

Stress value and need when you have to raise prices.

If your prices don't yield the earnings you might normally expect, you should consider raising them. But will your customers pay more?



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■ If your prices don't yield the earnings you might normally expect, you should consider raising them. But will your customers pay more? According to most lawn care and landscape companies, the answer is "yes," but only if you use sensible strategies. Here are some hints:

1) Base your prices on the value and need for your services.

Many landscapers concentrate on working for two-income families because they easily accept higher prices just to keep up appearances. They also have the money to pay more for such work, but not the time or energy to do it for themselves. Senior citizens whose incomes are more than comfortable will also accept higher prices for similar reasons.

2) Check competitors' prices for work that is comparable to yours. You can easily do this by reviewing these companies' ads. You might also use the phone and give the impression that you are a prospect. Ask what is charged for such services. Other questions might include:

- How experienced are your employees?
- Do you use modern equipment?
- Do you offer any free extra services or premiums?

Strike an average price for each type of work based on the answers, then compare these figures and features with your own.

Now, if you feel that you must charge more, let the customer know why by pointing out the extras which you offer but competitors don't—such as the use of more modern technology or more experienced employees. If need be, name the competitors.

3) Sell your professionalism instead of your price by stressing any (true) advantageous factors which your company possesses (such as how long it's been in business) and showing the written testimonials of satisfied customers.

Other ploys can be equally successful. One landscape contractor takes prospective clients for short drives in the neighborhood and points out the lawns and grounds of those for whom he has worked for many years. You can also

continued on page 62

Pricing from page 24

drive prospects past other properties that are badly landscaped and carefully point out what's wrong with them. Now the prospect can see for him or herself why the quality of your work justified your charges.

4) Seek out and use products that will allow you to do more work in less time—but charge the same or more for

such services. A case in point is using a growth regulator to cut the number of times you must visit the account to mow. This can be especially helpful for time-consuming hillsides, terraced landscapes and roadsides.

5) Don't overlook the high value of old pricing techniques such as \$29.95 rather than \$30 for a single item such as a potted plant; and "two-fer" prices, such as two for \$59.95. Despite the fact that

most customers realize that these aren't real bargains, studies show that they are amazingly effective.

Other old pricing "gimmicks" that have never lost their popularity and should be mentioned are:

6) Discount coupons which are sent through the mails, given to customers when purchases are made, placed behind the windshield wipers of nearby parked cars, or featured in ads.

Although the first purchase is made at a lower price, this is compensated by higher prices later, when customers have experienced the value of your landscaping services. Be sure to set time limits on coupons ("Good only until Sept. 30") to alleviate customer procrastination.

7) "Loss Leader" specials consisting of landscaping services sold to customers at a loss in order to encourage the purchase of other services, such as late fall leaf raking and yard work.

8) Offer "extras" that sugar-coat high costs, such as free how-to books on gardening, and free telephone advice on landscaping problems. Always detail such premiums in your ads and verbal sales presentations, and be sure to point out, if true, that no competitor offers such useful and welcomed gifts.

The marketing department of Evergreen Services Corp. of Bellevue, Wash., recently developed a two-page customer newsletter that gives maintenance tips and horticultural information. The little brochure also enhances the company's visibility and gives customers a place to air their concerns.

9) Remember that the marketing tool that will never be surpassed regardless of price is the reputation of your business. This reputation is based, of course, on performance.

"Our firm learned the hard way," reports one landscaper. "After experimenting with several marketing strategies, we are convinced that, even though our prices are considered to be high, most of our new business comes from customer referrals. Our clients are convinced that, even though we charge more than the competition, what they get for their money is well worth it.

"They pass their convictions on to their friends, who in turn become valuable clients."

—Bess Ritter May, author of this article, is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia, Pa. She is a frequent contributor to *LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT*.

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