

Can information blitz keep 'anti's' at bay?

■ Here's a blueprint for starting a pesticide controversy in a community, any community.

1. **Inspire** a single person, then a small group of people to express concerns about the health, safety or environmental aspects of pesticide use.

2. **Ignore** and/or antagonize this group so that it becomes vocal enough to attract the attention of a larger audience.

3. **Argue** the controversy long enough to whet the interest of the media.

4. **Add** fuel to the issue, raising it to the level of public debate.

5. **Avoid** compromises so that the controversy lands on the doorstep of lawmakers—local, state or federal.

Now that ChemLawn Services Corp. has identified the life cycle of a typical community pesticide controversy—astounding how similarly they unfold—the company's management is more confi-

dent it can address them.

And the number one way it addresses them is with information.

Deb Strohmaier, ChemLawn's chief public relations specialist, told an audience of about 200 turf professionals at the Ohio Turfgrass Conference this past December that the nation's largest lawn care provider is continually increasing and upgrading the information it provides its customers.

Brochures, videos, fact sheets—your name it, ChemLawn can provide it.

"We have a positive story to tell on the issues and we've made it easy for our employees to tell it," says Strohmaier who's been with the company for five years.

Strohmaier made these further observations specifically about dealing with the media:

● Recognize that most reporters and editors probably know little about chem-

istry.

● Recognize that they're working under a deadline.

● What's the background of the reporter seeking your comments? What's his angle?

● If an interview is being arranged, it's to your benefit to find out in advance what the reporter wants to cover.

● If you can—and want to—answer specific questions, be truthful. Never lie.

● Don't guess or speculate about answers. Offer to find out.

● Avoid saying "no comment." It's much better to say, "I can't comment on that just yet."

● Present your point but don't argue or debate with the interviewer.

● Know when to duck and get out of the way. If the story is bigger than you, refer your interrogator to your business association.

"In years past ChemLawn did find itself speaking for the industry and we became the magnet for controversy. We've since discontinued the practice of commenting on generic stories," says Strohmaier.

Smart billing KOs cash flow crunches

by Ed Wandtke

■ Lawn care and landscape company owners often say, "If I can make it through the first quarter, I'll be all right with cash flow."

There are ways, however, to minimize—or possibly eliminate—your cash crunch.

1) **Convert your current budget to a cash flow budget**, detailing when all monthly expenses and income will occur. Planning the year this way will help you better forecast major purchases. In addition, the cash flow budget will show you when cash will be tight. Confer with your accountant the first time through; he or she should be able to thoroughly explain this cash management tool to you.

When you apply for the line of credit, make sure that you and your accountant do a thorough job of explaining the cyclical nature of your lawn service business. By doing this, you stand a much better chance at receiving the line of credit you

are applying for.

2) **Offer a five percent discount for pre-payment.** A discount of five percent is typically enough to get five to 15 percent of your current customers to pre-pay. Some firms approach this method of generating cash flow more aggressively, and have an astounding 40 percent of customers prepaid by December 31.

3) **Billing at the beginning of the month** can accelerate your collection period by as much as 30 days.

The "on-time" customer always pays his bill within 30 days. The "past-time" customer pays within 60 days. For March application, look at how the billing could effect cash flow:

Bill March 1: Collect customer on-time March 30
Collect customer past-time April 30

Bill March 30: Collect customer on-time April 30
Collect customer past-time May 30

4) **Bill commercial accounts monthly** to guarantee certain cash flows each month. Some companies have even set up a program with their residential customers in which they offer monthly billing instead of five or six larger payments. Both of these methods can be implemented on a very cost efficient basis.

5) **Send customer statements on the 15th and the 30th of application month.** Reminding your customers often of the need to pay on time will assist in more of paying as soon as the bill is left or mailed to them.

Don't abuse your customer by calling for a payment two days after you have rendered an invoice for the prior 30 days. If you need to do this for cash, review the suggestion above as to a better collection system for these type of customers.

When you buy a new vehicle or other piece of equipment, do you take a 12 payment per year plan? Why take a 12 payment per year plan when cash is coming in for only eight to nine months of the year? Ask the financier next time if you could pay for this purchase on an eight-month schedule. This will help prevent you from paying out money when none is coming in. Remember it can never hurt to ask, because often the financier is happy to
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