



Smarter better than greener

Our Green Industry is becoming the greener industry. More encouragingly — and this is what excites us — it's becoming the smarter industry. This is what we see happening as we review *Landscape Management's* 2009 State of the Industry survey, the most complete and accurate snapshot of the industry you'll find anywhere.

Our survey shows that our industry is responding to environmental issues by offering an ever-broader range of so-called green products and services. For example, of those who indicated they offer sustainable services, 52% say they offer water-efficient irrigation, 42% natural lawn care, 30% soil remediation, 22% installing rain gardens and 20% ecological restorations.

This trend — driven by a combination of government agencies, the media and slowly accelerating customer demand — is starting to influence buying decisions, as well. Slightly more than a third (36%) of respondents to our survey said sustainable initiatives have “some impact” on their purchase of products and equipment and 12% said they have a “big impact” on their spending.

Nevertheless, many owners and managers are taking a wait-and-see attitude. For example, 18% of respondents indicated they have seen “no demand” for natural or overtly environmental landscape services in their markets yet and another 35% responded demand is negligible but “has potential.”

But there's a bigger picture arising from the survey — and this is what sustainability means to most of us. The survey reveals we're positioning our companies — and by extension our industry — to survive into the future, to be more efficient, to be more productive and to be less wasteful. Partly because of the unsettling uncertainty of our economy and partly in spite of it, we're planning well into the next decade. Sustainability (apart from its fuzziest green connotation) means survivability, right?

After all, in our incredibly competitive landscape and lawn service markets — characterized by reduced margins, higher costs and growing regulatory attention — sustainability boils down to providing clients with what they desire while returning a stream of revenue that rewards us for our efforts and allows us to continue investing in our companies and providing our services.

That's the biggest change occurring within our industry, according to the results of our survey, and the one that will ignite a new period of industry growth when we emerge from today's recession. Here's what you told us in the survey:

▶ About **60% of you** (410 of 679 responses) **said that you prepared a budget for 2009**. This is a much higher percentage than previous surveys.

▶ **54%** (371 of 682 responses) **told us that you have a 3-5 year business plan**. This includes 207 owners and managers who responded that they review it at least once every six months. When we asked that same question a decade ago, the percentage of owners saying they had a business plan was less than half of that.

▶ While you selected customer acquisition as your primary business focus this year, you said your **second most important goal is to improve your systems and build efficiencies within your operations**, another indication that the industry is looking ahead and planning for the future.

After you review our State of Industry report, drop me an email and share a thoughts on what the industry should be doing to remain “sustainable” within our society in the approaching decade and beyond.