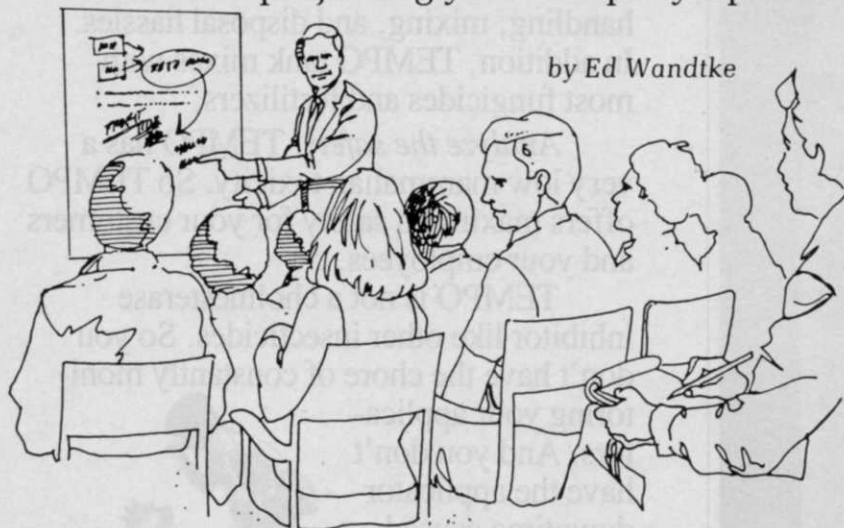


THE ART OF RELATING

It's more than just free publicity. Public relations can be a systematic method of projecting your company's presence in the community.



by Ed Wandtke

Most companies in the landscape/lawn care industries secure new customers by advertising. This results in an expenditure of money to obtain customers.

But customers can be attracted through other methods. And public relations gets your message to the public in a cheaper and often more effective means than advertising.

Public relations is one of the most inexpensive ways to attract customers. The general public usually is very skeptical of advertising, but feels more comfortable and will do business with companies they hear about through public relations channels.

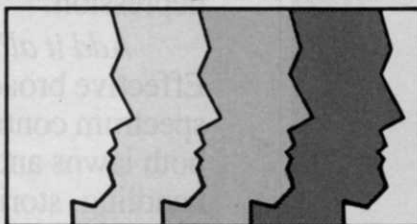
Public relations can benefit your company in the following ways:

1. Increase business through the most effective selling method of sales today: word-of-mouth or one-on-one communicating.
2. Create a positive image for your company.
3. Boost employee morale by generating goodwill that is often perceived as covering a larger geographical area than just the market area currently served.
4. Attract better employees—especially with current problems facing the lawn/landscape industry because of the shrinking workforce.

What, then, is the message of an effective public relations program for a company in this business?

Many owners are not aware of the fact that their company has a public image. They read in the newspapers about chemical spills, etc., and are elated that a similar problem has not

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occurred at their company. Yet, through an effective public relations campaign, a company's image can be improved.

A good image will attract customers. But it will *not* take the place of quality services. If the public perceives you as having a favorable image and you then provide superior quality services, it can make the difference between just being a successful company rather than a booming, growing company.

The key element in mapping an effective public relations campaign is to develop a program to take your message to the public. This can be achieved through a combination of the following methods: community involvement, public speaking, printed materials, media and the office environment.

Let's look at what can be done in each of the above areas to achieve an effective public relations program.

Networking opportunities achieved from community involve-

ment are unbelievable. The recognition of you as the company owner and of the company's participation in community activities really does pay off. There will even be times when your employees' participation in community activities will give morale a boost and at the same time identify your company as one committed to the betterment of the community.

Ways to involve your employees differ, but you may find the following options an excellent place to start in establishing a policy:

A. Allow employees to participate in only one community activity per year.

B. Let employees know that you support their community involvement by financially supporting a program the employee is personally involved in.

C. Share the participation in community involvement; let different employees become involved from year to year.

D. Evaluate the benefit to an employee both personally and professionally from their community involvement.

E. If an individual has been doing community work in one organization for an extended period of time, check to see if the individual's interest and participation level are waning.

Public speaking

Many people freeze up when they are asked to speak before an audience. To prepare to become a competent speaker, the key is to initially speak only on extremely familiar topics. Learn everything you can about your audience before you speak to them. At first, speak before audiences that you are familiar with. When preparing the speech, dedicate 15 percent to the introduction, 75 percent to the topic and 10 percent to the conclusion.

The objective in any speech is to market the company and to cover the topic competently. To affect this objective, prepare a brief introduction of yourself and the company that the moderator can easily read.

Mailing or distributing printed ma-



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materials to potential customers is an effective technique to secure company recognition.

The people that you target with printed materials would be:

- suppliers;
- individuals whom you know from community involvement; and
- customers and influential people in the community.

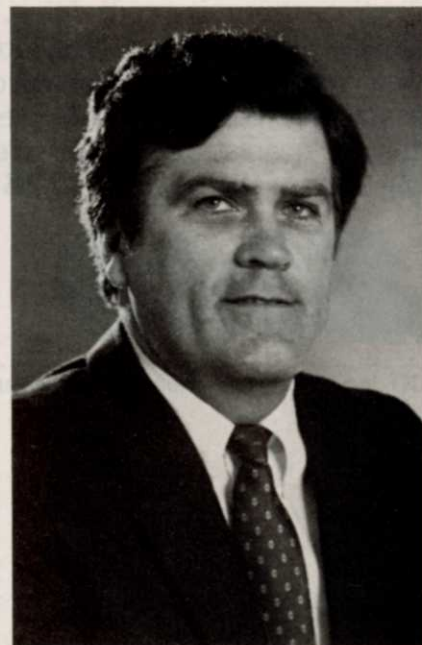
The newsletter is the key item that you should be mailing to the aforementioned list. Thus, you should develop a mailing list capability on your computer to make this system easy to execute.

Company environment

One area that I have seen skimmed on is the office. While this area does not have to be glamorous, it should be well-maintained and be a location your employees are proud to work in. Keep it painted and well-maintained in addition to introducing live plants as a method of improving appearance and projecting to any visitor a care for personnel.

Maintain an awards showcase in the reception area for show-off purposes.

Public relations is more than free publicity. It is a systematic method of projecting the company's presence in the community. Do not let it be a crisis action undertaken only when the company is having problems. Developing an effective public relations campaign takes effort, but can be systematically taken on. **LM**



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