

work with you.

6) Slow down your first quarter payments. Many purchases are made during the first quarter, but the payment for these purchases can be scheduled for the second and third month of the second quarter. Suppliers will work with you when you negotiate these payments in advance,

rather than after you have purchased the items. Often, the interest a supplier charges for extending payments is slightly higher than the interest a bank would charge, but you do not use your line of credit up at the bank when you can negotiate this type of payment plan.

Ask for a deferred or extended payment

terms, and you will be surprised how accommodating some of your suppliers can be. Prior payment performance will be the basis upon which a supplier will decide if they are willing to carry your bill for a deferred payment system.

—The author is a senior consultant with PC Systems, Inc., Columbus, Ohio.

Snow thrower safety: don't put your hands where you shouldn't

■ The biggest chance you have of injuring yourself while operating a snow thrower is by putting your hands where you shouldn't.

More than 4,000 people require emergency room treatment every winter because of injuries from snow thrower-related accidents, reports the Consumer Products Safety Commission. These injuries are usually to the fingers, hands and arms.

George R. Thompson, III, director of corporate communications for Briggs & Stratton Corporation, offers these snow thrower safety tips:

- Stop the engine before attempting to

unclog the machine.

- Use a wooden block to clear a clogged passage. "Even if the snow thrower is turned off, operators must make sure all moving parts have completely stopped before they attempt to unclog the machine," says Thompson.

- Read and understand all operating instructions.

- Don't touch hot mufflers, cylinders or fins.

- Don't fill the gasoline tank while the engine is running. Allow the engine to cool before adding fuel.



- If gasoline is spilled, move the machine away from the area of the spill and avoid creating any source of ignition.

- Don't wear loose clothing that could be caught in moving parts of the equipment.

The marketing plan

As the Cheshire Cat told Alice, it doesn't matter what road you take if you don't know where you want to go.

by Rudd McGary, Ph.D.

■ A big misconception in many green industry companies is that advertising equals marketing. But advertising is only one part of the marketing matrix.

The idea that advertising can make up for other marketing inadequacies is a fallacy. When several companies I know severely curtailed or eliminated their advertising for a whole year, the overall effect was actually *positive*. They saved money on advertising and, in addition, attracted new

customers through other means.

Marketing plans usually take at least a year to fall into place, since they contain many parts. Impatient management is the greatest impediment to a marketing plan's success.

Here are some key elements to a successful marketing plan:

1) The consumer—What does the customer want to buy? How much will they pay for it? How are you going to determine this information?

One of the factors in planning is that not everyone buys lawn care, nor tree work, nor design/build services, nor irrigation. Each segment of the population buys different services in different ways.

Ask the consumer what he/she wants. It's always best to ask in person, second-best to ask by phone, and third to ask by mail.

2) Control—If you're going to spend money in advertising/promotion, you should have a way of determining whether

or not you get a return on the money you've invested.

3) Sales staff and management—You need to understand what the sales force is to do, how it is to be managed, and how the rest of the marketing activities fit in with the sales force actions.

4) Mix of services—Have a clear focus. I've worked with many companies that have branched into areas that don't exactly fit into their original mission. The classic line is that "we went into (fill in the blank) because we had someone who could do it." Make sure your customers want it first.

5) Outside influences—How will reports on 2,4-D affect the lawn care business? What will a down economy do to the buying patterns for services? Regulatory, economic and environmental issues are as important a part of planning considerations as any of the internal issues.

6) Owner needs—What is satisfying to the owners of the company? For instance, in a small company, the owner is probably also working; in a publicly-held company, there may be thousands of owners peering

over management's back.

After getting the proper input from everyone required, you need to determine the company's strengths and weaknesses from financial, marketing, operational and management viewpoints.

The next step is to look at both long-term and short-term objectives. Short-term objectives should change depending

on how the long-term objectives are framed, and *not* vice versa.

The planning at this point takes into account information on the consumers, the company and overall objectives. These are examined at the same time, not sequentially.

The next part of planning is to determine accountability. If no one is responsible for either the plan or its final outcome,

there isn't much chance it'll work.

The final cog is to work out some sort of contingency plans. Obviously, it's impossible to foresee all the variables that can occur during the year. If the plan is not working, there must be an alternative. Failure to understand when the plan is going poorly is often a major problem in the planning process.

'Critical heights' of playground tested materials

■ Natural and artificial turf are not recommended by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) for surfacing public playgrounds "because their effectiveness in absorbing shock during a fall can be reduced considerably due to wear and environmental conditions."

According to a CPSC pamphlet entitled "Handbook for Public Playground Safety," unitary and loose-fill materials are better suited than grass.

Unitary materials are generally rubber mats or a combination of rubber-like materials held in place by a binder that may be poured in place and cures to form a unitary shock-absorbing surface.

Loose-fill materials include sand, gravel and shredded wood products. The table lists the critical height—maximum height

from which a child can safely fall—for each of seven materials tested by the CPSC. (For example, if uncompressed wood mulch is used at a minimum depth of six inches, the critical height is 7 feet.)

The depth of any loose fill material could be reduced during use, which would result in different shock-absorbing properties. For this reason, a margin of safety should be considered in selecting type and depth of materials, the CPSC warns.

CRITICAL HEIGHT OF TESTED MATERIALS

Material	Uncompressed to:			Compressed to:
	6"	9"	12"	9"
Wood mulch	7'	10'	11'	10'
Double shredded bark mulch	6'	10'	11'	7'
Uniform wood chips	6'	7'	>12'	6'
Fine sand	5'	5'	9'	5'
Coarse sand	5'	5'	6'	4'
Fine gravel	6'	7'	10'	6'
Medium gravel	5'	5'	6'	5'

Source: CPSC

—Landscape Structures Inc. is offering free reprints of "Handbook for Public Playground Safety." To get yours, write 601 Seventh St. South, Delano, MN 55328; or phone (800) 328-0035.

Selecting plants: a backwards method

■ If plants have not been specified in a landscape design, here is a "backwards" process for selecting them, as suggested by Bonnie Lee Appleton of the Virginia Hampton Roads Ag Experiment Station:

1) Decide generically what type of plant is needed: a tree, a shrub, vines, a ground-cover; deciduous or evergreen.

2) Decide what plant characteristics (time of flowering, fruit, fall color, bark or branch patterns) you want. She suggests to aim for multi-seasonal interest.

3) Decide—realistically—how large a plant can grow in its intended landscape

site. Consider height and spread, and growth rate.

4) Decide the degree of maintenance (pest control, pruning, fertilizing, etc.) desired.

5) List the existing landscape site conditions, to include:

- soil: type; pH; moisture content
- exposure: full or partial sun or shade; direction and amount of wind
- available moisture: precipitation and irrigation
- temperature tolerance: both winter and summer.

6) Use plant reference guides to select a

specific plant of the desired type with the desired characteristics and level of maintenance.

7) Shop for plants that are labeled as to type; healthy looking; free of insects, diseases, mechanical damage and well-cared for.

8) Look for a few specific things based on the way the nursery produces the plants:

● bare-root: adequate number of roots, roots not dried out

● balled and burlapped: tight rootball, no weeds, rootball not dried out, rootball well wrapped and/or laced

● container-grown: adequate number of roots on outside of rootball; no major circling roots; no weeds; not dried out

● containerized/process balled: adequately rooted into the medium packed around the roots; not dried out.