

One voice, one message

Our industry is huge, but not unified. There are many local associations for lawn care operators, landscape contractors and grounds managers, each with opportunities to network with peers and learn something to improve your future. If you don't belong, you should.

At the national level, you have many choices: ALCA, PLCAA, PGMS, ANLA, IA and more. These groups help you network, increase technical and management knowledge, become certified and improve employee programs. You've asked for these services, and the associations responded.

But while each association serves its members, the industry as a whole rarely benefits. I don't see many efforts to show your work has value for homeowners, property managers, regulators and politicians, investors or students looking for a "green" career.

These associations try to do this but their resources are limited and frankly, they've been directed by members to do otherwise. Many co-sponsor the yearly Gallup poll measuring consumers' use of professional landscape services. But there is no coordinated program of public relations targeting shared key groups — those who buy, regulate or staff your services.

Right now, you handle PR on behalf of your industry, in your own marketing and political efforts. If you believe in licensing and professional operations like Troy Hall, owner of Hall's Horticulture Design in Charlotte, NC, you educate your customers yourself. "Public awareness of registered landscape contractors and the extensive testing we must go through should set us above the rest. Whether it does or not is up to me as a sales person," he says.

He's right, but I also think it's up to your associations

to help. It's time to focus more associations' efforts on spreading the message of value. You can't do it alone.

More bang for the buck

Here's what I'd like to see: One unified program, funded by participating organizations, developing first-class public relations and lobbying on behalf of the entire professional landscape management industry. Starting goals with key groups could be:

Consumers — Develop an appreciation for the value of professional landscape management.

Commercial buyers — Understand how professional services benefit their property values.

Investors — Provide accurate and comprehensive industry research.

Regulators and politicians — Provide quick response, accurate data and coordinated lobbying.

Students — Increase existing efforts to explain how great a landscape management career can be.

With one voice, the associations would not have to reinvent the wheel and would have a new "critical mass" carrying more weight with regulators. These messages of professionalism and service value will eventually increase your own respect and rewards.

I'm serious about this and pledge to help get this thing organized. But you need to tell your associations this is important work, with benefits for all. Many voices together make one strong message. Let's talk!

There is no coordinated program of public relations targeting shared key groups — those who buy, regulate or staff your services.

