

IMPROVING ROUTING EFFICIENCY

One of the easiest ways to lose money is to send crews out in a haphazard fashion. Routing should be fully planned ahead of time.

by Ed Wandtke

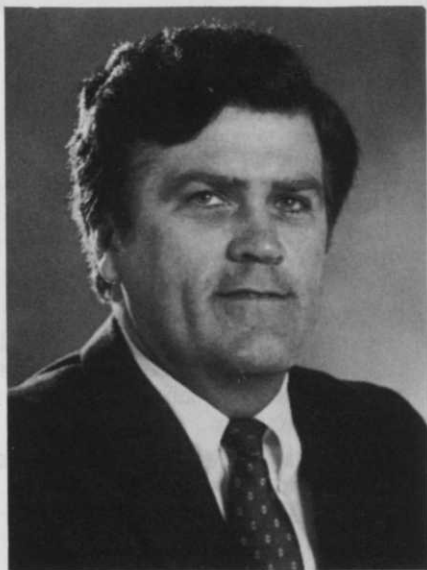
One of the best ways to control costs also happens to be one of the most overlooked aspects of doing business in the green industry: routing efficiency.

Routing is frequently delegated to an individual technician, serviceman or to a mowing crew chief. But the astute businessman needs to ask himself if this is the right person. What other options would provide better cost control, and how can your routing efficiency be improved?

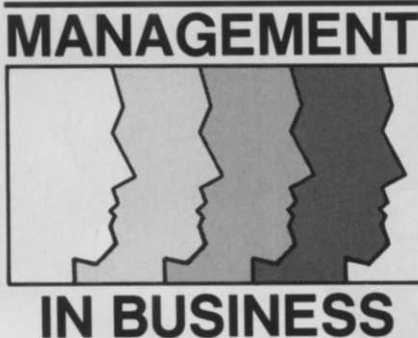
Routing is the sequential servicing of customers on a given route. The traditional rule when developing a routing schedule has been to service commercial accounts in the morning and residential accounts later in the day, if time is available. But frequently a residential customer dictates the day and/or time that they want to be serviced. In many instances they insist you call ahead.

Who's in charge?

Routing should be done by an individ-



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ual who understands the priority of your accounts. And though it's important that this person has an understanding of the layout of your service area, the actual deliverer of service rarely is the ideal person for route planning.

Some companies currently use a routing coordinator who sets the sequence of work to be performed each day, thereby allowing service personnel to concentrate on the customer. While this may seem to be a significant additional cost for some companies, you may be surprised how much time and payroll expense can be saved. I have seen this concept work for a company with as few as 10 service routes as well as for companies with more than 25 service personnel.

The routing manager usually has the additional benefit of knowing when work is completed each day. Therefore, if you're able to communicate to your service personnel, more work can be assigned to an individual or crew that finishes early. In addition, if you have customers who must be pre-notified, your office can call to confirm the service while your crew is enroute to the site. Such efficiency is sure to be noticed.

Figuring in growth

As your company grows, the need for an organized approach to servicing customers is critical to cost control. The rapid addition of new customers

each year doesn't necessarily make your present routing plans obsolete. Customers signed up during the off-season should become the core of a grid network to be completed after new customers are added. It then becomes the routing person's responsibility to efficiently integrate new accounts into the daily production activity.

Many companies buy a grid map of their service area, identify the exact location of their customers, and map out what looks like a specific, efficient route. I have found that this system only works part of the time. A better approach for developing your routes is to buy a mylar (clear) film cover for the grid map and trace your customer locations on it.

Some companies need to narrow their service area in order to improve efficiency. Though saying "no" to that one account outside of a reasonable service area is difficult, it's more important to have stabilized routing. You need to bite the bullet and concentrate on solidifying the geographical area in which you will work.

The customer's eyes

Some of the computer software recently introduced to the lawn care industry features routing packages. Many of these systems are worth looking into. They are capable of saving you a significant amount of money, usually many times the cost of the software. Whether you choose to do the routing manually or with a computer, make sure that adequate room is left for inserting additional customers as opportunities arise.

To evaluate your company's delivery efficiency, look at your operation from a customer's point of view. Have someone in your company evaluate service delivery for your current customers.

Effective routing will save you money, but only if someone oversees the system. That's the route to improved profitability in 1989 and beyond.

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