

Increase your customers' satisfaction

Guarantees and complimentary re-treats are just some of the ways lawn care pros can make customers smile more

Customer satisfaction is key in the lawn care industry. While not all lawn care professionals offer written guarantees for their services, most will re-treat at no charge or at least repair damaged areas.

Depending on the region of the country, certain problems crop up more often than others. In Kansas City, Jon Cundiff, owner of Turf's Up, Inc., Lee's Summit, MO, says weeds cause the most callbacks. "Farther north, crabgrass isn't really a problem, but it's probably our biggest reason for going back to a client's property," Cundiff says. "Dandelions are the second biggest problem, followed by grubs."

While grub control is part of Turf's Up's program, some customers choose not to take it. "It depends on whether the customer wants to be proactive or reactive," Cundiff says. "But if we treat for grubs and you wind up with a problem, we'll come out and fix it. Since we've started using

Merit for grub control, we have definitely minimized our return visits."

Because his service doesn't include watering and mowing, Cundiff figures his team does one-third of the work on customers' lawns. "But we're responsible for 100% of the results," he says. "We can't control nature, but customers hold us accountable anyway."

Use service calls wisely

In the Dallas area, GroGreen, Inc. follows a seven-round program for its residential customers. Owner Gary LaScalea offers a strong guarantee: "If you're on our program and you have a problem, we'll go back and take care of it at no extra charge." He looks at a service call as an opportunity to show his customers that he cares. "It's a chance for us to re-sell the account," he says. "I see it as a benefit to us to go out and diagnose the problem. I see it as a good time to communicate with our customers."

LaScalea says there are several advantages to operating in Dallas. With warm-season grasses, his employees can fertilize and treat for weeds even during hot summer months. And most of his customers have built-in sprinkler systems, so when his crews put down an



Darrel Nail, vice president/general manager of Dallas, TX-based GroGreen, Inc., looks at service calls as a way to show care and concern for customers.

application and ask them to water, they usually oblige.

Because most southern landscapes suffer from insect and disease problems, around 70% of LaScalea's customers receive GroGreen's tree and shrub service, too.

"We have different issues in the South, such as fire ants and mole crickets," LaScalea notes. "But it means we're on the property more often, and that gives us more opportunities to please our customers."

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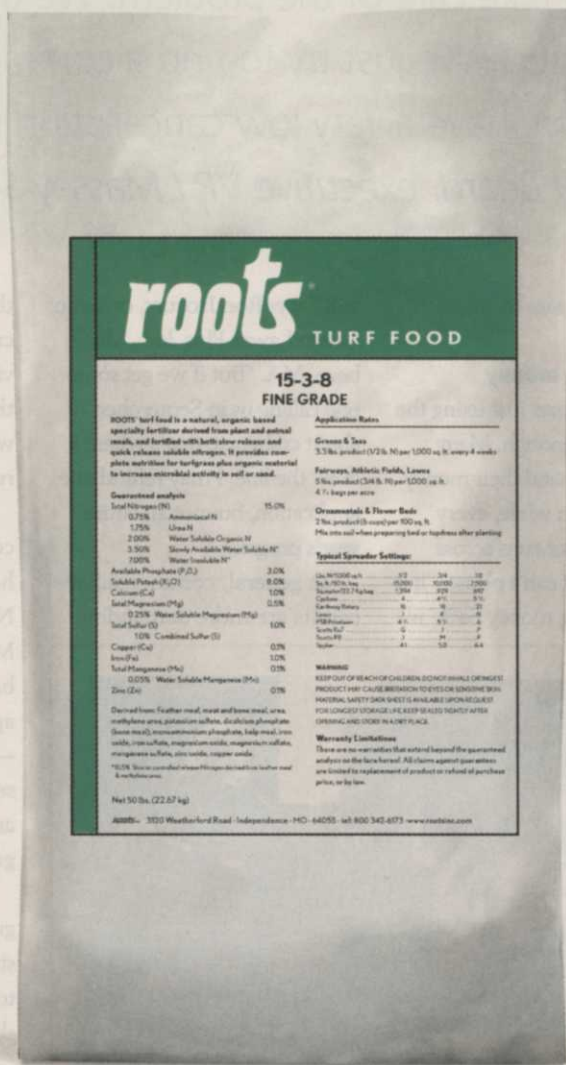
While most lawn care companies guarantee their services, guarantees from the manufacturer to the end-user are not as common. But this year, turf professionals using Merit insecticide from Bayer Corporation for white grub control are eligible for a first-of-its-kind guarantee program. Bayer Corporation offers repayment for retreatment if grubs break through the spring/summer Merit treatment.

To participate, turf care professionals must be members of the Bayer Accolades program and enroll in the Merit Guarantee for Grub Control Program anytime between November 1, 2000 and April 27, 2001. This program is not offered in California.

"We are confident that Merit will work properly under normal conditions," says Mike Daly, brand manager, turf and ornamental products. "But unpredictable weather and environmental conditions can reduce the effectiveness of any grub control material." He adds that the guarantee program will cover the lawn care operator when these situations occur.

For more information about the Merit Guarantee for Grub Control Program, contact your local turf product distributor or the Bayer sales representative in your area, or visit the Web site www.accolades.com.

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Most of the time, people don't really want their money back. They want you to take care of the problem. We do reapplication, put in plants or put in turf. We just try to find a common ground with our customers. Since we have a very low cancellation rate, I think our policy is working."
 — Rick Beard, executive VP / Massey Services

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Show me the money

But sometimes just fixing the problem isn't enough. Many customers demand their money back. Once in a while, every lawn care service runs across someone it just can't please. "If it comes to giving money back, we

will," says Ron Jacques, owner of Green Lawns Plus, Inc., Marlboro, MA. "But if we get someone calling us in September about crabgrass, that's where I draw the line. I may refund one application, but not an entire year's program."

In general, commercial accounts are more demanding

than residential accounts because they usually involve servicing a larger property where the contact person has to work within a budget. As a rule, they want more for less.

"We had one estate account we could never make happy," says Brad Culver of Nitro-Green, Inc., Helena, MT. "I finally agreed to come back two weeks after every application to check on things — but I charged them for the service. They soon switched to another company, and that gave us the out we needed."

Though he doesn't offer a guarantee in writing, Culver states on his invoices that if customers see a problem, they should call back within 21 days.

cancellation rate, I think our policy is working," says Rick Beard, executive vice-president of Massey Services. "The money-back guarantee also holds our employees more accountable for the service they're providing."

The right recipe

Charles King, owner of King Green, Norcross, GA, sends a monthly newsletter to all his lawn care customers. He writes a column called "Charlie's Turf Talk" seven times a year.

He also holds what he calls "manager meets," in which employees visit customers to discuss any problems they might be experiencing. "We try to impress upon customers that you don't buy an application, you buy a program."

Because of his confidence in the program, King guarantees all his company's services. King refunds money as rarely as possible, but he does budget a small amount for re-servicing.

"When you get right down to it, making a repeat application is pretty cheap customer service," King says. **LJM**

Communication is key

In Maitland, FL, Massey Services' GreenUp Lawn Service emphasizes customer communications. With 34 service centers throughout the state and three in Georgia, Massey offers lawn and tree/shrub care, residential and commercial pest prevention, and termite protection. The company offers a money-back guarantee but refunds money in only a few cases.

"Since we have a very low



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