

LAWN & LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY

IMPROVE YOUR COMPANY'S IMAGE!

by Ed & Aaron Wandtke

■ Your company's image depends on the behavior of your front line: the service providers. In this era of environmentally-concerned consumers, companies need to become more conscious of the image portrayed by their employees.

Your employees' image determines how much your company cares about the customer, his or her property, and the world we live in.

A strong company image is critical for your success and continued viability. Take a close look at companies you believe to have a strong image. What is the secret? What should you be doing to improve the image of your company to customers, the community and the industry?

Customer image—People form perceptions about your company's quality, reliability, competence and integrity through the image you display on properties. For most of you, employees and vehicles are the only opportunity to create a company image, based on:

- how employees look;
- how they act on a property;
- how professionally they are viewed in the community; and
- the appearance of vehicles and equipment.

Dirty uniforms (at least at the start of the day), faulty equipment, perennially damaged vehicles all have an impact on your company's image.

With the green industry under close scrutiny by customers and the media, it is imperative that extra care be exercised in

order to present the best possible image at all times.

If a company can't afford a large advertising or promotional program, the professional appearance of personnel and vehicles is a necessity.

I recently observed a landscape maintenance employee operating a backpack blower without ear or eye protection. He then proceeded to blast the air at another employee. If it was a property I was involved with, I would have fired the company on the spot. Safety in working on a property is critical, and there is no place for horseplay on any job. The equipment and materials your employees use must be handled carefully for customer safety, too.

Human safety and environmental consciousness need to be the focus of every employee as they work for every customer. The image you have developed over time can be destroyed by one careless employee who is observed by the wrong customer.

Community image—How is your company perceived in the community? Are giving back a portion of the benefits you get from the community?

Every year, members of the Metropolitan Detroit Landscape Association (MDLA) donate personnel, materials and creative talents to improve a long-term project on the grounds of Cobo Hall in Detroit. More than 86,000 square feet of gardens, waterfalls, ponds and bridges with thousands of trees, shrubs and flowers are maintained and improved through the efforts of MDLA.

IN THE PUBLIC EYE



The image created by this ongoing project benefits the community in which the companies work, and reinforces the value of the services which the companies provide.

Involvement with the Chamber of Commerce, the local small business association and other community-based service clubs is an excellent way to contribute to the community and receive recognition. And contributing to the community should not be limited to the company owners. Employees should be urged to participate in church groups, parent-teacher organizations and other similar groups to demonstrate your company's commitment toward improving and maintaining the community in which you live and work.

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Too often, the positive contributions made from green industry people are not reported because the actions are not controversial or sensational. So you should work to get your efforts recognized publicly.

Industry image—Each company in an industry contributes to the industry's general image. As new companies continue to proliferate, it is imperative that local

groups organize to protect that image.

Because most states do not have barriers to entry into the green industry, existing owners and employees need to police, maintain and improve the industry's image. Being an activist doesn't mean being a thorn in people's side, but it can make a difference: possible unwarranted regulations may be thwarted, and adversarial visits from federal and state regulators may be avoided.

The image your company has developed

or is developing takes time to mature. Staying active in the community while maintaining a professional, quality service will not only help your image but it will also improve the image of the industry. Take the little extra time to make sure your company is working on it.

—The authors are owners of *Wandtke & Associates*, a green industry business consulting firm located in Columbus, Ohio. To contact them, phone (614) 891-3111.

Using your advertising to educate customers

by Judy Good

■ "Diplomacy" is telling someone where to go in a way that they actually look forward to getting there. And using education in advertising is like diplomacy: it's putting your ad in front of someone so that they actually look forward to seeing it there.

I would like to encourage each of you to educate the public about our industry through the advertising or publicity you use to promote your company.

A few years ago, I suggested that J.B. Good develop a direct mail technique of marketing our tree services by mailing educational flyers to our local customers four times a year. We looked at the costs and thought it would be expensive. We didn't know if we could afford it, but we went ahead anyway.

We bought the postal permit, we paid our yearly fee, and we developed our first educational piece (which was pretty crude compared with the things we're using today). Here's what we used *then*: low-cost paper, one color, my crude graphics, printed 100 at a time. Here's what we use *today*: glossy paper stock, four-color photos, professional graphics, printed 100,000 at a time.

Why? Because educational advertising works. It not only tells people you want their business, but it tells them what to ask for. The phone rings and they'll either ask for some outdated practice or they'll ask for what you've taught them to ask for.

Nobody else is going to educate your market for you. Especially if you plan to stay on the leading edge of the industry. New information is coming out all the time and your customers are always going to be two or three steps behind you.



An example—A few years ago, we were contacted by the local government to bid the pruning of a set of trees. The specs said that all pruning cuts must be painted with an approved tree wound paint, even though current arboricultural practices do not include painting tree wounds. Yet the government wouldn't omit this portion of the specs because they were afraid of getting too many complaints.

The leading edge of the industry is the hardest to educate people about. You must lead by example, and educate those who question what you are doing. This does two things:

- 1) When people learn what you are saying is correct, they respect you.
- 2) It's a great way to "soft-sell" your services.

One of the things to remember about educational advertising is that it's more important to educate than it is to be fancy about it. As your company grows, and as you see the benefit of shunting dollars out of big display ads and into education, then your publications can get fancier.

Positive reinforcement—People tell

us that they've created files containing our advertisements. They may want to refer to some of our information.

We walk into houses and, lo and behold, they have one of our educational postcards magnetized to their refrigerator.

We walk into the local city parks shop and they have one of our postcards posted on their bulletin board.

We drive up to our bank teller and there on the window is one of our arboriculture calendars.

It takes the average person seven



times of hearing something before they remember it. Before they understand it. So don't get discouraged. Just keep on educating.

One of the rules in advertising is that, just about the time you are so sick and tired of hearing your ad, the public is just beginning to take note of it. It will take a while longer before they actually understand it, and still longer before they request what you are offering.

If you've used educational advertising, you have well established yourself as a local authority on the subject, and word-of-mouth takes over as your best source of advertising.

—Judy Good and her husband John are co-owners of J.B. Good Inc. For more information, or to order educational post cards or posters, write them at 5250 N.E. Highway 20, Corvallis, OR 97330. Phone number is (503) 752-6260.