

Breaking the ice

When prospecting for commercial clients, get to the point and show you can deliver.

■ Prospecting for and winning new commercial clients takes more than just being in the right place at the right time.

If you want that office park or corporate headquarters contract, you've got to prove you can handle the project to begin with, and have some references to back it up.

Here's what three buyers for major Indiana-based companies told us they like to see in a sales approach and presentation:

Linda Byers, Eli Lilly Co.:

● "Contractors have to know the business and know their own limitations." If you're mailing to a prospect for the first time, the brochure has to be an attention-getter.

● Keep your first presentation short and sweet. A portfolio with *good quality* photographs is important.

● Leave the boots at the office; dress like a pro to match the surroundings.

Ed Grenier, American United Life Insurance Co.:

● "Just about anything that complements the product we sell is an asset," and that includes the property.

● "The best advertising is the finished product. If I can drive by and see something that is beautiful and attractive, that's the best advertising there is."

● *Active* association membership is a plus.

● In the initial meeting, appearance, sense of humor and knowledge of the business all count.

Nick Rush, Cummins Engine Co., Inc.:

● "I talk to others in the profession to find out who they might recommend."

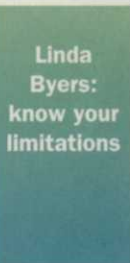
● "Be persistent; let us know you're out there. Be capable, professional and trustworthy. Show that you're able to live up to the expectations of the project."

● At the close: cost (not necessarily the lowest), quality, ease of delivery, communication skills and trustworthiness win the day.

—Terry McIver



Nick Rush:
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Linda Byers:
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Ed Grenier:
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Primary salt damage is found along areas along roads.

Helping landscapes recover from snow and ice damage

You and your customers might be surprised to see all the damage done by winter snow plows and salt. Here are some spring fix-it suggestions.

by James E. Guyette

■ Even a successful winter snow and ice removal program can rub salt into the spring wounds of landscape managers when they take stock of the damage done to turf

and plants.

Heavy use of salt or other materials, including urea and other alternative products for ice-melting on sidewalks, streets and parking lots, can damage concrete and harm bordering lawns and ornamentals.

"Around homes, it's common for March rains to wash heavy amounts of residual ice-melting products into neighboring turf," says Dr. Bill Pound, turfgrass specialist at Ohio State University. "This raises the soil's salinity level. Salt draws water out of grass roots and burns roots that it touches. At high saline concentrations, this can damage or kill grass."

Pound receives phone calls every spring from people seeking advice about plants injured or killed by winter ice control. Most calls come from landscape contractors who maintain pavements around institutions such as hospitals, and who spread heavy amounts of deicing materials to clear sidewalks and driveways.

Pound says to use only enough material to melt the ice and snow, or alternatives such as sand, or sweeping up any excess salt residues before they're washed into neighboring lawns or flowerbeds.

In many cases hard rainfalls will wash salt out of the soil, allowing it to recover. "It all depends on how much rain and water you move through that profile," says Pound. But in some circumstances, turf damage may have already occurred. In late winter or early spring, yellow or brown strips up to two feet wide will appear along the pavement.

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Use only enough de-icing material as is needed to melt the ice.





To replace larger areas, strip the top two inches of topsoil in April.

"The extent of damage depends on the amount of salt and the type of grass. Tall fescue tolerates high saline levels the best, followed by perennial ryegrass, fine fescue and Kentucky bluegrass," says Pound.

If an entire strip dies, replace the dead turf and top two inches of topsoil in April in Midwestern climates, says Pound. But if you're dealing with a Kentucky bluegrass lawn and only parts have turned yellow, green grass will eventually fill in the damaged areas.

Ryegrass won't fill in, so reseed in early

spring.

"The need for topsoil replacement is only there if you want to replace the turf immediately," Pound points out, noting that many landscape managers use a sod cutter for this task. It's best to get a handle on the situation by doing some checks in the dead of winter. "I encourage people to take some soil samples." With a test for soluble salts, a reading above 150 indicates a saline level capable of killing grass.

—The author is a freelance writer specializing in the green industry. He maintains his office in South Euclid, Ohio.



Tall fescue tolerates salt better than other turf.

Wildflower seeding: pick best method for your site

■ The goal of wildflower seeding is simple—an even distribution of seed with good seed-to-soil contact.

That's not always easy to do, however, because of the great variation in the size of wildflower seed. Some species produce seed smaller than a pinhead while others may be several times larger and of a different shape.

Even so, a landscape manager can seed many sites with either a manual or tractor-pulled cyclone spreader, spreading them with a blending agent like sand or vermiculite. Also, some suppliers coat their seeds to make them easier to distribute, with at least one supplier using multi-colored coating so that appli-



Soil on this site has been loosened and is relatively weed-free, a good start for wildflower establishment. (Photo courtesy American Seed Trade Association)

The same site weeks later shows the results of good soil preparation and effective seeding. (Photo courtesy American Seed Trade Association)



cators can, at a glance, see how effectively they're dispersing seed.

Larger seeding projects call for different seeding strategies. Craig Steffens with the Texas Highway Department says his department uses three methods to broadcast wildflower seeds:

1) The most effective and expensive method is with a drill-type seeder where a rip shank forms a groove in the soil, seeds are dropped, and then a culti-packer comes back over to assure good seed-to-soil contact.

2) Another method used by the Texas DOT is a piece of chainlink fence weighted down (with rocks or a railroad tie) and dragged
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Plan for winter in the summer

■ The best way to avoid getting plowed under by winter snow and ice removal is to think winter in summer. Consider the snow when planning the landscape.

In snowy climates, any landscape plan has to be checked to make sure it leaves places to pile snow. Failure to ponder this point can leave you with a mountain of problems come the following spring: dead ornamentals, damaged lawns and irate customers.

Dr. Bill Pound, Ohio State University: "Be careful about what you plant and where you plant it." A strip of mulch around landscaped edges can reduce costs if snowblower damage is a recurring problem among your customers.

Joseph Hudak, a Westwood, Mass. landscape architect: "Avoid brittle plants whenever possible. Day lilies are one of the least sensitive plants for abuse. They're used a great deal in Canada along highways where they salt things to death."

Trees alongside driveways need special attention. Plan or prune so that you avoid low-hanging horizontal branches when the plow comes.

"The more snow they have the more they will hang down. If you have branches that won't clear the cab, you won't have any branches."

If you or your clients use a snowblower, look out for those tight hedges. "You've got that barrier staring you and your snowblower right in the kisser." Snowplows, snowblowers and salt can bring damage to any type of plantings along driveways and sidewalks. A misguided plow blade can easily strip away big chunks of grass and anything else in its way.

John M. Bass, Lawn Master, Midvale, Utah: Pounding in stakes in the fall, and maintaining fallen ones throughout the winter, can also help reduce lawn and bed damage. "We'll go out and mark the curbs so when we're pushing snow we'll know where to push it to."

Phil Jorgenson, Tuff Turf, Merriam, Kansas: "The main thing is taking corners." It's great customer relations to repair any plow damage free of charge. It can be an excellent advantage to you when compared to other plowers, such as off-season construction contractors and the like, who are unable or unwilling to guarantee that the proper repairs will be made.

—J.E.G.