

BECKMANN TURF AND IRRIGATION PROVIDES PRESENT AND FUTURE NEEDS IN THE ST. LOUIS VICINITY

Despite the growing cost of sales calls, Bruce Beckmann, president of Beckmann Turf and Irrigation Supply of Chesterfield, Missouri, expects his sales staff to make seven to eight calls per day when they are not giving demonstrations.

These aren't always sales calls, they are service calls too. "We make frequent calls on the customers," Beckmann says, "to develop a rapport and gain their confidence so that we can recommend products to fit their long-term growth."

To Beckmann, distribution is a one-on-one business. With direct mail advertising and a new catalog that goes out to 1800 landscape managers each year, it is the personal contact that is most productive. "It is probing by the salesman that determines what the customer's needs are," said Beckmann. "Once we have an exchange of ideas we can begin to help satisfy his needs by demonstrating equipment in order to determine its efficiency in comparison to what he already has."

On the day the *Weeds Trees & Turf* visited Beckmann Turf and Irrigation, one salesman had just returned from a demonstration of a Dedoes aerator for the superintendent of a 27-hole municipal golf course. During the course of the demonstration the salesman and superintendent figured out that the Dedoes would cut 75 man-hours from the traditional method of aeration. To Beckmann's sales staff each demonstration is an opportunity to sell.

Once a piece of equipment is sold, Beckmann then concerns itself with three other phases of the transaction: setting the equipment up, servicing it, and educating the customer to get maximum efficiency from it.

In effect, many sales calls are an offshoot of the deep commitment Beckmann feels towards its customers. "The service end of the

business is as demanding as any part," said Beckmann. "Some customers don't have the expertise to continually update their specialty equipment to achieve the productivity demanded by their budgets." He added that while those calls are expensive to make, it is important to satisfy the needs of the customer in order to grow with his maintenance program.

Some recent trends have reinforced Beckmann's philosophy of customer commitment, particularly with irrigation and specialty equipment. Beckmann has watched the distribution of chemicals become the domain of specialists whose expertise lies in low pricing.

Many distributors are shrinking their lines and expanding their marketing region as shipping methods become more sophisticated. Beckmann suggested with products that require little service or follow-up, price is often the definitive factor. Beckmann carries a full line of chemicals and seed as a service to his customers, but there is clearly a concentration on irrigation and specialty equipment.

An important reason for this concentration is the industrial market's need for better-manicured turf.

It can take 7 months to more than a year before a client can get final approval for a piece of equipment.

More and more landscape contractors are serviceing the industrial market," said Beckmann. "Condominiums, apartment projects and industrial complexes are being maintained more like golf courses." While 10 years ago it was accepted that turfgrass had dormant periods, today turf is expected to be maintained 12 months a year.



President Bruce Beckmann.

Although Beckmann's territory lies smack in the middle of the transition zone with its four extreme seasons, the attitude is "it can be done." "With," Beckmann added, "modern irrigation and maintenance equipment, improved chemical products and the ability to apply those products with the new equipment."

Being in the transition zone causes the grass to have two heavy growth periods—March to June, and September to November. Beckmann sales would peak in spring and fall and drop in summer and winter in the past. The growth of the company's irrigation business however, has levelled out the summer trough and extended the fall peak into December or as late as installations are still feasible. Chemicals move well in the summer, largely because the weather has the cool season grasses under stress.

"Budgets at schools and government agencies come due in June and July," said Beckmann. "Most golf course budgets come due in the first quarter. Equipment is now selling on a nine to ten month basis, not just in the spring."

Beckmann's irrigation division has been a prime beneficiary of the trend towards better turf. By his estimate, 70% of keeping good turf is adequate water supply. "For the



Field service representative loads mower for repair at service center.

first five years (of the irrigation division) we had to convince the commercial/industrial market that good turf was attainable," said Beckmann. "Now that it's established, they are opting for improved watering systems to maintain the turf." Manning the irrigation division is a sales manager, an architect/engineer and a designer/contractor.

In the off-season Beckmann sponsors training meetings for selected contractors. They involve marketing, design, advertising, promotion, service, and application of equipment. The residential and light industrial markets have grown significantly over the past six years, according to Beckmann. Improved irrigation systems are increasingly being specified for athletic field and golf course renovations, although new golf course construction has been off.

In line with most successful businessmen, Beckmann sees the tight economic conditions as an opportunity for his staff to exhibit their expertise and commitment to their customers. Beckmann stresses the "life cycle cost" of equipment, not simply the purchase price. "The cheapest piece of equipment is often short-lived and requires high maintenance," noted Beckmann. "Turfgrass managers can't afford down-time." With labor costs being such a large part (50-60%) of maintenance budgets, superintendents are opting for cost-efficient equipment.

"Toro equipment is the best engineered equipment I have ever seen in the industry," exclaimed Beckmann. "They have taken a leadership position. About 10 years ago they redesigned their equipment and came out with a life cycle and

low cost that the industry needs."

"Our specialty equipment is designed for broad applications in maintaining turfgrass," said Beckmann. "To justify the cost of the equipment, you can point to the number of jobs it can perform. We're selling 'greater versatility.'"

Beckmann started out in his family's lawn and garden supply company. It was the model of a two-step distribution system, i.e., receive it in a box and send it out in a box. Accordingly, it was a lot easier to service customers. "The transition from two-step to one-step distribution was difficult because of the increased demand for service after the sale," said Beckmann. "If a customer buys equipment and doesn't use it properly, all

Equipment is now selling on a ten-month basis, not just in the spring.

the investment in time and service goes down the drain."

Beckmann recently hired a field service technician to expedite his customer service. The field service technician makes periodic visits to offer help in structuring preventive maintenance programs and in effect, teach the customer what can be done to extend the life of his machine. As a jack-of-all-trades, the field service technician can fix equipment on site, make an educational service call, or haul damaged equipment back to the shop. Beckmann noted that his next personnel addition will be another field service technician.

Beckmann currently has a staff

of 21: 6 in service, 4 in turf equipment and supplies sales, 3 in irrigation sales, 3 in parts, and 5 in administration. The warehouse facility includes a 12,000-sq. ft. warehouse, 7200-sq. ft. service facility, and an 8000-sq. ft. office/display area. The display area is reminiscent of a lawn and garden store, not an industrial distributor. "People like to look at what they are going to buy," said Beckmann. "Since we have the room, we set up the equipment and let them kick the tires. We're in a marketing business and we have to merchandise the equipment." Beckmann added that it can take seven months to 1-1/2 years before a client can get final approval for a piece of equipment. "So, everytime we can expose him to it helps."

The current trend in the bureaucracies is to let level upon level of management scrutinize big purchases (like specialty equipment). With the frequency of selling equipment somewhat limited by their longevity, Beckmann views each meeting with the customer and corporate structure as another chance to sell the advantages of his product. The sale, however, can be lost at any level, often after a considerable investment of time and salesmanship. Beckmann continually battles the corporate gremlins that simply pick the least expensive piece of equipment.

Beckmann's mixture of customer commitment and service has proven successful, yet demanding. Particularly in a sales territory with a 300-mile radius. Expanding further, while still providing full service, proved to be a problem for the company. A solution came in the form of a return to a modified two-step distribution.

Recently Beckmann has begun setting up a commercial dealer operation in the outlying areas of his territory. This has benefitted the company by providing the Beckmann brand of service and education on a day-to-day basis by an affiliated dealer in the customer's locale. "The dealer network will give full service to outlying areas that were difficult to reach," said vice president Bob Tegethoff. "It is also a way to reach customers that like to spend their money locally." **WTT**

HYDRO-SCAPE USES SALES SAVVY TO INCREASE IRRIGATION MARKET SHARE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



Operations Manager Don Larsen.

Sound, modern business practices are the reason Hydro-Scape Products, Inc., of Southern California keeps increasing its share of the irrigation and landscape products market during abundant rain and recession. Bob Tiglio provides the technical expertise with a background in golf course irrigation construction and Art Arns keeps management practices up to date with his manufacturing and sales background.

Operations Manager for the San Diego-based firm, Don Larsen told

Weeds Trees & Turf Hydro-Scape made a major expansion into the Middle East in 1978 under the direction of Arch Humphreys. Today, Hydro-Scape has eight outlets with 3,000 accounts and it is only seven-years-old.

While many view Southern California as the land of opportunity and ever-increasing growth, Larsen noted that business is increasing but at a decreasing rate. "Business has been very good since the '74 recession, but last year was tough," said Larsen. He pointed out that the biggest problem during last year was the hard winter. In Southern California, while it never gets too cold to do contracting, the only thing that can hold up a job is rain and 1981 brought a lot of that. However, Hydro-Scape weathered the winter and in some ways came out ahead. Due to efficient management the company could afford to swallow some contracting downtime. Some of their competition wasn't as fortunate.

"While we see business in gen-

eral increasing slower, we intend to increase our market share," said Larsen. Indeed, in the midst of last year's shakeout, Hydro-Scape bought up a Los Angeles-based competitor. "When the business climate got more severe during the past winter, the company concentrated on controlling purchases, reducing inventory and turning dollars more quickly. "We buy on a month-to-month basis," said Larsen. "One reason is that the cost of borrowing money is better on a month-to-month basis. Another reason is that we try to synchronize our buying periods with our sales periods." Due to Hydro-Scape's

Hydro-Scape uses a Nixdorf computer to manage its more than 3,000 accounts and its inventory.

size, it has the ability to swap materials from one branch to the other when the need arises. Deliveries are made to the branches three times a week, although the company offers 24-hour delivery on pallet-size orders. "Service is very important," noted Larsen. "It is important to have orders ready when the customer needs it."

Service is one of the reasons that Hydro-Scape is more than an irrigation equipment distributor. Their customers demanded that they carry landscape supplies. "They liked the service they got with irrigation supplies, so they wanted us to carry other things," said Larsen. The list of landscape products the company carries has grown to include: decorative bark, edging materials, erosion control materials, fertilizers, fungicides, herbicides, insecticides, lumber, nursery items, outdoor lighting, plant material, seed, sod, soil amendments, tools and equipment.

Expansion into Middle East provides cushion to U.S. sales

While other distributors were figuring out how to expand their territory into another county or state, Hydro-Scape Products expanded into another continent—the Middle East. The company now maintains full time sales representation in two Saudi Arabia offices.

While margins are slimmer, the volume of the projects is significantly larger. "They are building cities from scratch in the desert," said Operations Manager Don Larsen. "It is a status symbol to plan and generate ornamental irrigation in the desert because they've never had it before." The largest job Hydro-Scape has supplied is the

120-sq.mi. airport in Riyadh. Larsen hastens to add that the Mid-East is not quite a plum ready to be picked. "It can be very frustrating," he said. "Time is dragged out. It can take from two to five years to nail down a project and there is a lot of red tape." Larsen added that exporting was foreign (no pun intended) to Hydro-Scape, but they soon learned that if the paperwork wasn't perfect they could lose their shirts.

"There were two reason for us to expand into the Middle East," said Larsen. "We thought it would be profitable and also help average out our domestic business cycles."



Hydro-Scape carries 16 lines of irrigation equipment, sod, chemicals, but no large landscape equipment.

A second important reason for Hydro-Scape branching out into landscape products is the dual roles of the Southern Californian landscape contractor. Many of the company's customers do both landscape contracting and irrigation contracting. "Prior to us no other distributor carried both," said Larsen. In a typical transaction, a landscape contractor might first purchase his irrigation materials, then soil amendments, fertilizer, trees, edging and sod.

Even while Hydro-Scape strives to be a full-service distributor, it keeps an eye on business management at all times. A case in point was the decision not to carry turfgrass maintenance equipment, such as mowers and aerators. (Their landscape equipment line consists mostly of hand tools and spreaders.) "We don't have a service facility, so we carry very little maintenance equipment," said Larsen. "We have no inventory, but we will order items on special request. Basically, those items take up a lot of space and turn slowly."

With margins being squeezed slimmer and slimmer, Hydro-Scape turned to computers to fatten profits. They hit paydirt with their Nixdorf system. Their 3000 regular business accounts were programmed according to their method of buying, method of payment, volume and other categories. This simplified the pricing structure and enabled the customer to get the best discount possible. Inventory management was also made more cost-effective. "The system enabled us to buy faster and we found that the cost of our inven-

tory dropped," said Larsen, "especially the price of plastics." Larsen stressed that they don't pick up the computer print-out and then order accordingly. "We still like the personal feel for inventory. We do a rough count on what we have, what we're ordering, and what we need."

Hydro-Scape opted for a Nixdorf system because they felt that the smaller computer firm was more responsive to their needs than the bigger companies they had contacted. The system they initially purchased was supposed to be sufficient for five years. After two years a bigger system was needed due to Hydro-Scape's speedy growth. "We're extremely satisfied," said Larsen. "With the help of some good programmers and a little patience, the performance has been terrific."

Though Hydro-Scape has diversified into landscape products, over 60% of its business is in irrigation. Their coverage of the market is impressive; in sprinkler equipment alone they carry no less than 16 lines, including Rain-Bird, Royal Coach/Buckner, Toro and Safe-T-Lawn. Some manufacturers were wary of having Hydro-Scape also carrying their competitor's products. (Rain-Bird only recently tapped them as a Southern California distributor.) Yet Hydro-Scape has a firm policy on which products they will recommend to a customer. "If the specs are set, we will not change them," said Larsen. "Otherwise we put together the best package for the job, even if that entails using components from different manufacturers."

With drought conditions becoming more prevalent in Southern California, irrigation sales might not be viewed as a growth industry. Yet in its typical fashion Hydro-Scape views the drought as another opportunity to do business. "The drought woke a lot of people up to improving their irrigation systems," said Larsen. "Customers are opting for drip irrigation systems and a more controlled spray. With today's solid state technology the spray at each valve can be monitored."

California's Proposition 13 caused some initial cutbacks in orders but business is back close to normal. Larsen told *Weeds Trees & Turf* that the government has found some alternative sources of revenue. "The tourist industry is very big here and there is a high priority on appearance," he said. "The government has a big investment in landscaping."

An interesting point made by Larsen is that sod sales are still strong in Southern California. Hydro-Scape is the largest distributor of Pacific Green/Nunes sod and there has been an increase in the sale of drought-tolerant sod. Selling sod and plant materials is one area where the company's ties with their landscape contractor customers has been an asset. "A lot of growers are wary of selling to contractors they are not familiar with," said Larsen. "With us as the intermediary, the growers is assured his money and the contractor gets his materials."

The company carries 16 different lines of irrigation equipment without favoritism.

Hydro-Scape maintains WATS lines in Los Angeles, San Diego and Orange county in order expedite transactions with the vast number of growers they do business. In that manner they can also avoid inventorying plant materials. The company views plant materials as a potential liability. With the Wats phone lines they can contact various growers and have them ship directly.

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GARFIELD WILLIAMSON DOUBLES PROFESSIONAL SALES IN FIVE YEARS TO NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA

The ability to respond promptly to the needs of the consumer is the most critical quality of a distributor for John Zajac, the vice president and general manager of Garfield Williamson, a distributor of seed and allied products in Jersey City, NJ. "Flexibility is what gives us our place in the market," he stated in a recent interview with *Weeds, Trees & Turf*.

The key to maintaining flexibility to Zajac is keeping the company a manageable size. The larger the company, the more layers of management a customer must wade through to have a request fulfilled. At Garfield Williamson, the customer doesn't have far to go for a definite answer. "As opposed to a large corporation, there is only one step in our organizational chart between the salesman and a definite yes or no," Zajac pointed out. Garfield Williamson's seven salesmen, covering the New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut territories report directly to Zajac, who then contacts his staff members in the office.

The company has been service oriented since its inception one hundred years ago. The founder, Garfield Williamson, was among the first to tap the industrial market, approaching businesses and factories with the idea of beautifying their grounds.

The company was purchased in the 1930s by the Wagner family, who still control it today. The market remained more or less the same until the mid-forties. The business swung sharply toward retail after World War II as New York City dwellers spread out to the suburbs, creating the sprawling bedroom communities on Long Island, New Jersey and Connecticut. Acres of well kept lawn were being supplied by a new specialized retailer, the lawn and garden center, who was in turn being supplied by Garfield Williamson.

The retail market nearly had the full attention of the company until, with the increasing affluence of the region, golf courses began sprouting up and homeowners turned to professional landscapers.

Service has become even more essential as sales to professional users grow in comparison to the retail sales. "In the last five years professional accounts have grown from 20% of our business to at least 40%," estimated Zajac. "With an activity as weather dependent as seeding, servicing the professional sector is a demanding job. We are able to prepare and deliver 700-lb of a special mixture in two days."

As part of this service, customers are asking the distributor to take their burden of inventory off their shoulders. Because of uncertain cash flow, they are letting the distributor act as their warehouse. Business cycles have proved the distributor can warehouse more cheaply because it has better inventory control. This requires more work from the distributor. A customer's initial order used to be the biggest portion of his needs. Now he requires frequent deliveries of smaller orders.

Zajac feels that the high value that the customer has placed upon his time also benefits Garfield Williamson. The increasing prevalence of a "time is money" attitude has pushed professionals to invest in the high grade proprietary grasses he sells. Zajac claims, Eclipse Kentucky bluegrass sells equally as well as conventional types of bluegrass although it costs almost three times as much. The contractor justifies the higher priced specialty grasses as insignificant monetarily when compared to the overall cost of the job.

Even the retail consumer has learned to appreciate special formulations and varieties of both seed and chemicals. A more informed public is now approached in much



GW vice president and general manager John Zajac (left), office manager Bill Lind (center), and warehouse superintendent Peter Matu.

the same manner as the professional. Advertising and packaging, using the names of the specific seed varieties, is being used for the first time on the consumer level. Garfield Williamson now advertises its Wonderlawn brand of consumer products in local print, TV, and radio as well as providing retailers with point-of-purchase aids.

Despite Garfield Williamson's success in both professional and retail markets, it is now competing with a growing trend where professionals form groups to buy directly from the manufacturers. Zajac dismisses this as a fad, although the activity is growing in the New York and New Jersey areas. "These groups are big enough to buy from the manufacturers, but not big enough to demand the kind of service they may need in the height of the season. Distributors may be able to help, but we are bound to take care of our regular customers first. This will probably cause a ripple in the industry and then even out."

Zajac is sure the position of the distributor is secure in the green industry as long as he doesn't over-extend himself. "If your area gets too big, you can't effectively act as a distributor. We prefer to cultivate the 250-mile radius around New York city, our main market, more intensely than go further outward." **WTT**

LAKESHORE: OHIO TURF DEALER GROWS INTO NATIONAL MANUFACTURER

In 1961, there were three ways for a golf course superintendent to buy products he needed; from an agricultural supplier, garden center dealer or, in a few cities, from a localized "turf distributor" such as Bob Burkhardt in Rocky River, Ohio. Regional distributors of turf and landscape supplies hadn't developed in most areas of the United States by then.

Today, Bob Burkhardt looks back with partner Jim FitzGibbon and smiles, almost in disbelief, at the state of Lakeshore Equipment & Supply Co., one of the first "regional turf suppliers," now a national distributor of turf supplies. The \$75,000 gross of 1962 has grown and is now approaching \$40 million including chemical and equipment manufacturing divisions.

FitzGibbon, a lumber broker and hardware merchant, joined up with Bob Burkhardt in the early 1960s. Since 1962, Lakeshore has had four homes in the Cleveland area, but next year the company returns its offices to where it started out, Rocky River. Lakeshore is in the process of renovating the old hardware store to make it the new headquarters for LESCO.

The company's current headquarters in Elyria, OH, doesn't have the Musac atmosphere of some companies. It is more like the floor of the stock exchange with orders being announced over the intercom and all kinds of activity in the hallways and offices. The only time the principals really have time to discuss business is over lunch.

As the name implies, Lakeshore started as an equipment and supply dealer located on the south shore of Lake Erie, supplying local golf courses, cemeteries, greenhouses and nurseries. More than 80% of its business in 1963 was equipment. Lakeshore represented National, West Point Products, Sod Master, Goodall, H.D. Hudson and Smithco, among others. Its first

salesman, Herb Cole, came from H.D. Hudson in 1963. Sales people Gene Probasco, Ed Williams, Barb Craycraft and Ron Giffen joined the company shortly thereafter.

FitzGibbon and Burkhardt weren't satisfied with the territorial limitations placed on equipment distributors by manufacturers. They had a concept for a regional business and restrictive territories were counterproductive. Even so, Lakeshore grew to become the largest distributor of many equipment lines. "There are two thoughts on marketing equipment," says FitzGibbon. "One is to sell by territory. The second is to allow competition to take its course." Though the second choice was not popular in the turf industry, Lakeshore was ready to let competition take its course. The course led straight to growth.

In the early days, Lakeshore also sold a line of fertilizers manufactured by Agrico. Today, its subsidiary Ag Industries Mfg., Columbia, Alabama, produces sulfur-coated urea and sulfur-coated fertilizers. Facilities in Wellington, OH, produce fertilizer, formulate chemicals and serve as a warehouse. Manufacturing, formulating and warehouse facilities are also located in Sebring, FL, and a new warehouse is located in Landover, MD.

Lakeshore added chemicals to its line in 1970 when Morton Chemical was selling out its line of turf herbicides. Lakeshore bought the products and originated its first private label chemicals, Lescopex—MCPP—and Lesopar—a combination of MCPP and 2,4-D. Today, Lakeshore formulates a line of 20 proprietary chemicals including Lescosan, A,4-D (2,4-D), Dursban® and Diazinon® granular and fertilizer combinations. Plans for 1983 include more formulating facilities and more facilities for the manufacture of after-market replace-

ment parts for turf equipment and golf course accessories.

If Lakeshore has symbol to tout, it is its LESCO Truck showroom system. With 21 trucks and growing, Lakeshore brings a showroom on wheels to its golf course customers once a month, or more often if needed. Chemicals, equipment and accessories are displayed and supplied from the trucks. In between salesmen's visits, customers can order directly from Elyria. Ads encourage phone orders suggesting customers "Call Barb" for fast service.

Lakeshore's first LESCO Truck was placed in Florida and proved to be a disappointment. A second chance in Florida proved to be successful, however, and Lakeshore has expanded its truck routes ever since. Prior to instituting truck sales, Lakeshore served the states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Illinois. Today, the company serves 25 states with its sales force and the entire country with its mail order business.

The trucks have enabled Lakeshore to grow more into Southern markets which have year-round sales. Growth there has also encouraged Lakeshore to enter the overseeding market. A relationship with Turf Seed, Inc. in Hubbard, OR, has prospered with CBS overseeding mixture. Future seed varieties are being tested by Turf Seed's Dr. Bill Meyer.

The lawn service business has given Lakeshore another area for growth. FitzGibbon sees continued growth there as well as in the golf course and nursery areas. A new line of spreaders, including an electric model, might be the beginning of a national equipment manufacturing division. "We already make many replacement parts for golf equipment, we just don't assemble the units yet," says FitzGibbon.

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