



DEFINING

YOUR IMAGE

**Whether you're head
of a golf or landscape
maintenance
department or a lawn
or landscape
company, your
success is defined by
your customers'
perceptions.**

**by Jerry Roche,
Editor-in-Chief**

You pull into the local Texaco station. Three attendants in immaculately-pressed khaki uniforms pop out of the building and, like whirling dervishes, pump gas into your tank, check the air in your tires, and flip up the hood—all in the space of 60 seconds.

You are impressed, and the next time you need a fill-up, you return to the same station.

Never mind that this was 40 years ago when Texaco was defining customer service with its "Men from Texaco" advertising campaign and jingle. ("Oh, we're the Men from Texaco, we work from Maine to Mexico...") The same rules still apply today. A pristine image still means good business.



Ruppert employees attend a regularly-scheduled training session.

CURB APPEAL

ISSUE 1992 Published by Brown Landscaping

CASE STUDY

Unquahick Residence: A Romantic Garden

When the owner of the Unquahick Residence in Massachusetts decided to build a garden, he gave a clear vision. He wanted a garden that was both romantic and practical. The garden was designed to be a place where the owner could relax and enjoy the outdoors. The garden features a variety of plants, including roses, hydrangeas, and perennials. The garden is also a place where the owner can entertain guests. The garden is a beautiful and functional space that is a true reflection of the owner's vision.

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RUPPERT REPORT

A Pro-active Approach to Labor

How do you attract and retain the best talent? How do you manage your labor force? How do you control your labor costs? These are the questions that every manager must answer. The Ruppert Report provides the answers. It is a magazine that is essential for every manager who is responsible for the success of his or her organization. The Ruppert Report is a must-read for every manager who wants to stay on top of the latest trends in labor management.

Newsletters and logos help companies stand out from the crowd. Here are some of the nicer newsletters we've seen, plus Phil Fogarty's popular sprite (upper right).

Image, of course, starts with how you look to customers and prospective customers.

Phil Fogarty of Crowley Lawn Care in Cleveland, Ohio, recently employed a freelance artist to create a new company logo. The artist had worked with Disney Studios' animation department, and gave Fogarty a variety of options, from which he chose the image of a green leprechaun (above right).

"We've got to be more user-friendly in this industry," observes Fogarty, an inveterate philosopher who tends to consider the "big picture" before making any important business decisions. "We have to counteract all the negative media we get, so the leprechaun was designed to make people feel at ease with us and to appeal to women.

"It's all very subtle stuff. I wanted a logo that would leave people with an impression that we can perform miracles. Leprechauns are mystical, magical and non-threatening.

"Women walk up to me and smile and say, 'Isn't that cute?,' and point at the logo on my shirt," Fogarty continues. "Dealing with people is a lot easier when they're in that kind of a mood."

Here are some other ways you can create or further define your image:

- Are your employees properly dressed? Do their clothes carry the company/department logo, displayed prominently? Are the employees neat and clean?

- Is your equipment clean and shiny? Will it catch the eye of the general public

when your crews are on a job site?

- Is your headquarters building (maintenance facility in the case of golf courses) nicely landscaped? Is there a pleasant waiting/reception area?

- Do all your employees—not just the ones who regularly call on customers or interact with the greens committee—communicate well and know how to deal with agronomic problems? Have they been trained to be courteous, cheerful and helpful?

- Do you have the proper communication technology—fax machines, voice mail, mobile telephones and/or two-way radios—to immediately respond to customer or golfer concerns?

- Do you have a means to communicate with customers in writing, like a newsletter or brochure? Do you mail it out or post it in the clubhouse regularly? Does it accurately reflect a certain level of professionalism, and does it establish your company/department as an expert?

Kathleen Obenschain and Cheri Baker, public relations experts at Ruppert Landscape in Ashton, Md., have helped publish the *Ruppert Report* newsletter for nine of its 13 years.

"We have really gotten positive feedback over the years," Obenschain says. "In the customer's mind, the *Ruppert Report* is always there; it's a staple. And within the company, we realize that it's a good-looking (four-color) piece and something to be proud of."

Each issue has a theme—in the past,

value engineering, employee training, customer service. The most recent issue contained articles on attracting and retaining employees and controlling plant costs. It had interviews with various area property experts. One article featured "enhancement supervisor" Steve Bisset, and another revealed how Ruppert designed and installed the German Ambassador's landscape in Rosslyn, Va.

"Our purpose is to educate the customer about our company and the industry," notes Obenschain. "We also like to acknowledge employees."

Yet the newsletter isn't the only way Ruppert creates its image.

"It's just one of many tools that we use," says Obenschain. "We market ourselves, but we're not really showy. People remember the *Ruppert Report*, but they also remember the good-looking trucks and uniformed employees."

Certainly, these are only the first steps you must take to create a squeaky-clean image. As you implement such programs, and your business or department attains a certain level of recognition, you can budget more money for image-building programs and refine them.

No matter what your image, it can be improved upon. Turn to page 12 for details on more ways to check yourself and your employees, from the viewpoint of one golf course superintendent and two landscapers.

IMAGE CHECKLIST

by Rich Akerman,
Northwest Landscape Industries, Tigard, Ore.

Image is the sum of how the public and your customers perceive your firm, it is your firm's position in the marketplace.

A unified, consistent image serves two major purposes:

- 1) It indicates a level of thought, organization and commitment by your firm, indicating that the firm is "together" and knows what it's doing and where it's going.
- 2) It makes your firm more memorable, because it makes associations easier for your public when—

every time they see you or a representative of your firm—the same image is reinforced.

These factors all influence your company image:

PERSONAL

- Wardrobe: uniforms, personal appearance
- Staff: dress, demeanor and attentiveness
- Receptionist: greetings and phone techniques
- Logo: on letterhead and all correspondence
- Office atmosphere: landscaping, look of office (pictures, photography, magazines, layout, lighting, neighborhood parking)
- Equipment: appearance, application of name and logo
- Community relations: activities within the community
- Association memberships
- Awards: from whom and for what
- Presentation style
- Client list

NON-PERSONAL

- Brochure
- Direct mail
- Video
- Photography
- Advertising
- Publicity and publications

Whether favorable or not, your company will have an image. Shaping a positive image with clients and public requires effort and attention to detail. Ask yourself regularly, "If I were a customer, what would I think about my company's image?"

—Reprinted, with permission, from "Landscape Contractor News," the newsletter of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America. For more information about ALCA, phone (703) 620-6363.

SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE YOUR IMAGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

by Bob Klitz, CGCS,
Deer Creek Country Club, Coral Springs, Florida

■ Golf course superintendents have several means available to help get the word out on the fine job they are doing:

1) **Offer your services** to area high schools and vocational schools, to provide information about job opportunities in the golf course management industry. This information can be provided through job fairs, career days, or other school-sponsored activities.

2) **Volunteer to be a guest speaker** for area community groups at luncheons, meetings and various functions. Check newspapers or local Chamber of Commerce for listings of groups that meet on a regular basis. Offer your time to speak about the golf industry, home lawn and landscape care, or other environmental issues.

3) **Handle your interactions** with golfers, members, clubhouse staff, management, and employees with a professional attitude and manner.

4) **Establish an interactive relationship with someone in the media.**

Sportswriters, television reporters, local newspaper editors or columnists, environmental writers for area papers...all would be worthwhile contacts to provide with interesting and helpful information.

5) **Continue to operate your maintenance facility** in a clean, organized, safe and environmentally beneficial manner.

6) **Continue to provide your employees** with the latest safety equipment and training available. Be sure they know how to operate and use all of their equipment in a professional manner. Remember that their actions are a direct reflection of their training.

—Reprinted, with permission, from "The Florida Green," the magazine of the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association.



IMAGE IS A REFLECTION

by William E. Akehurst Sr.,
Akehurst Landscape Service, Joppa, Md.

■ An image is a reflection of one's self or thing. In our businesses, just what image do we reflect to others?

It's been said that our actions often speak louder than words. The same holds true with the image that each of our businesses convey. We must continually monitor the way our firms are mirrored to our clients, our community and the public in general.

There are three areas that demonstrate the way others see us:

1) **The image of our person.** Our own witness to how people perceive our appearance and character.

If our own lives do not reflect a proper, moral, high standard, ethical and quality image, then how can we expect others in our organizations to conduct their lives and to perform their duties in such a manner as to reflect a good company image?

2) **Physical, outward appearance.**



This includes our facility, equipment and employees representing our firms. Does our facility depict a caring attitude? Are we an asset to the community and our neighbors? Is our equipment well kept?

3) **The image of the work we perform.** We are all aware of quality control. As professionals, we should have very

high standards. All too often, particularly on very competitive bid jobs, there are little details that if performed will give you a high quality image—but if they go unnoticed or overlooked, it will contribute to a mediocre or poor image.

Our image as individuals, as members of our community, and as an industry should always reflect quality.

—Reprinted, with permission, from "Landscape News," the newsletter of the National Landscaping Association/American Association of Nurserymen. For more information about the NLA and AAN, phone (202) 789-2900.