

HARDSCAPING

an easy add-on service

Concrete pavers can add a new dimension to your scope of work and a great new source of income for your company.

by DOUG WILBRANDT

Being in a competitive industry like landscaping, we're constantly looking for new ways to expand our customer base and new services. And I think we've found a good way with hardscaping.

Using concrete paving brick for patios, driveways and sidewalks has proven to be an excellent and profitable sideline for our landscape business. It doesn't need to be in a new housing project either. More than half of the sidewalks we install are replacements for existing, broken concrete walks.

The International Concrete Paver Institute (ICPI) states that less than two per-

cent of the potential market for paving stones has been tapped. Scott Swierad, sales manager for Unilock, the largest paving stone manufacturer in the U.S. agrees.

"Although our growth has been 15-20 percent a year, I feel we are just seeing the tip of the iceberg," says Swierad.

Jot down on a piece of paper all your customers with broken concrete sidewalks or patios and remember, they are already your customers!



Many supply houses also have seminars and hands-on demonstrations. This helps with doing the design layout, choosing which shape paver to use and getting the proper base down.

Quality pavers, local sources

Concrete pavers are available from a variety of sources, but your best bet is to buy from your local landscape supply dealer, brickyards, or even directly from manufacturers. Avoid thin, flimsy concrete blocks that crack easily and are hard to level.

Quality pavers are made with high-strength concrete and are uniform in shape. The color is blended throughout the paver and isn't sprayed on. Look for the manufacturer's guarantee. Quality producers usually offer a lifetime guarantee on the paver's integrity.

Equipment and installation

Most of the equipment you will need to install concrete pavers is already in your garage. Two things you will need to use are a power plate compactor (a lawn roller isn't heavy enough) and a brick saw or cutter.

I recommend renting these from the rental yard until you have enough work to warrant purchasing them.

As far as installing the pavers, talk to your local supplier or call the manufacturer



Don't be afraid to ask questions of suppliers. Start with some small, simple jobs and work your way up to larger, more intricate installations.



for more information. Most offer help and helpful literature.

"If the installation is bad, it gives the whole industry a black eye," says Swierad. "We offer detailed installation manuals, videos and design aids to ensure the con-

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tractor is educated on the process and the end results are professional."

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Pricing is easy!

When pricing paver work, use the same formulas you use for your other jobs. It may take a few jobs to get the man hours down, but by attending a few seminars and talking to your suppliers, you'll get a handle on it.

Don't forget to include equipment rental costs in your bid price.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Start with some small, simple jobs and work your way up to larger, more intricate installations.

A quick tip: have the materials delivered to the job site. They'll unload it for you and save a lot of time. And don't forget to include any equipment rental costs in your bid price.

Getting into this line of work is quite simple and doesn't require a lot of new investment. It also fits nicely with what you're already doing. Put a line in your Yellow Pages listing that mentions paver installation. Run a few ads in the newspaper, especially during the summer months, when your other work is slowing down.

And don't be afraid to approach your existing customers. □

The author is owner/operator of C.B.D. Landscaping, Inc., Woodstock, Ill. He has been honored by the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association, and in 1986 was named U.S. Small Business Administration "Entrepreneur of the Year."

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