

# Hold that trip to the local scrap heap; better fates await your old equipment

**Personal contact with prospective buyers smooths the hard sell; advertising helps, too.**

■ Unless your company headquarters is blessed with unlimited storage space, efficiently disposing of old, unwanted equipment can be better for your business operations.

For many landscape managers, unloading used equipment doesn't require a hard sell. Usually, just getting the word out does the trick. The chore is made smoother by simply maintaining personal and business contacts in the community.

"We've never had a problem moving used equipment out of here," reports Robert E. Bushouse of Green King Lawn Care/G&L Distributing in Kalamazoo, Mich. "I meet all the new guys starting out in the business in this area and then I set them up with equipment.

"Most of the established people are in the same position I am—they'd rather buy new equipment," Bushouse points out. But someone who has been in operation just one or two years welcomes the chance to buy bargain used equipment.

In addition to personal contacts, Bushouse keeps a lookout for new landscapers placing ads in the local newspaper. "If they advertise at all, I just plug them into our mailing list. If I have something really hot to sell, I'll send a post card out."

Although the distribution arm of his business helps provide additional visibility, Bushouse notes that people familiar with his sales of used equipment will call seeking specific items or referrals to other local businesses.

**Pots 'n' plants**—Bartering is a technique used at Las Colinas Landscape Services in Dallas, Texas. According to Mike Bratton, customers or vendors—such as a nursery—will make a trade in return for a piece of equipment.

"They'll come in and say, 'Hey, do you guys have any old mowers?' They'll give us pots or plants, and maybe some money will exchange hands," says Bratton. "Or, if I have a mower that's worth \$500, I'll get \$500 worth of trees."

Much of the equipment is used to its capacity. "Sometimes it's just flat worn out and we skeletonize some parts and scrap-metal the rest."

For example, the parts off two dead mowers will be used to keep five others running. The rest is tossed into a pile to be hauled, two or three times a year, to a scrap metal dealer. Las Colinas will get about 20 cents to 25 cents a pound for the several tons that they turn in annually, although the rates vary.

It helps, too, to have all the plastic and other stray materials separated from the targeted scrap, advises Sean A. Bennett, president of Bennett Enterprises in Lomita, Calif. "The cleaner the metal, the more you get for it."

To Bennett, making a scrap run is a form of recycling. The money earned by the scrap from his smaller full-service landscaping

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operation pays for the time and energy needed to turn it in. "You break even or make a little bit."

Bennett's selling method of choice for used equipment is a local auction house. "They take 20 percent of what they sell it for." He also likes to buy items at auction because for him it works out better than purchasing new from a dealer. "Our men don't regard new equipment on a high level," he explains.

Some pieces are used over and over again. "Snapper decks will last forever and we'll just put new engines on them," says Bennett. "We won't throw something out until it's seen its final day. It'll see the scrap pile before it sees re-sale."

It's a similar situation at The Country Club of Colorado in Colorado Springs. Superintendent Stan Metsker prefers to trade used items in for new products, but often it's more economical to just keep the good parts and junk the rest. "It doesn't take that many parts to make it worth more than what you'd get for it."

A list of available used equipment circulates in Metsker's area, but the specialized nature of some of the golf course equipment makes it difficult to move. Therefore, Metsker usually opts to trade it in, keep the parts or give it away, depending on the circumstances.

Some items are kept on hand for emergencies. "I try to keep back-up for all my main-line equipment," says Metsker. "I have an old 16-inch rotary that I keep," he notes. "It's not that good, but at least it works. When I get a new mower that one will be out of here."

**Advertise**—At the Monroe Sod Farm in Davidson, Mich., Scott Monroe will place classified advertisements in LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT and work the phones. "Direct contact with different people" is his preferred method.

Placing classified ads in the local daily and community newspaper is the approach favored by Richard Gaffney of Gaffney Landscaping in South Euclid, Ohio. He stresses, however, that timing is everything.

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"I was selling a Bunton walk-behind for \$600 the first day," he recalls. "Now doing that in the fall—no—you wouldn't get that kind of response at all."

Sometimes just keeping a marketable item in a visible spot will attract buyers. Gaffney had an old dump truck that he kept stored in a parking lot in an industrial Cleveland neighborhood. "I wasn't really trying to sell it, but people kept stopping in to ask about it." And one of those streetside shoppers eventually made an good offer.

Placing ads in the local daily paper and posting notices on the company bulletin board board will help move old equipment at Senske Supergreen in Yakima, Wash. Employees or local residents buy the items. "Once in a while we put them on consignment with our repair shop, but they really don't like to do that," reports turf agronomist Bo Hepler.

—James E. Guyette  
— is a freelance writer based in South Euclid, Ohio.

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## What to do with old equipment:

- 1) Sell it:
  - a) advertise in local papers or LM
  - b) test the water with 'beginners'
  - c) store it in a visible location
- 2) Trade it in
- 3) Use it for barter
- 4) Put it up for auction
- 5) Sell it as scrap metal
- 6) Use it as back-up equipment
- 7) Keep components as extras for working equipment

## Maintenance prolongs lawn mower life

■ Treat lawn mower engines with the same respect you show your car's engine, says a machinery specialist at Penn State University.

Pay strict attention to owner's guide specifications, plus the viscosity and quality of oil used in the engine, says James Garthe, instructor in agricultural and biological engineering.

Keeping the air filter clean also extends your mower's life.

"If the air filter is dirty, minute particles of silicon can eventually get into the internal moving parts," Garthe says. "A dirty air filter also keeps air from getting to the engine and affects the air/fuel ratio that governs combustion. The engine has to work harder, wasting energy and fouling the spark plug with deposits."

Other hints that Garthe and PSU offer:

- Check spark plugs regularly. Careful scrape deposits from the plug with a pocket knife or wire brush.
- Change oil while it's still warm to drain suspended contaminants.
- If you keep your mowers in a damp location, consider coating them with a silicon spray to keep moisture out and discourage rust. Covering with a plastic tarp also keeps moisture—and rodents—out.