious to StrataPoint that a highly functional, easy-to-use tool that required a minimal effort was essential. StrataPoint with the assistance of participating superintendents went about designing a user friendly model.

Bass did the necessary research and discovered that superintendents needed and required more than a database. They wanted a tool that gave them visual access to all assets of the course. In addition to trees, irrigation, turf, contour, chemicals, maintenance and employees and much more were added to the list.

Obviously computer technology had a role to play. Bass set about designing an application that utilized GPS and GIS (Geographic Information System) that was superintendent friendly and did the tracking and reporting on a wide-range of asset categories. His pilot project turned up very useful additions to the design.

StrataPoint's product, Point DataMap, was developed. The application program did its job: recording, tracking and providing decision making information. Point DataMap now has moved

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StrataPoint –

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beyond its original focus on trees. It is a very comprehensive golf course management program designed to assist superintendents.

The continuing focus of the company is helping superintendents do what they do every day. The technology assistance is designed to not take more time or effort. In fact, assuming that the functions of recording, tracking, reporting and analyzing are considered essential, the technology is a time saver. Collecting and storing data and turning the data into useful decision-making information is what it is all about.

Meeting the Challenges: Sticking with its evolutionary nature StrataPoint has listened as superintendents struggled with the age-old problem of trees-shade-turf. The shade problem is understood but the question is what specifically should be done about it? Removing and trimming trees without knowing the consequence is not wise. The situation calls for some careful analysis. This presents an excellent opportunity for using the technology inherent in GIS and Point DataMap.

A course that has GPS location data and attribute information for each tree can easily use software developed to simulate the actual shade condition for any site on the course. The resulting comparative analysis can be invaluable to the superintendent who is trying to solve turf problems. The Shade Analysis Module is now planned to be part of StrataPoint's program. When the customer identifies a need StrataPoint will respond by using its technology and building on the solid foundation of data it has for its customers. As needs expand this young Minnesota company will continue to evolve by meeting those needs.

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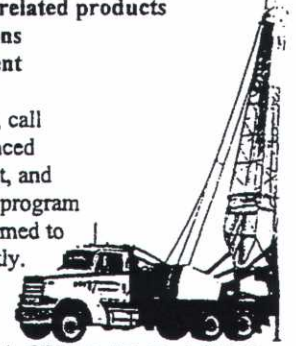
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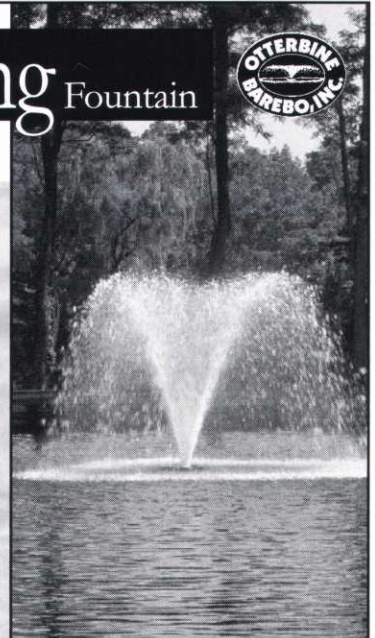
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