

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

Solving problems

Bob Clouten is a custom applicator seeking new ideas to old problems. His North Dakota firm is servicing 2,000 customers a year and that number is increasing.

The morning shower is somewhat of a ritual for custom applicator Bob Clouten. He doesn't just sing in his shower. As the water pelts his body, Clouten mulls what he can do to make his business—Fertilawn, Inc.—stronger.

By 6 a.m., Clouten, at his shop/garage well ahead of Fertilawn's 25 peak-season employees, is already in motion.

"Good service will always sell," says Clouten. "It's the key, whether you're talking lawn work or industrial application. You need to be competitive, but service is what builds long-term business."

Clouten feels long hours, hard work, and a creative approach in the custom chemical application business still pay off.

Early last spring, for example, Clouten worked to earn a contract to control all vegetation at Basin Electric Power Cooperative substations. The new business calls for year-round bareground control at 36 electrical substations, some located 500 miles from Bismark, home base to both.

Hard work pays

Clouten, 33, started the business seven years ago in his father-in-law's garage. Selling door-to-door and by telephone, he custom-applied fertilizer, herbicide, and insecticide to about 200 lawns.

Last season, his company tended 800 lawns. For many, Fertilawn pro-



Bob Clouten, owner and operator of Fertilawn Inc. in Bismark, N. D.

vides complete lawn care—from spring power raking through season-long fertilization and pest control to regular mowing. "All told, we serve about 2,000 customers a year," says Clouten.

'It makes me a better manager if I do some of the sales and application work myself.'

—Clouten

Fertilawn's services extend to other cities and towns in the region, including adjacent Mandan. The company holds its own against highly-promoted and franchised lawn care services.

The company's industrial division has enjoyed rapid growth.

"We work closely with manufacturers, conducting local experiments with new herbicides," he says. "We want to be known as the custom applicator with new ideas and products that solve problems."

Along with lawn and commercial chemical application, the crowded print on his business card also advertises: tree spraying; soil testing; ground sterilization; garden fertiliz-

ing; tissue analysis; lawn power raking, mowing and edging.

Lawn work at homes, businesses, schools and government institutions make up 75 percent of Fertilawn's business. Non-lawn industrial and commercial weed and grass control are increasing rapidly, he says.

The boom sprayer

Nineteen trucks equipped with solution tanks and a variety of application systems are used. For lawns, the company gains attention by using a small, hand-pushed boom sprayer with wheels. It's connected by a feeder hose to the service truck.

Fertilawn claims that greater fertilizer and chemical application accuracy are achieved with the boom, versus a single hand-held spray nozzle.

"People often call and ask if we're the lawn company with the boom sprayer," says Clouten.

Clean, attractive equipment and operators also are important, he says. "People comment about our clean trucks and uniformed men."

Homeowner invoicing also is innovative. Upon completion of an application, the Fertilawn operator leaves behind a handy pre-addressed envelope with the amount due included.

Clouten divides his time between selling, management, and application work. He often does all three the same day, changing from suit and tie to applicator uniform.



Fertilawn's Brad Jossart uses the boom sprayer.

"It makes me a better manager if I do some of the sales and application work myself," he says. "I stay familiar with the problems. And for some of

our industrial work, I have the most experience." About 60 percent of his work time is spent on sales and management and 40 percent on applica-

tions. His usual work day during busy seasons is 6:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Business goals

Clooten credits his success to hard work, inventiveness, a positive attitude, and good employees.

Employee performance comparisons, meetings, individual conferences, job-related training courses, and incentive pay help maintain continuity.

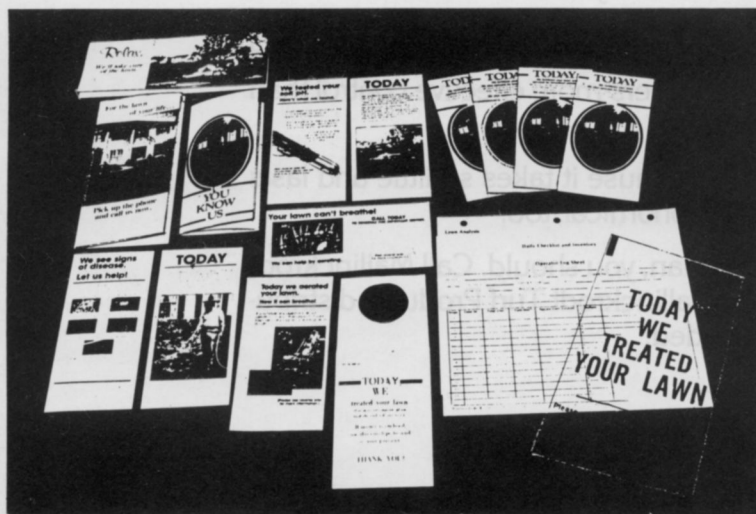
Fertilawn uses Du Pont Hyvar herbicide to achieve soil sterilization under hard-surfacing, such as in the case of parking lots. Karmex and Velpar herbicides are also applied at industrial and commercial locations.

"Setting business goals is vital," he says. "We look for referrals from present customers and a high rate of repeat business."

Can a custom application business such as Clooten's Fertilawn be sustained? "I'll make it go on," he answers. "I get up every morning with a positive attitude and make it grow."

"Taking my morning shower, I start thinking, 'What can I do today to make the business more productive than it was yesterday?'" **WT&T**

Quality brochures to promote your lawn service business.



Designed to increase customer response and enhance the professional image of your company, these new brochures from LESCO will give your lawn service company an updated look for 1986.

Brochures are of extremely high quality, printed in full color on fine paper stock and can be ordered with or without personalized imprinting. Small or large quantities are available and the entire selection is very competitively priced.

LESCO . . . the full-service supplier to the lawn care industry. For more information or to obtain samples, call LESCO toll free.

(800) 321-5325
NATIONWIDE

(800) 362-7413
IN OHIO

LESCO

LESCO, Inc. • 2005 Lake Road • Rocky River, Ohio 44116 • (216) 333-9250

Circle No. 126 on Reader Inquiry Card