

COMPETITION from page 22L

New for the 1990's: how to deal with the largest companies offering the lowest prices.

If you discover your market niche is too small or another company is aggressively marketing to it, be prepared to change. You may want to specialize in more than one niche, to allow the company to shift its efforts according to customer demand. (Price-conscious customers may not be concerned with the quality; likewise, quality-conscious customers may not be concerned with price.)

Selling against price—Most LCOs are not prepared to deal with price shoppers, but it can be done by telling them the other factors to consider when evaluating a company: things like quality of service, professionalism, timeliness, cleanliness,

and ability to answer questions.

Train employees how to communicate these positive attributes of your company to prospects. Preparing them to handle the pricing issue will help ease the communication between both the employees and the prospects.

Regardless of the tactics engineered by your competition, an understanding of your niche and where exactly your company fits in relation to the competition will help define your potential market share.

Keep in mind that the lower prices initiated by yourself and the competition are not likely to have significant impact on your market share this year.

And remember: the lowest priced company in a market usually has the highest customer turnover.

—The authors are principles in Wandtke & Associates, a green industry consulting firm headquartered in Columbus, Ohio. For more information, phone (614) 891-3111.

PLCAA's dynamite idea: partnering with the EPA

by Ron Hall,
Senior editor

■ Lawn care professionals may soon be showing customers another side of their environmental concern through a unique PLCAA/EPA partnership.

The program is the EPA's Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Program. It promotes the wise and responsible use of pesticide products. The Professional Lawn Care Association of America is the first green industry group to partner with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the program. To date, most program participants have come from ag grower groups and right-of-way maintainers.

"We're developing our environmental stewardship strategy now. When it's approved, PLCAA members can publicize their participation," says Thomas Delaney, PLCAA government affairs director. In other words, PLCAA members who participate in the program and meet its criteria will be able to tell their customers that

they are a part of the EPA program.

PLCAA earned the right to offer the program to members because of its ongoing efforts to educate the public to the benefits of healthy lawns, promote sensible lawn care practices and to reduce the risks of pesticide use, said Delaney.

"I applaud the steps your organization has already taken toward reducing the risks from the use of pesticides," wrote EPA's Daniel M. Barolo, director of the Office of Pesticide Programs, in a recent letter to PLCAA. "To further advance our common environmental goals, the next steps require collaborative public-private partnerships."

More about environment—PLCAA could yet help promote an Audubon Society program if it can get some financial help in printing the literature.

The Audubon Society of New York State's "Backyard Sanctuary" program is similar in purpose, if not in success, to its golf course sanctuary program. That pro-

continued on page 26L

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PLCAA from page 24L

gram promotes wildlife habitat enhancement on golf courses. More than 1,000 course superintendents are participating in it. The Backyard Sanctuary program has attracted far fewer cooperators, said Audubon's President Ron Dodson, mostly because homeowners don't know about it.

Dodson spoke at the PLCAA Conference this past fall. He said Audubon would cooperate with PLCAA in supplying PLCAA members with Backyard Sanctuary material. He described the collaboration as a win-win-win situation. PLCAA provides its member companies with more consumer-friendly information, lawn care pros gain stature for helping enhance the environment, and ASNYS's sanctuary program reaches homeowners.

"I think it makes perfect sense for lots of different reasons for us to partner on this," Dodson told *LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT* magazine.

Certification gains steam—About 600 people are registered in the University of Georgia-PLCAA turf certification program. There are now at least 45 Certified Turfgrass

Professionals (CTPs), those that have successfully completed the course. Dr. Helen Mills, department head, U. of Ga.'s Community Learning Resources, said the correspondence course had attracted participants from as far away as Singapore and Israel. It covers such topics as mowing, soils, irrigation, pesticides, customer relations and more.

"We're exceptionally pleased with the response," said Mills. The program is in its second year.

"The UGA-PLCAA course is a must for someone entering the business and a great refresher for experienced LCOs," said Lou Wierichs, Jr., Pro-X Systems, Fox Cities and Green Bay, Wis. Wierichs was the first CTP.

Legislative Day—More than 80 lawn care professionals from 27 states attended PLCAA's sixth Legislative Day on the Hill this past Feb. 27-28. They met with former Republican Congressman Fred Grandy from Iowa before meeting with their own lawmakers. Grandy, still well-known for his role on the TV series *Love Boat*, told the LCOs to keep in close touch with their legislators.

"Americans are not sure what they're

looking for in the next generation of leadership, but they are reasonably certain that they haven't found it yet," Grandy said. "Don't be convinced that the hurricane is over."

A Texas theme—New Frontiers in Lawn Care is the theme of 1995 PLCAA conference in Fort Worth this autumn. This is PLCAA's 16 conference. It runs in conjunction with the Green Industry Expo Nov. 12-16.

"For this year's conference in the Lone Star state, we've developed a frontier theme and agenda reflecting rapid changes and expanding growth in our industry," said Conference Chairman Bill Hoopes, Barefoot Grass Lawn Service, Worthington, Ohio.

Subjects covered in this year's conference include: IPM, employee considerations, the fate of pesticides, biological weed controls, environmental stewardship, understanding epidemiology and others.

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Predicting your financial future

by Dan Sautner

■ Throughout the life of your lawn or landscape company, you are continually asked to predict the future. Your banker wants to know how you will repay loans. You hire new employees when you expect more business. You purchase a new truck because you expect to need it in the future.

We often predict the future by relying on our intuition or gut feeling about the business. We consider the past, make adjustments for the new environment the future always brings, and then take a stand on where sales will be.

Something you can use as a tool to make your future predictions are cash flow projections. They are estimations of where cash will come from and where it will go.

These projections take a number of forms and have a number of uses:

□ Projections that can be broken down into three-month periods and cover up to five years are often used in major capital acquisitions (such as a new building).

□ Projections by the month for periods of two or three years are most commonly used when raising debt at a bank. The pri-



mary focus of these types of projections is when and how much excess cash will be generated. The lender will then use these to help him or her determine your ability to repay a loan.

□ The simplest forms of projections are those related to a single project, event or season. Time frames are contracted and often the information is restricted to only those elements affected. An example might be the decision to purchase a display booth at a trade show. Here the event and costs have a limited, easily-definable life.

Let's use this last type as an example to develop a cash flow projection.

First, determine what costs will be needed to undertake the project. List these on a page, left-hand side, about a third of the

way down the page. Label the column "Uses," and then make another set of columns ("Weeks") to cover the time frame. In this instance, since the trade show begins in eight weeks, use eight columns—one for each week—plus one for "Total."

Using the list of expenses, first work out the total money you'll need and record it in the "Total" column. You'll allocate it by "Weeks" later. If the total is realistic and obtainable, you can go to the next step.

On the top third of the page, on the far left, list the "Sources" of cash for this project. It may include immediate sales at the trade show or costs avoided while at the show. Then place the total in the "Total" column. Now add a final line in the sources, called "Contributions." Use this line to balance the sources of cash to the uses of cash. In a perfect world, sources will be higher than uses and no amount will be required here. In many cases, however, you will have to put cash into the venture, after determining, of course, if this type of contribution is possible.

Now, you break the total sources of

continued on page 30L