

LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

The key: being paid for the type of service we give, not just the products we apply

Are there better terms to use than IPM?

■ Is the acronym IPM (integrated pest management) getting a little frayed around the edges? Is it beginning to show some gray?

After all, it's been around for decades. In agricultural circles it has. Only during the 1980s has it been used by professional turf and ornamental maintainers, with any regularity anyway.

"A lot of us don't understand if IPM is doing us harm or doing us good," says Tom Smith, president and owner of Grass Roots, Inc., Lansing, Mich.

Smith, for one, thinks the philosophy of IPM is still valid (see box). In fact, he says it's one of the cornerstones of his landscape design/build/manage company.

Even so, he admits IPM is, by definition, restrictive.

Professionally maintaining landscapes involves *a lot more* than pest control. "Sometimes our programs focus on pest management. We do it at the exclusion of good turf management," he says.

Are there better terms than IPM? Smith trotted out TEMP (Turfgrass Environmental Management Program), a term favored by Dr. Frank Rossi of Michigan State. Other professionals prefer PHC (Plant Health Care), and still others

CLM (for Comprehensive Landscape Management) or CTM (Comprehensive Turfgrass Management).

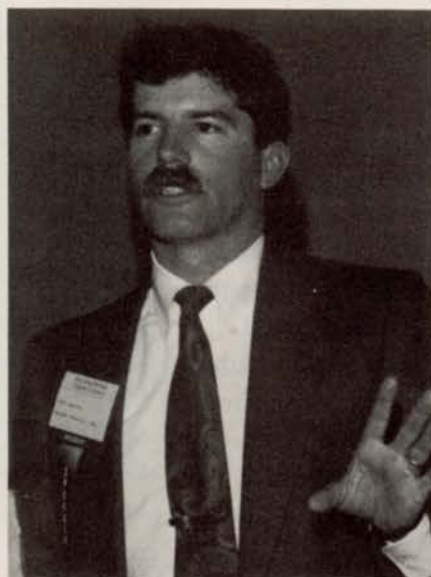
Any, if practiced, can justifiably be used as a marketing tool, says Smith. By using IPM—or any of its cousins—a turfgrass/landscape professional demonstrates that it takes specialized knowledge to nurture and maintain healthy and beautiful turfgrass and landscapes.

Semantics aside, Smith says he believes the industry sometimes sends the wrong message to its customers—that it expects to get paid only when it applies a product in conjunction with its services.

"How many other professionals will come out to your house, provide you with a management plan and not charge you for it?" asks Smith.

(Smith spoke about IPM at the Michigan Turf Conference last January.)

—Ron Hall



Smith says green industry shouldn't push products over good service.

THE FOUR COMPONENTS OF IPM:

1. Initial inspection of lawn or landscape.
2. Development of a management plan for a particular site.
3. Monitor and treat the site based on the plan.
4. Evaluate and modify the plan.

ELSEWHERE

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Mike Bailey works around the weather, p. 86

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Cleveland audience wakes up to new upbeat tree & turf program

This green industry duo 'puts its money where its mouth is' on a radio program devoted to good advice and good fun.

■ Turn the dial of your AM radio to 1300 WERE Cleveland at 8 a.m. Saturdays to listen to a different kind of call-in garden show.

You'll be among the 10,000-plus listeners tuning into the shenanigans of Lauren Lanphear and Phil Fogarty in their weekly 1 1/2-hour tree-and-turf radio program, *The Root of the Matter*.

There's no question they're enjoying themselves, but the fun stuff is rationed out with larger doses of "how-to" advice on lawns, shrubs and trees. That's what listeners now expect from the two, not that they don't appreciate the duo's light-hearted approach to the subject matter. The program's rising viewer ratings show conclusively that they do.

"After all, the program's on at 8 a.m. Saturdays. If we want people to listen, we'd better be entertaining," insists Lanphear.

Lanphear, representing the Forest City Tree Protection Co., is the tree expert; Fogarty, from Crowley Lawn Service, is the program's resident lawn and ornamental guru. And—more often than not—Fogarty is a willing although sometimes unsuspecting straight man to Lanphear's good-natured wit.

The two try to make the call-in show entertaining even if they can't always make it humorous.

For example, when Lanphear took listeners on a weekly radio tour identifying different historic trees in Cleveland—those present when Moses Cleaveland founded the city in 1796—telephone calls to the station flooded in.

Many people asked for a list of the historic trees, while others suggested trees in their neighborhoods that Lanphear might add to the list.

(Cleveland, for many years was known as *The Forest City*, a nickname promoted by Leonard Case, a Cleveland mayor in the

1850s. The Forest City Tree Protection Co. was founded by Lanphear's grandfather in 1910.)

Then there are Fogarty's turf trivia quizzes, and Lanphear's "Arbor Jeopardy" segment.

Fogarty and Lanphear began their unusual radio partnership in June 1991, starting a 27-week run that ended in November. This past February, they kicked off a 39-week run for the 1992 growing season.

The two men "broker" the 1 1/2 hours of radio air time. They must come up with the money and material to make it work. They're helped by several sponsors, but admit they could use a couple more. Some of costs of the show come from their own pockets, they admit.

"I don't think either one of us ever saw it as a money-making deal," claims Lanphear. But they'd sure like to break even.

Typically, the two men alternate Saturday mornings at the radio station. The one that's not at the station will, sometime during the other's broadcast, telephone into the program for some chat and to answer some questions. Occasionally, both men will do a show together.

Local and even national guest experts are common. For example, Rod Tyler of Kurtz Brothers, a Cleveland-area company, is to talk about composting, while researchers like Dr. Wendell Mullison and



Loren Lanphear took WERE listeners on a tour of historic trees.

Dr. Tom Watschke all will be fielding questions from listeners sometime yet this spring.

"We can do it through a telephone hook-up," explains Fogarty. "They can talk to our callers. It sounds just like they're here in the studio."

Lanphear and Fogarty both admit that their motives for doing the program are—in addition to dispensing helpful information about landscapes/lawns and the green industry—business-based.

"It's a great way to give your company name credibility," says Fogarty. "And you immediately become the expert."

Adds Lanphear, "Our goal is to build our name recognition within the community."

Fogarty feels green industry business owners in other communities can develop equally successful shows.

"We (industry) could gain control of that hour every Saturday morning and talk about water quality as it relates to turfgrass, and talk about the benefits arising from the correct use of pesticides in lots of different markets," he says.

—Ron Hall



Phil Fogarty says the radio station's ratings rose for the Saturday morning tree & turf program.

Everybody talks about the weather; Bailey's doing something about it

Mike Bailey, owner of Super Lawns of Gaithersburg, seeks ways to work with weather, rather than against it.

■ The newspapers are soggy. Some are in yards while others are on driveways.

It's obvious to Mike Bailey, driving to his office in Montgomery County, Md., just north of Washington D.C., that many of the newspapers were delivered *after* residents returned home from work, *before* the rain.

Every copy of the newspaper is wrapped with a printed advertisement—a wet advertisement—for Mike Bailey's lawn care company, Super Lawns of Gaithersburg Inc.

"Even if I get just a percent or two response, we can close enough sales to make it worthwhile. But, now I think we're looking at a percent of a percent," he says with a touch—just a touch—of disappointment.

Even from the cozy fabric seat behind the wheel of his shiny gray GMC sport truck, Mike can't see any good coming from wasted advertising dollars. A lawn care business can go broke hoping for ideal weather, he knows.

Rather than wait for perfect conditions, Bailey, 35, a man of medium build with smoky blue eyes and, seemingly, inexhaustible energy, this past winter immersed himself in two weather-related business projects; this in addition to running the lawn care franchise he bought 14 years ago.

Weather station—On one hand, Bailey is putting the finishing touches on computer software for a portable weather monitoring system he will, later this season,

begin offering to other lawn/landscape professionals.

The model weather station, located in the yard behind his headquarters, is tied into his personal computer. At a keystroke, the station displays the barometric pressure, wind speed/direction, rainfall (daily and cumulative), air/soil temperatures, etc. Bailey's technicians access this information through the two-way radios in their service (pick-up) trucks. They record the data on the back of every service ticket.

Says Bailey, "This is the direction lawn care is going."

Increasingly, regulations require professional applicators to tailor and adjust

tion service to improve his company's growing seeding and sodding activities.

The heart of this service is a custom-built, wooden, crate-sized unit, a meticulously engineered collection of hoses and valves, controlled by a computerized, electronic timer. The company is building eight or 10 of these units, each about the size and weight of a full box of groceries. These irrigation devices will allow Super Lawns of Gaithersburg to keep clients' turfgrass green and alive, even in summer's heat.

Last summer's localized drought again demonstrated the importance of being able to work through unfavorable conditions, says Bailey. His company, in its full-service programs, says it will do all it can to keep clients' lawns attractive.

"Last summer we had to fess up. We had to deliver on our promises. And we had to do it at no extra cost to our customers," says Bailey.

That translated into a record-breaking season of aeration and seeding, mostly turf-type tall fescues. (Bailey, who has established turf plots adjacent to both his office and home, is particularly impressed with the continued performance of certain hard fescues for shady problem areas.)

Indeed, Super Lawns' full-service program (the so-called *Super Program*) is what, Bailey feels, sets

his company apart. It includes seeding, aeration, rolling, weed/insect controls, organic-based fertilizers—as many visits as it takes.

Bailey admits that 1991, mired as it was in recession, wasn't strong. He says his company grew. Barely.

This season, providing Mother Nature cooperates even moderately well, should be stronger, he's says.

"People aren't going to pave over their lawns," says Bailey.



Mike Bailey says the two-way radios he installed in every service truck have paid for themselves many times over.

their treatment programs to meet specific environmental conditions. They'll need more accurate and immediate local weather data, believes Bailey.

From a practical standpoint, charting and recording local weather conditions helps lawn pros better target weed, insect and disease controls, as well as improve irrigation efficiency, he says.

Portable irrigation—The other service he's initiating will, he's hoping, bring financial returns yet this season. It's an automated, portable, above-ground irriga-

—Ron Hall

Lawn care PR: an active spring

■ The Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) will be getting a report on the success of its spring public relations campaign soon.

PLCAA, through a committee headed by Bob Tracinski, and the support of Tracinski's employer, Deere & Co., distributed a "Grasscycling" public service announcement (PSA) to 250 television stations on March 9. Another 200 TV stations received PLCAA's National Lawn Care

Month (April) message on March 23. All were professionally produced.

Tracinski said the first of five spring radio PSAs was sent to 2,000 radio stations in March also. Different radio announcements will continue through April and May. They were sent to the stations via satellite.

DowElanco, Monsanto and Sandoz are helping PLCAA put together five radio PSAs for the summer. Meanwhile,

Tracinski says, three additional radio PSAs are being developed for fall 1992.

Also, about 3,000 publications along with 1,330 garden communicators received PLCAA's spring press kit.

Tracinski says the PSAs—which contain positive information about professional lawn service and helpful tips to homeowners—are generally welcomed by the media. And, the cost to PLCAA's budget is negligible.

The four 'P's' of training

■ Michigan is one of the latest states to require training for lawn applicators. More states will likely implement certification and testing requirements.

Industry expects this to happen in spite of a national lawn care technician training program which has been in the planning stage these past two years.

The challenge, says Tim Doppel, Atwood Lawn Care of Sterling Heights, Mich., is for lawn care company owners and managers to develop *responsible* training programs.

"Welcome to the 1990s. You're not only in the lawn care business, you're in the training business," he told about 200 turf managers at the annual Michigan Turfgrass Conference.

Doppel offered the Michigan audience these four "P's" of a training program:

● **People.** Train to the level of your audience, says Doppel. Most training programs will probably have trainees with dif-

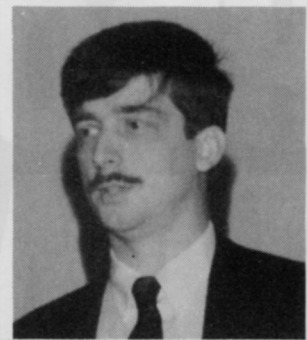
ferent education and experience levels. More experienced personnel will be more receptive to new information, whereas new hires know little about the industry.

● **Planning.** Provide trainees with an agenda, then stick to the agenda, Doppel says. "You can't do a good job of training your people if you throw your training program together the night before." Likewise, he adds, trainees should be given an opportunity to prepare for training.

● **Practice.** Good trainers practice what they're going to say and do, maybe in front of a mirror, maybe with a spouse as an audience. They do this before getting in front of trainees.

● **Place.** Have a suitable and comfortable location for training. If you don't have facilities at your business, consider renting space at a nearby hotel.

"You provide training fairly inexpensively," says Doppel. "It tells everybody that what you're doing is important. It tells



Doppel:
Plan your training program.

your employees that they're going to get something out of the training program."

Some time-tested Doppel communication techniques: break technical and semi-technical subjects into easy-to-understand chunks of information, from 20 to 40 minutes each; tell anecdotes and relate your own real-life experiences as they relate to the subject; provide periodic breaks.

Equally important: treat trainees with respect. "Your employees are every bit as important as any other people you talk to," says Doppel. "They're your link with your customers.

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