

Make your sales pitch snappy

Use your pallet of experience to paint a colorful picture when first meeting a prospective customer. More on p. 26.

■ When trying to sell your landscape services, you'll never have a better opportunity than your first.

So say three landscape managers who were part of an Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) panel session at the Green Industry Expo last November.

"Sales presentations are made up front, not at the tail end," says Mike Guthrie of Ground Control Landscaping, Orlando, Fla.

"I *show* the client I want to work for him," adds Judson Griggs of Lied's Nursery, Sussex, Wis. "That starts with the first phone call. No matter how busy you are, you've got to show some excitement and genuine interest. That first phone call can make or break you."

Guthrie says he'll send prospective customers a brochure and references. An offer to drive them to some of Ground Control's properties is not out of the ordinary. "I *want* them to check me out," he notes. "I know they won't hear anything but good things."



Griggs:
what about
customer?



Hillenmeyer:
what about
competition?



Guthrie:
what about
brochure?

Face-to-face—The first interview is all-important.

Guthrie suggests arriving at the site 30 to 45 minutes early. "Drive it, walk it," he says. "Tear the (existing) landscape apart, but don't get negative."

Griggs says you should "try to go in without any pre-conceived notion of what the landscape should look like.

"Shut up and listen to your client, initially," says Griggs. "You want to find out what makes them tick. If they don't tell you, you have to start asking the right questions. Get them talking so you can understand their goals. Explore what they're telling you; don't take it at face value."

Griggs says this process is very personal, especially on a residential property. You have to use open-ended questions, take a lot of notes, or even take a tape recorder along.

"In most instances, people are interested in getting the most for their money," Griggs notes. "We like to tell the client we'll meet his objectives in the shortest time at the lowest possible cost. We tell him we'll be responsible for the whole exterior environment."

One of the initial keys is trying to establish a budget. That way, you know what design suggestions are possibilities and you can begin throwing ideas at the prospective client. "Make sure you and the client are both on the same page," Griggs interjects.

Talking money—Then comes the preliminary budget.

"I develop a preliminary concept, but I'm not spending a lot of time on it," notes Griggs. "You paint the picture of what they should expect. I might throw

out a couple ideas and get the client's reaction.

"The preliminary budget has some round numbers to get the client making decisions. I'll also let them know what's *not* in the budget, so there are no surprises later."

Negotiated bids are handled slightly differently.

"On a negotiated bid, we try to find out as much about the customer and the competition as possible," says Steve Hillenmeyer of Hillenmeyer Nurseries, Lexington, Ky. "Talk to other employees at the company. Ask questions. I like to make the first visit a fact-finding mission."

"When you sit down with those people, you'll be amazed at what they'll tell you. A few will even tell you what their budget is."

Guthrie adds, "Negotiating usually gets down to man-hours. There comes a time when you have to do some value engineering. There are decisions you have to make, and it's a give-and-take; you have to weigh each individual situation."

All three do complete and total analysis bids or budgets, depending on whether the job is negotiated or not. Most of the bids/budgets are many pages long (see example).

In the final analysis, remember that there's usually a reason the prospective client gave you that first telephone call. From that point on, "there's a real fine line between sales and BS," Guthrie notes, and it's up to you to toe that line, and to convince the customer that you're the best company for the job.

—Jerry Roche

ITEMS	QUANTITY	UNIT PRICE	TOTAL PRICE	REMARKS
Site Preparation	1	1,000.00	1,000.00	
Planting	10	100.00	1,000.00	
Irrigation	1	1,000.00	1,000.00	
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