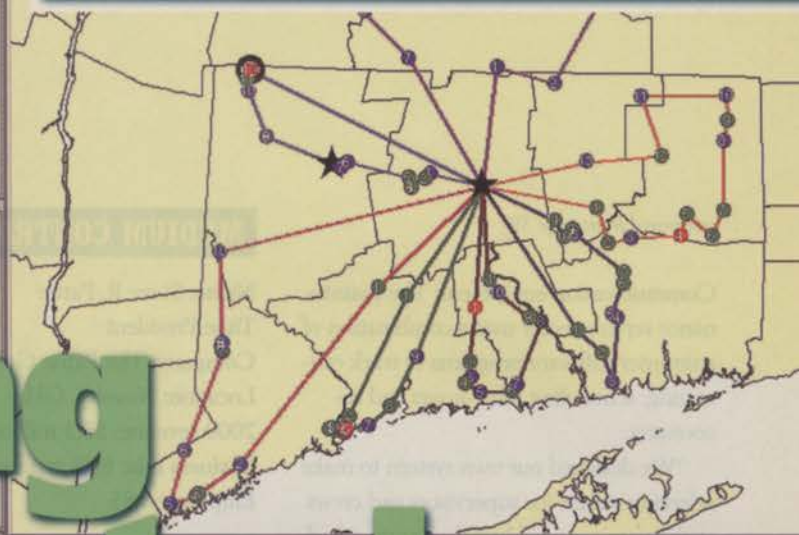


TOOLS OF THE TRADE: COMMUNICATIONS



Staying connected

BY VICKY POULSEN

Landscape professionals are looking for communication and scheduling tools that are easy-to-use, reliable and capable of keeping them in constant contact with their crews. Today's high tech communication devices make constant communication a reality.

A foreman can be at any site and still have a "virtual office." He or she can look up addresses and phone numbers, track jobs and organize the day — all without ever returning to the home office.

With so many communication packages to choose from, contractors today are looking at simplified products that can be customized to fit their communication needs and will give them more bang for their buck.

That explains the popularity behind the Nextel phone. A cell phone and two-way radio all in one, it eliminates the need for a pager because it allows the user to receive text paging.

But a reliable communication and scheduling system doesn't have to be one with lots of bells and whistles, as we discovered when we interviewed these contractors.

LARGE CONTRACTOR

Name(s): Andy Mill, production manager, and Russell Hoff, maintenance division manager

Company: Mill Brothers Landscape & Nursery, Inc.

Location: Ft. Collins, CO
2000 revenue: \$6.2 million

Business mix: Mostly commercial
Employees: 85

Company profile: Founded in 1980, the company offers landscape, irrigation and maintenance services. Of these three divisions, landscape takes the lion's share of its service offerings at 50%, with irrigation at 30% and maintenance at 20%. Landscape services require four-man crews, while maintenance operates with crews of three.

continued on page 60

▲ PHOTO COURTESY: INTERGIS

Three contractors tell how the latest technology keeps their crews in touch and in the loop

Vertex Standard:VX
Portable series of high performance radios



continued from page 59

Communication equipment: The maintenance service sector uses a combination of computer software programs to track estimating, scheduling, man-hours and accounting.

"We designed our own system to make reference sheets for supervisors and crews so they can see weekly if they're on schedule," says Hoff. For updating on a day-to-day basis, the company relies on its Nextel phones, which are distributed to 39 key employees.

Tool of choice: A giant scheduling board with Post-It notes and color-coded job tracking stickers works best for the landscaping side of the business. Mill has his board down to a science.

"When it rains, I can move those sticky notes faster than any computer," says Mill. Every crew has a color-coded line on the board, and each job is tracked from soil prep to completion.

Future purchasing decisions: "We're looking into an electronic time maintenance system which allows you to shuffle a magnetic card into a time-keeping device that is then downloaded into a software program that's good for tracking job costs for smaller functions," says Mill.

Russell says the company has also been looking at Palm devices to help them with routing. However, he admits that the language barrier with their Hispanic employees makes training them on software and hardware a challenge.

"I think a lot of these products have their place in the market," says Russell. "But nothing will replace good, common business sense."

MEDIUM CONTRACTOR

Name: Steve R. Pattie

Title: President

Company: The Pattie Group, Inc.

Location: Novelty, OH

2000 revenue: \$5.3 million

Business mix: 85% residential

Employees: 85

Company profile: The 35-year-old company, which provides 75% design/build and 24% maintenance services to a 85% residential/15% specialty commercial customer mix, also offers a three-year guarantee.

Communications equipment: "Cellular phones are our number one instant communications tool — 100% of our management staff, sales personnel, field production foremen and project managers have them. Around 30% of our technicians have their own phones, and we reimburse them for business calls. Everyone in the field has pagers which allow them to send numerical and text messages to the staff. We also have two-way radios, but they're becoming obsolete and will be phased out quickly."

Tool of choice: "All our tools have to be user-friendly, equipped with multi-task and state-of-the-art features, and perform at rapid speeds. Plus, they have to be integrated with our Internet and digital capabilities."

Future purchasing decisions: "Choosing the right communications tool is critical. We look at dependability, service life and service range for optimal connectivity. We're willing to spend more money on a better product. We just did an upgrade, but are always looking for better, state-of-the-art equipment without going overboard."

SMALL CONTRACTOR

Name: Rick Murray

Title: President

Company: Murray's Landscape Center

Location: Commerce Township, MI

2000 revenue: Over \$1 million in sales

from landscape and design/build and \$675,000 from its garden center

Business mix: Mostly residential

Employees: 15 employees in the landscape division

Company profile: Founded in 1980, this is really two companies in one: a retail nursery and a landscape design/build operation with full construction services including plantings, hardscapes and grading. "We do everything ourselves except for irrigation services." Of its \$1 million-plus revenue in 2000, \$300,000 came from snow removal.

Communication equipment: "Our primary radio is the Nextel. They are great because they allow you to talk one-to-one or as a group. This product is what I dreamed of before they had them on the market. The downside is that sometimes the reception is limited. The pagers are used during the winter months and then our guys turn them back in to us in April." Also, Murray uses a computer estimating program, scheduling board and calendar for job tracking.

Tool of choice: "The Nextels, because they do everything we need. It's cheaper than having separate radios."

Future purchasing decisions: "I haven't found anything out there that would increase our efficiency. The Nextel system is a simple system, and it works."

continued on page 62

Productivity tools

Palm devices, cell phones, radio phones are sophisticated business management tools that can add more profits to a bottom line. A fully-integrated system will allow people, phones and other wireless devices to communicate with servers at office headquarters. Routing, scheduling and billing can all be done in real time.

So what's next? Here's what the manufacturers had to say:

INTERGIS

STEVEN BROWN, SR., PRESIDENT

Product: Visual Control Room software for landscaping industry

Best features: "It can reduce manual dispatch and scheduling time by 75% or more while reducing miles driven. It can increase productivity, control costs and enhance customer service." Accessible over the Internet, it also is compatible with Microsoft Windows 95/NT.

Key trends: "Routing and scheduling equipment and field equipment are both more affordable now. A landscaper can choose to integrate pagers with our system, or choose wireless network devices that let you print out invoices at the job site."

Uniqueness: "All routing/scheduling tasks are linked them together with customer accounting functions."

On the horizon: "The price of field communication products will continue to drop."



by **LITTLE WONDER®**

Xtra powerful + Xtra fast + Xtra performance = Xtra \$\$\$ Profits



Easily cuts through hard soil! Gets the job done quickly and fatigue-free! Outstanding, precise edging results! Puts more money in your pocket.

YES, I'd like to learn more about the revolutionary Little Wonder Xtra Edger, and the 15-day risk-free trial!

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 State _____ Zip _____

**THE XTRA EDGER
 COMES WITH A 15-DAY
 RISK-FREE TRIAL!**

FAX 215-357-1071
 Attn: Kathy
 Dept. L0028
 or mail this coupon.

Little Wonder
 Attn: Kathy
 1028 Street Road
 Southampton, PA
 18966

©2001 Little Wonder

SANGOMA

DAVID MANDELSTAM, PRESIDENT

Product: WANPIPE S-Series WAN cards

Best Features: "Users can add a wide area network (WAN) router to any existing server. Our 'no-box' Sangoma router card fits directly into a server. WANPIPE cards work on a number of operating systems, including Windows NT and Windows 2000."

Design trends: "The products will get easier to use and the prices will come down."

Uniqueness: An all-in-the-box routing solution that eliminates the need for an expensive, stand-alone router and all of its associated cables, connectors and power supplies.

On the horizon: "The cost of high-speed T1 access is coming down very fast."

**SERVICE COMMUNICATION SOFTWARE
 KIMBERLY DEERING, SALES REP.**

Product: Service Pro software

Best features: "A service industry manage-

Circle 125

ment system built by an owner with 25 years experience in the lawn and landscape business."

Design trends: "Handhelds and mapping are key trends."

Uniqueness: "It is so customizable. It works for just about any service company."

On the horizon: "We have two handhelds coming out. A small inexpensive one that fits on a key chain, and a more expensive handheld which will capture more data. Our new Visual Route mapping program shows all of a crew's stops for a day."

VANGUARD COMPUTER SYSTEMS
STEVE SLOAN, MARKETING DIRECTOR

Product: Camelot software system

Best features: "This system offers automatic scheduling and routing, which allows contractors to track jobs and re-route or reschedule quickly. It handles ongoing service accounts and produces analysis/production reports for all employees." It is compatible with Microsoft Word and the Quickbooks family of software.

Uniqueness: "It does not require extensive knowledge of computers."

VERTEX STANDARD
SCOTT HENDERSON, PRESIDENT

Product: VX Portable series of high performance radios

Best features: These lightweight radios have a one-piece, die-cast aluminum chassis with a weather-sealed mike connector, noise-canceling microphone and 700 mW audio output.

Key trends: "Landscapers want small, rugged, light-weight portable radios."

On the horizon: "Having a vehicle (or unit) location built into the radio, whether it is a portable radio or a mobile (one that is hard wired into a vehicle). The trend for more radio at a lower price will continue."

Convertible
A Work of Art

The Convertible is a zero turn rider for mowing open areas; and as easy as flipping a lever, you have a hydro walk behind for mowing hillsides and hard-to-reach places.

Available accessories:

Rich Mfg. markets the Convertible mower through a network of independent distributors and dealers. We are proud that the Convertible commercial mower is not only being purchased by the landscape contractor, municipalities, and government agencies, but by private homeowners. We, as the manufacturer, will constantly strive to make the necessary improvements that will make our product stand out from the rest!

For the location of your nearest dealer call:
Rich Mfg., Inc. • (765) 436-2744
richmfg@frontiernet.net



Circle 126

Sangoma: WAN-
PIPE S-Series
WAN cards



FLEETBOSS GLOBAL POSITIONING SOLUTIONS, INC.
STEVE URQUHART, PUBLIC RELATIONS DIRECTOR

Product: "The Boss" (FMS-2500/FMS-3500) fleet management system

Best features: "Stores GPS satellite data 24/7, recording and verifying the vehicle's locations, stops, and service equipment usage as well as driver habits. The automatic vehicle location (AVL) feature lets a fleet manager find

any vehicle within seconds from the office computer. With the automatic download feature, all stored data is automatically sent to the "home office" computer via 900 MHz radio signal.

Key trends: "This system controls fleet vehicle costs by identifying speeding, engine idle, actual job costing, on-time service and GPS-precise verification. Companies can enforce policies on speeding and off-hours vehicle usage, limiting a

company's liability exposure and potentially lowering insurance rates."

Uniqueness: "This is the only system that combines comprehensive GPS location data and automatic vehicle location (AVL) capabilities in one package."

On the horizon: "Insurance companies are looking closely at GPS technology for fleet management and vehicle tracking. They see reduced loss rates, decreases in speeding and at-fault accidents."

TEMPORARY / SEASONAL LABOR VISAS



SIGN UP BEFORE FALL 2001 FOR APPROVAL BY SPRING 2002*

Call now for information packet and a quote.

Foley Enterprises

Austin (512) 282 3237
Fax (512) 282 0958

Toll Free (888) 623 7285

*Duration of permits is based on eligibility and subject to governmental processing delays

**NEXTEL COMMUNICATIONS
LINDA JENNINGS, DIRECTOR OF
CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS,
MIDWEST REGION**

Product(s): Variety of Motorola manufactured phones designed for business use.

Best features: "Technology — Nextel uses iDEN (integrated Digital Enhanced Network) technology developed by Motorola. It is a completely digital wireless system that combines digital cellular, Nextel Direct Connect, Text/Numeric Messaging, and Wireless Web Services in a single phone. In particular, Nextel Direct Connect® is extremely popular for the construction trades where out of office communication is necessary.

Key trends: "Data capable phones allow Nextel customers to access the Web."

Uniqueness: "Preferred business tool for businesses that need to communicate throughout the day and night. Hundreds of customers use our phones to do the work that they needed several products for in the past. (No more phone, pager and radio to do business, Nextel can do it all and offer wireless web access, too.)

On the horizon: "Nextel continues to look for ways to 'Get Business Done.' We just recently introduced the first Java -powered phone in North America which offers numerous applications specifically for the business customer, including construction calculators, expense pads, voice activation, speakerphone, etc. There'll be more applications to come." **LM**

sports TURF innovations

conferences and exhibitions

An event whose time has come...

Sports Turf Innovations

Focusing on the newest technology, agronomy, and management techniques, Sports Turf Innovations will give attendees an opportunity to participate in industry discussions, listen to industry leaders, and view, first-hand, some of the newest, cost-efficient, and time-saving techniques for turf managers and superintendents.

Special Feature!



REMODELING UNIVERSITY

The American Society of Golf Course Architects will feature "Remodeling University." This "Short Course to a Better Course" is designed to educate golf course decision makers about the basics of golf course remodeling. Remodeling University is sponsored in part by The Toro Company.

**For Attendance/Conference/
Exhibition Information Contact:**
John McGeary • 203-840-5522

To Exhibit Contact:
Jack Ross • 203-840-5421

**September 24-26, 2001
Las Vegas Hilton, Las Vegas, NV
www.sportsturfinnovations.com
1-888-319-1313**



Circle 128