

BY SUE GIBSON / EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Where's your hill of 'beenz?'

Is it me or do many advertisements promote "Something.com?" Suddenly, everyone's a day trader or buying their cars on the Net, not down at "Honest John's" lot.

Let's face it, the Web is shaking things up like nothing has since the evolution of television, and probably more so. It's forcing us to rethink how we buy and sell goods and services, even in the landscape industry.

For instance, have you heard of "beenz?" Beenz.com is a new form of e-money that works like frequent flier miles. You visit a site, receive a "hill of beenz" for your purchase and use your 'beenz' for goods and services at participating Web sites. Soon, you will be able to use your 'beenz' at traditional retail stores. Is this something you might be able to use to benefit your landscape operation? I bet you can.

Remember how valuable stock brokers were just a few years ago? They were indispensable for making our stock trades — but now? We've bypassed the need for a middleman to execute the trades and are fast outgrowing the need for their firms' research. Most e-trading sites offer us the same resources those firms use.

Think about how the Internet is reshaping the way we buy cars. We don't have to haggle with the dealer anymore. We can order online, then breeze into the dealership to sign the final papers. We're ordering direct from the manufacturer.

Whole lotta shakin' going on

So how will the Internet affect our industry? While many dramatic changes have taken place in retailing or manufacturing, the service side is still foggy. Obviously, landscapes will always require the physical

presence of people to do the work, and as the economy continues to roll, that bodes well for you.

But what can you offer on the Web besides customer education, streamlined ordering or service announcements? What will your suppliers offer that will benefit you?

If you want to be competitive when the real millennium rolls around, start thinking now about how to redefine your model of customer service using the Web. It's already changing your role as an equipment buyer — you can now order equipment direct from some manufacturers (see Industry Almanac). Expect to see more of that as the distribution chain evolves.

Will you use it to educate not just your customers, but your suppliers and employees? Will they use it to educate you, order service to fit their schedules or build new partnerships?

Some of you are already expanding markets with the Internet, using it for public service, lobbying and creative networking.

Some of you already use the Web to get new business, make consultations, save time and money, and keep your employees loyal. And you'll discover how instant online monitoring will benefit your customers.

Amazingly, there are already \$2.5 million worth of 'beenz' in our Internet economy, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. Watch for new models like this to sprout up in our industry. They may not change things right away, but I bet they'll change things radically, and soon. — SG

"Watch for new models like this to sprout up in our industry. They may not change things right away, but I bet they'll change things radically..." — SG

