

## The misinformation age

BY RON HALL / Editor in Chief

**W**e live and work in what's often described as the "Information Age."

It can as easily be labeled, the "Misinformation Age."

Maybe you feel like I do sometimes — that we're the targets of a perpetual rainstorm of messages, claims and counterclaims. Which do we process? Which do we believe? Regardless of what we do, where we go, we're pelted with news, sales pitches (some ingenious, some clumsy), spins (corporate and political), opinions, requests, solicitations and rants.

These days most of us don't rely exclusively on the local newspaper or the 6 p.m. television newscast for our daily information. More likely most of it comes from CNN, a podcast from the Internet, an Internet search engine, emails or a favorite radio commentator.

### Not a bad thing

I hope I'm not coming across as a snarling curmudgeon because I welcome and am convinced this incredible flood of information is a good thing. After all, each of us gets to choose or reject the message. *We* can believe or not believe. *We* choose.

Even so, I have reservations. The technology that allows anyone to post practically anything online (Web sites, blogs, YouTube, etc.), and make it instantly available, also brings with it the need for caution and, more importantly, critical thinking.

There's a saying that "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own fact." That may be,

but today's consumers of landscape and lawn services, like us, are bombarded by all kinds of information, and the lines between opinion and fact are often blurred, sometimes intentionally.

### Emotion vs. reason

An obvious example is the issue of the use of chemical products on our lawns and landscapes, which often generates more emotion and heated rhetoric than reason. And it will continue to do so and, probably, intensify thanks, in large part, to technology that gives voice to any organization or person who cares to have one.

But, although the pesticide issue is the easiest to identify, there is plenty of other misinformation in the Green Industry, including the most common — exaggerated product or service performance claims.

As consumers, we must remain critical thinkers and ask questions such as — "Who says?" "Where did they get their information?" "Are they a reliable source for this information?" "What are they not telling me?"

Beyond that — and this is the take-home message — we have to be the source of "information" for the consumers of *our* products and services. We must adequately answer all of the same questions for them.

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