

LOCATING THE CUSTOMER

In order to grow efficiently, lawn care operators must determine those most likely to seek lawn care services. Traditional methods of pinpointing potential customers are undergoing some variations.

by Rudd McGary and Ed Wandtke

One of the pressing questions asked by lawn care operators is: "Who are my potential customers?"

One tool used to measure the marketing effectiveness of lawn care companies, large or small, is their answer to that question.

Let's discuss some methods of determining how to profile your potential lawn care customers. They may be slightly different from those you are now using.

Several key points should be used to profile customers. They can be applied universally.

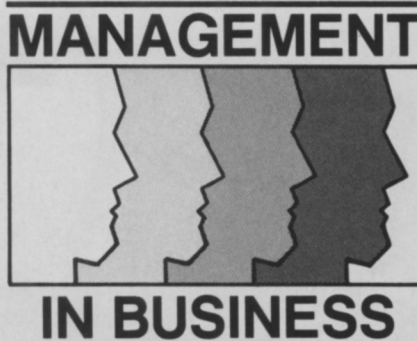
1. The traditional method of drawing a basic profile is through income. The rule of thumb: a person making \$25,000 is considered a potential customer. The figure has dropped to \$20,000 in recent years.

This is not a good measurement to use because \$25,000 isn't a big salary in many eastern states. It may be a comfortable middle-range salary in other areas of the country.

Don't use a constant, such as simple income.

Generally we like to look at the top 40 to 50 percent of the incomes in the area, not at a specific income figure.

This helps eliminate any regional



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income differences.

2. House value is also a key. Examine what percentile of the population falls into which house value. Don't consider an absolute dollar figure.

If you have someone whose income is in the 30th percentile and whose house is in the 30th percentile of your geographical area, you have a strong potential customer.

Generally we don't like to go much below the 40th percentile on house value for ranking potential customers.

3. The median age of the customer also has a bearing on the way people buy. Often the lawn care customer is 30 or older.

Median age depends a great deal on geographical area.

4. Two-income families are usually better potential customers than single-income families. Busy working people usually like outside services to

perform a variety of jobs around the home.

A word of caution: you must correlate the income percentile to the two-income statistic to make this work.

For example, if there are two wage earners in the home and they are in the lower 40 percent of income in your area, they aren't good potential customers.

5. Lawn size generally should be above 5,000 sq. ft. (If you have a "mini" price below this you can also do very well if your customers are grouped near each other.)

In certain parts of the country, lawn size is smaller, usually in older cities.

6. Some simple parameters to consider: are there single-family dwelling units in the area; do they feature some sort of lawn; are they in areas that you can reach cost-efficiently?

Where do you find these facts?

The U.S. government has printed a lot of information on demographics. In addition, you should examine marketing research companies and mailing houses. Many contain current demographic information.

The keys are to determine who your customers can be, to make sure your information is accurate, and then to assemble a marketing plan that is both professional and unique.

Whether you choose direct mail, telemarketing, electronic media, print media, referral systems, bonus systems, or a combination, you must have the correct information on your target.

Without this you may grow, and grow well—but you won't know why. With it you can control your marketing costs, track your progress, and be able to adjust your marketing plan from year to year.

Only companies that pay attention to detail are going to grow as the competition and government regulation become more complex.

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