

LO
OVERHEAD

- OPERATES OUT OF HOME
- GOOD EMPLOYEE TRAINING
- WORD-OF-MOUTH HIRING PRACTICES
- DEGREEED OWNERSHIP



HI
QUALITY

- LOTS OF EXPERIENCE
- EXTRA SERVICES LIKE GARBAGE CURBING, DEAD LEAF REMOVAL
- FLEXIBILITY
- QUICK RESPONSE TIME

High-end services at low-end prices

Because of the way NatureScape is run, it can adjust to the needs of its clients.

by James E. Guyette

■ Proper advance planning with low overhead, attention to details, and better rates than the competition are the marketing ploys of NatureScape, a full-service landscaping company in South Euclid, Ohio.

NatureScape clients all know that "you don't always have to pay a high price to get high quality work," owner Jil Morgan explains.

She won't discuss prices—citing competitive reasons—but Morgan does reveal that she strives to shave 20 to 30 percent off the going rates within the area.

Savings are garnered through a number of methods, such as running the operation from a garage and her home rather than renting expensive office space. Morgan's high level of experience also contributes to more efficiency, she says. She has a degree in landscape construction/contracting, with studies in urban forestry, from Ohio State University; plus, she's worked in the industry for 10 years.

Another money-saver is a strong word-of-mouth network which helps her locate the two to five extra employees used each spring and summer. "We can't afford to hire someone with several years of experience," Morgan explains, "but if it sounds like they know what they're doing, we'll give them a shot."

A sound training system helps too, says Morgan: "We like to show them the way I

was taught."

No mow and go—Morgan stresses that high quality work at a fair price usually just means going beyond the typical "mow-and-go" attitude sometimes found in the industry. "We give more for the money," she notes. "If it only takes a minute to help the customer out, we go the extra step."

That attitude is instilled throughout every task NatureScape undertakes. While on a property, "we'll walk around with a bucket and pull dead leaves out of plants."

The extra steps so often overlooked by competitors may include something as simple as carrying customers' full garbage cans out to the curb. "We know that every Wednesday, the trash goes out."

NatureScape's marketing niche is offering specialized full-service care to smaller properties—especially those belonging to older residents. "Senior citizens can't get out there and mow lawns and cut up sticks," Morgan explains, adding that NatureScape has always included such factors in its business plan.

"We usually are prepared for anything that happens, and we're flexible," says Morgan. "Because of the way the business is run, we can adjust to the needs of our clients."

Such services tend to be greatly appreciated, and they were especially welcome after the area was ravaged by a massive summer storm.

Riding it out—The Cleveland area's "Great Storm of '93" last August lasted less than 10 intense minutes. The driving rain and howling wind gusts exceeding 100 mph created the most massive power outage in the history of the local utilities. Huge trees were left toppled atop houses, and residents were literally left in the dark.

Proper advance planning meant that NatureScape crews could provide quick response time, which pleased current clients and helped pick up some new ones.

"There were branches and sticks all over. It was a real mess," Morgan remembers. "When we went out on our jobs we took the chain saw, pruners and other equipment with us."

Discounts of 10 to 20 percent were automatically granted to long-term customers or to those who had offered referrals. "We tried to help out," she says.

Not a single stick was left by NatureScape clean-up crews. "Being female, we like to look at the little things," says Morgan of the company, which is owned and operated by women.

Not surprisingly, clients' neighbors noticed this treatment and approached NatureScape for even more work, including future design and installation jobs.

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Slowing down money leaks

by Dan Sautner
Padgett Business Services

■ As a business owner, only you can control how the business operates. Part of this control relates to corporate finances.

Any company is like an old row boat, with a large number of small leaks. Each leak in itself is not important or dangerous to the well-being of the craft, but the sum of many leaks leads to disaster. As a business owner, you have to have a way to watch for the leaks, and a way to stop them.

Cash—The best type of cash is the cash coming into your business. Part of your business must include some kind of system to record sales and account for cash receipts. Beware of cash-over and cash-short situations. At the very least, these are indicators of poor customer service; at the worst, they are signs of an organized attempt by dishonest people to remove your cash.

Inventory and supplies—The next area of control is in the supplies and inventory that you have on hand. A steady gross profit margin is usually the easiest control to have, and this is achieved through regular inventories and a monthly profit-and-loss statement.

If you have a consistent and stable gross profit margin, then you are likely in

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