

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

is a proud member of these green industry professional organizations:



Associated Landscape Contractors of America, 12200 Sunrise Valley Dr., Suite 150, Reston, VA; (703) 620-6363.

American Association of Nurserymen (National Landscape Association), 1250 I St. NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 789-2900.

American Sod Producers Association, 1855-A Hicks Rd., Rolling Meadows, IL 60008; (708) 705-9898.

Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, 1421 Research Park Dr., Lawrence, KS 66049-3859; (913) 841-2240.

International Society of Arboriculture, P.O. Box 908, Urbana, IL 61801; (217) 328-2032.

International Turfgrass Society, Crop & Soil Environmental Sciences, VPI-SU, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0403; (703) 231-9796.



National Arborist Association, The Meeting Place Mall, P.O. Box 1094, Amherst, NH 03031-1094; (603) 673-3311.

National Golf Foundation, 1150 South U.S. Highway One, Jupiter, FL 33477; (407) 744-6006.

Ohio Turfgrass Foundation, 2021 Coffey Rd., Columbus, OH 43210; (614) 292-2601.



Professional Grounds Management Society, 120 Cockeysville Rd., Suite 104, Hunt Valley, MD 21031; (410) 584-9754.



Professional Lawn Care Association of America, 1000 Johnson Ferry Rd., NE, Suite C-135, Marietta, GA 30068-2112; (404) 977-5222.

Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment, 1155 15th St. NW, Suite 900, Washington, D.C. 20005; (202) 872-3860.



Sports Turf Managers Association, 401 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611-4267; (312) 644-6610.

Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association, 8400 Normandale Lake Blvd., Suite 500, Bloomington, MN 55437; (612) 832-5000.

AS WE SEE IT

JERRY ROCHE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Good business: know the customer, and then some

Not surprisingly, I own a car. More accurately, the bank owns a car that I occasionally drive.

This particular vehicle was assembled in America, though the automaker is decidedly non-American.

Do I want my hard-earned cash siphoned from this country, into the pockets of some fabulously wealthy foreigner? I'm not ecstatic over the idea. But it's happening.

Seeing my dollars turned to yen (or marks, or whatever) before they reach their final destination, you see, is the lesser of two evils. A worse scenario would have me stuck on a back country road some night with a piece of equipment that refuses to awaken from a mid-winter's nap.

It doesn't matter that I'm paying \$19,000 for a machine that probably cost a fraction of that in parts and labor on the assembly line. I'm quite willing to pay extra for peace of mind.

What blows my mind is that the carmaker apparently knew this a long time ago!

The carmaker also knew that when I needed a new car, I would seek the advice of friends and acquaintances.

The carmaker knew that I would be willing to pay extra for resale value.

The carmaker knew that I would gladly pay a little extra for first-rate maintenance service, as long as the personnel at the dealership were respectful, prompt, efficient and knowledgeable.

Somehow, I'm thinking, this particular carmaker knew exactly what I wanted before I wanted it!

So, you see, I don't feel bad about giving him my business, no matter where he lives. The people at his company are on the ball, and I reward them for it. They may not be American, but they certainly value American business.

The point to this whole story is that the American consumer, with whom you deal,

is not as fickle as you might be led to believe. His or her loyalty can be bought, just like you can buy anything else in this great country of ours.

When I refer to "customer," of course, I'm referring to the people who view and/or use the landscapes you maintain. In some cases, they are homeowners; in some cases they are golfers; in some cases they are the parents of Little Leaguers. But in all cases, they are the people who give you the license to make a living.

The key is knowing what customers want, and how they want it—before they want it, if possible. When you can determine that—hey—the selling part is easy.

Here's the nut, then: talk to your customers (and prospective customers) regularly. In some business circles, this is known as "market research:"

- Before the season starts, send them a questionnaire like Jack Robertson told us in last month's issue (*mail surveys*).

- Invite key customers to your place of business. Buy them lunch. Talk about the services you are providing (*focus groups*).

- Make phone calls regularly, at least once a month, to as many customers as you can fit into your schedule (*phone surveys*).

- Visit homeowners between applications. Watch golfers and Little Leaguers play their games (*personal visitation*).

Most of all, be visible. And always, always be asking questions.

As George Toma told the Sports Turf Managers Association at its annual meeting late last year: to be truly successful, you need to do your job—"AND THEN SOME."

Jerry Roche