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FIRSTCUT

NICOLE WISNIEWSKI EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Perfection obsession?

I recently noticed something in my daughter's behavior that concerns me. Before we leave a room, she likes to put certain toys away. And she's very particular. The bear must be seated to the right of the elephant and the doll must have her shoes on. And all of the toy drawers must be closed — all the way. Not even open a crack. And if there is mud on her hands, she washes them immediately. She's not a fan of dirty fingers.

You might say this sounds like a parent's dream — an organized, orderly child. But I'm concerned at 2½ years old she worries about trying to be perfect too much too soon. Life doesn't always work out to perfection's standards, and I'd hate for her to get in the habit of setting unrealistic goals for herself.

I think some business owners do the same thing. Today, it is drilled into our brains that every little thing must be absolutely perfect or it's considered a failure.

But when we do that we ignore the actual merits of a task, day or project and put a magnifying glass on the one thing that went wrong. It makes employees anxious and uncertain — it crushes their confidence in their work. This lack of self-assurance is apparent to customers who become wary to trust you. And all of this means you, the owner, become miserable.

We are a performance-obsessed society, and with growing technology there is even more room for highlighting each error — and blogging about it, and tweeting about it and having accompanying video and photos as exhibits A and B. As mere humans, we can't sustain this unwavering and intense microscope.

As marketing guru Seth Godin recently pointed out in his blog (sethgodin.typepad.com), this also causes bad prioritization decisions. For instance, "the

owner of a bar says to the manager, "How was the night?" and the response is, "The cash register came up \$8 short." Suddenly there's an urgent problem to be solved. How to replace the \$8 and who to fire?"

But if the question instead had been, "What's up?" — literally, "up," Godin says, "the answer might have been, "There's a big party at table 12, a going away party that's been buying champagne all night, and Mary set a new record for tips."

As you set priorities for yourself remember to look at the whole picture.

You get the point. "Highlighting what's working helps you make that happen more often," Godin insists. "Perfect is overrated. Perfect doesn't scale, either."

While he doesn't encourage ignoring bad news or permitting employee theft, focusing on the successes — in this case, the going away party that surely covered the missing \$8 — might make up for the failures every time.

So as you put out daily fires and set priorities for yourself and your business, take Godin's advice and remember to look at the whole picture.

Time to go finger paint with my daughter. And to encourage her that a little extra paint on our fingers, clothes, table and nose is part of the fun.

Landscape Management

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GREEN INDUSTRY EVENTS, TRENDS AND TIPS

Labor, pesticides top Day on the Hill issues

BY RON HALL EDITOR-AT-LARGE

On July 20, about 80 landscape/lawn service company owners and managers traversed the halls of the Senate and House office buildings in Washington D.C. to educate legislators on issues affecting landscaping businesses.

Not unexpectedly, the two issues foremost on the visitors' minds were labor and pesticides. Specifically, they urged lawmakers to support the H-2B seasonal guest worker program — and to increase the number of visas available to foreign H-2B workers. They also petitioned legislators to reign in pesticide provisions being considered for the Clean Water Act, and to modify the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's

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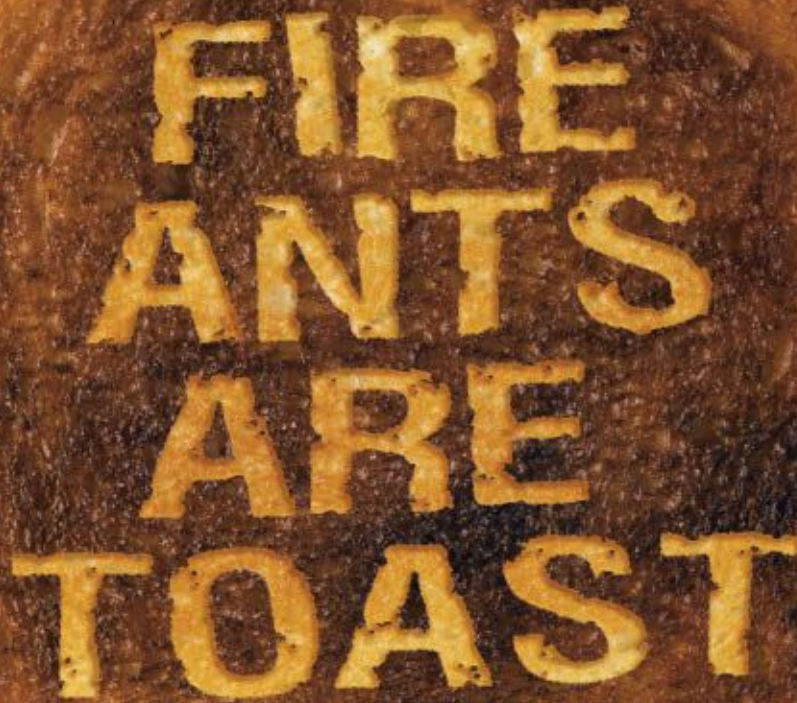


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The Green Industry donates labor, equipment and product to maintain and beautify Arlington National Cemetery.

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(EPA's) proposal for zero spray drift for pesticide applications.

The group was part of the 505 volunteers (450 adults, 55 children) working in the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET) Renewal and Remembrance project at Arlington National Cemetery the previous morning. One hundred companies sent volunteers who provided more than \$250,000 in fertilization, aerification, soil modification, planting and tree services at the 146-year-old, 634-acre military cemetery.

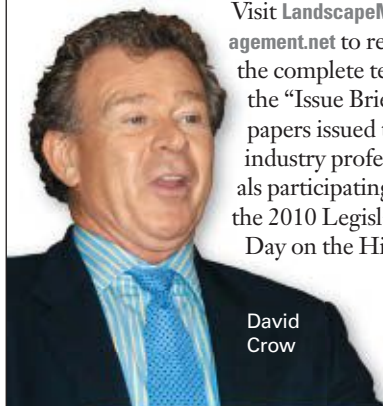
While Renewal and Remembrance has grown into one of PLANET's most popular annual events, its Legislative Day on the Hill, which takes place the following day, was the reason 20 years ago why Green Industry professionals gathered here for learning and lobbying annually in the first place.

"Zero is a very small number," says David T. Crow, president of DC Legislative & Regulatory Services, regarding the EPA proposal to limit spray drift. Crow, who spoke to the PLANET volunteers prior to their Hill visits, said the proposal, if approved, could subject lawn application companies to lawsuits.

"The EPA is going farther than it should go," he told attendees, advising the audience to ask legislators and staffers to modify both this regulation and one in the Endangered Species Act (ESA) establishing 20-yard buffer zones for ground applications of pesticides along waterways in much of the Pacific Northwest in an effort to protect salmon.

Crow urged landscape and lawn care professionals to "encourage" the EPA to develop reasonable approaches to spray drift and endangered species protection that allow lawn care companies to continue to use the pesticide tools needed to maintain lawns, athletic fields and other green spaces that provide significant benefits to local communities.

Visit LandscapeManagement.net to read the complete text of the "Issue Briefing" papers issued to industry professionals participating in the 2010 Legislative Day on the Hill.



David Crow

PHOTOS BY: RON HALL

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Just over 20 years ago, a colleague wrote a short article alerting readers to unflattering data for a product being promoted as the next great chemical turfgrass grub control. Grubs are every lawn's worst nightmare.

My friend hardly expected the backlash resulting from his article that he based on a summary of the research of a well-respected Midwest entomologist. Appearing in an issue of *Lawn Care Industry* magazine, a sister publication to *Landscape Management* at the time, the piece related how the scientist's field-testing showed that the insecticide was being captured by turfgrass thatch and degrading before making it into the soil where, of course, grubs do their dirty work.

The article ignited an angry reaction from an executive with the chemical company. He demanded further explanation from the scientist and a public mea culpa from the editor. The executive insisted his company's research showed that the molecule provided excellent grub control. (Yes, in the laboratory, the molecule probably tested very well indeed.)

Money and reputations were at stake. His company had already started a sizable marketing campaign for the product.

The researcher stuck to his data, and the magazine wouldn't budge either. Both had much to lose — for the researcher, future research funding from the company; for the magazine, advertising revenue.

Not surprisingly, the product, with further testing confirming its unsuitability as a grub control, was allowed to fade away. The executive eventually cooled down, and sometime later in the 1990s his company was absorbed by a larger agrichemical company during a period of furious industry consolidation.

So, what's the point of rehashing this ancient history? The turfgrass industry (indeed, the public) rightfully relies upon a surprisingly small group of experienced and, yes, honest researchers — many

of them working at our major universities — tasked with testing and evaluating the products being developed for the use by professional applicators. In my 26 years covering the industry I'm not aware of a single instance of any of them falsifying data for any company's benefit. There's too much at stake — not the least of which is their reputations.

These researchers tell us what works, why it works and how best to use the modern chemical tools that science provides.

Beyond that, the environmental and human safety protocols established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Environment Canada, which have been regularly reviewed and updated these past 40 years, are among the strictest in the world.

While I'm no expert on the processes our regulatory people follow to make sure the products we use on our properties pose no undue risks to our health, our children's health or the environment, I'm confident they're well-thought-out and result in reasonable decisions.

Has this system always worked perfectly? Of course not. The agrichemical business, and especially that portion of it focusing on developing lawn and garden chemicals and also of regulating their use, is barely a half century old.

Even so, the system — from the university level through the halls of our regulatory agencies and with ongoing refinements — has worked remarkably well. And it continues to work. It's not broken.

That said, some lawmakers in our Canadian provinces and in our state capitals, attracted by what they sense as a populist issue, continue to bend to the emotional rhetoric of groups seeking to ban or restrict the use of products that, I believe, have been rigorously but reasonably tested. These critics unapologetically disparage the opinions (in some instances, integrity) of scientists and regulators most knowledgeable about these products. On what grounds it's not clear.



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CAN **GAS** REMAIN **KING?**

Commercial cutters are warming to the **COST SAVINGS** and environmental benefits offered by **ALTERNATIVE FUELS**

BY **RON HALL** EDITOR-AT-LARGE

Tall and outgoing, Eric Hansen's youthful enthusiasm keeps him investigating better ways to serve his landscape clients.

While his tightly run, 30-person Competitive Lawn Services is best known in the Chicago suburb of Downers Grove for providing reliable service the past 28 years, the past three years he's been moving it in a "greener" direction. He uses propane-powered mowers and handheld equipment, which he is field testing. His service trucks, including a propane-fueled Roush Ford F-350, proclaim "Green Propane Power."

He sees four benefits to propane versus gasoline: 1.) propane mowers emit a smaller amount of harmful exhaust emissions, 2.) it burns cleaner and with less carbon and he saves money with fewer oil changes and reduced maintenance costs, 3.) his units are quieter, and 4.) it's less expensive. Usually.

"Landscape companies should be looking for green initiatives that they can adopt. Using propane is something that we can do," says Hansen.

Propane (also known as LP gas or LPG)

is one of several alternative fuels now being used in mowers. Others include biodiesel, compressed natural gas (CNG) and ethanol.

Their use within the industry is growing, but it's not clear by how much.

The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI), whose members include most mower and engine manufacturers, doesn't track the shipment of mowers manufactured or converted to use these fuels. It does track annual mower shipments as a whole, and more than 90% of the 131,798 new 2010 commercial units are powered by either gasoline or petroleum diesel, the vast majority by gasoline.

"The air-cooled gasoline products for the professional mowing industry represent good technology. The life of the engines match fairly well the rest of the components on the products," says Mark Pavcik, product line manager for John Deere's professional mowing equipment. "Contractors get good value during the life of their machines, and they're good at keeping records, so they're always moving up or trading out their machines."

Pavcik wouldn't get an argument from the >>>

COVER STORY

thousands of commercial cutters who have built their businesses on gas and diesel-powered units.

Hansen admits he's ahead of the curve in his choice of fuel, but he's pretty sure he's on the right track.

"Commercial properties and larger corporations are demanding green from the top down and some are requesting that alternative fuels be used on their facilities," he says.

Boosting development of these new fuel choices for mowers and other maintenance equipment are the U.S. EPA and the California Air Resources Board (CARB), which are pushing lawn and garden engine manufacturers to reduce exhaust and evaporative emissions.

Cost savings

But the biggest attraction, at least for end users, is probably cost. While labor is the biggest *continued on page 18*

ALTERNATIVE FUELS AT A GLANCE

» **Biodiesel** is a domestic, renewable fuel for diesel engines derived from natural oils like soybean oil. Biodiesel can be used with petroleum-based diesel fuel in existing diesel engines with little or no modification. Biodiesel is not the same thing as raw vegetable oil.

» **Compressed natural gas (CNG)** is made by compressing natural gas to less than 1% of the volume it occupies at standard atmospheric pressure. It's stored and distributed in hard containers at a pressure of 2,900 to 3,600 psi. CNG is used in traditional gasoline engines. CNG produces significantly fewer emissions of pollutants like carbon dioxide, hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, sulfur oxides and particulate matter, as compared to gasoline.

» **Ethanol fuel (ethyl alcohol)**, the same type of alcohol found in alcoholic beverages, is often used as a biofuel additive for gasoline. Most ethanol in the U.S. is produced from corn. Ethanol contains approximately 34% less energy per unit volume than gasoline.

Alternative fuels are considered "greener."



» **Propane (LP gas or LPG)** is normally a gas, but compressible to a transportable liquid. It is derived from other petroleum products during oil or natural gas processing.

A mixture of propane and butane, used mainly as vehicle fuel, is commonly known as liquefied petroleum gas (LPG or LP gas). An odorant is added so that people can easily smell the gas in case of a leak. About 90% of U.S. propane is domestically produced, most of it in Texas.

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expense of delivering service, the cost of fuel and equipment are significant, fuel being the most unpredictable. By not making every gallon of fuel work as efficiently as possible, owners forfeit dollars out the exhaust of their mowers. This is true regardless of energy source. The memory of \$4.50 a gallon gasoline

and hated fuel surcharges three seasons ago lingers in owners' minds.

And, yes, alternative fuels offer the possibility of measurable savings.

For example, as this article was being prepared in mid-summer, Ferrell Gas in northern Ohio quoted a price of \$1.88 per gallon of propane for, say, a one-person mowing operation. Because of

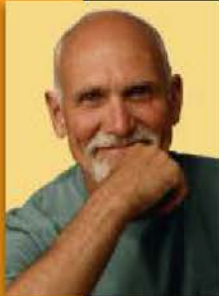
the modest amount of propane purchased, the company charges for pickup and delivery of the 33.5-lb. cylinders. However, a landscape operation using, for example, 200 gallons of fuel a week could expect to pay \$1.63 per gallon. This includes free, twice-weekly pickup and delivery by the supplier. Compare this to \$2.79 per gallon of gasoline in the same region.

Be advised, however, propane prices can be volatile because supply is affected more dramatically by weather and production issues than either gasoline or diesel. Even so, because propane is used for winter home heating, the price falls about the time that spring mowing season begins. About 90% of the propane used in the U.S. is produced

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3. Mowing the same areas of a property twice (overlapping).

4. Operating a mower when it is not cutting grass (e.g. turning, going from one jobsite to another, etc.)

5. Failing to clean accumulated grass from under a rotary deck.

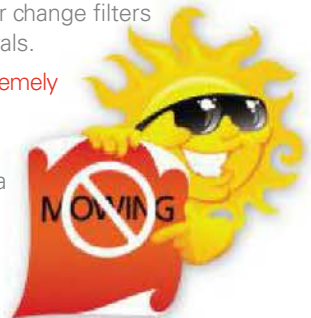
6. Inefficient or unskilled operator.

7. Cutting under loads or cutting wet or very high grass, can reduce fuel efficiency by more than 30%.

8. Mulching decks use more fuel than decks that discharge grass.

9. Mowers with hydrostatic drive use more fuel than belt-driven units.

10. Using bigger mowers than warranted on properties. Heavier mowers typically use more fuel than lighter-weight units.





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Bobcat®

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COVER STORY



Biodiesel figures larger into the fuel mix for diesel mowers.

continued from page 18

domestically — 75% of that in Texas from natural gas and crude oil refining.

“It’s amazing how far LP gas has progressed since 2005 as far as availability,” says Warren Evans of Dixie Chopper, the Coatesville, IN-manufacturer that started selling propane-powered

mowers in 2006.

Evans, in a spring roundtable sponsored by the Propane Education & Research Council, listed these advantages of propane versus gasoline:

- › less carbon in the fuel
- › fewer oil changes
- › less engine wear

- › better fuel stability
- › no chance of fuel contamination
- › no fuel spillage
- › less chance of fuel theft
- › easy to store

Evans says that Dixie Chopper has been running propane-powered vehicles for three decades.

“When I got my drivers license in 1981 the first vehicle I learned how to drive was a shop truck powered by propane,” he says.

At least 10 manufacturers now offer mowers with engines that operate on propane. And there’s a growing market for conversions from gasoline to propane power, as well.

Getting started

For his part, Chicagoland’s Hansen is taking it one step at a time. In 2008, after finding out as much as he could about alternative fuels, he ordered two

continued on page 22

PHOTO COURTESY: THE GRASSHOPPER CO.

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PROVEN SOLUTIONS

COVER STORY

continued from page 20

17-hp, propane-certified Kawasaki engines that he had installed on commercial mowers. Each conversion cost him \$800.

Because he was using less than 700 gallons of propane that season, he paid top dollar for the fuel. After meeting state and local regulations he was per-

mitted to install a fill site at his shop.

Hansen has since been ramping up the number of propane-powered units his crews use. This season he's expecting to use more than 5,000 gallons of LP gas and, of course, he's buying it at a better price. He says the propane industry, which is aggressively attempting to build its presence in the landscape market,



Propane units are becoming more common, especially on commercial and municipal sites.

needs a "step-by-step guide" to help owners like himself.

"The interest in alternative fuels is in its infancy at this point," says Garry Busboom, director of research and development for mower manufacturer Exmark. Nevertheless, Busboom predicts industry adoption will grow as property managers and owners, especially those responsible for government and large commercial properties, seek to reduce the carbon footprints on their properties.

Ruppert Landscape, Laytonsville, MD, reportedly has been testing several different models of propane-fueled units on federal property in the Washington D.C. market, and many contractors and municipalities in Texas now operate propane mower fleets exclusively.

Texas is the hottest market in the U.S. for propane mowers for several reasons. It's where most LP gas is produced. Equally significant, the Propane Council of Texas offers \$1,000 incentives for the purchase of new factory-direct LPG, zero-turn commercial mowers or a conversion of a zero-turn commercial mower with less than 200 hours of operation.

Exmark's Busboom points out propane mowers, unlike gasoline mowers, can be operated during ozone-action days in cities such as Houston when the hours of use of gas-powered equipment are restricted.

The performance factor

One of the biggest concerns with using alternative fuels is performance, the amount of energy provided by each unit of fuel. Since LPG holds 86% of the energy of gasoline, it requires more

continued on page 24



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COVER STORY

continued from page 22

storage volume to produce an equivalent amount of work, according to the Consumer Energy Center.

That's where another emerging alternative fuel, biodiesel, shows an advantage. And biodiesel, unlike propane which is a by-product of refining, is a truly domestic product as it is made from domestically produced vegetable oils.

Diesel provides the most punch for energy dollar (even when blended with biodiesel), and diesel-powered mowers are often the choice for municipalities or landscapers with big or tough properties to cut because they produce more torque and are better able to maintain blade speed in high or wet grass versus gasoline or LPG.

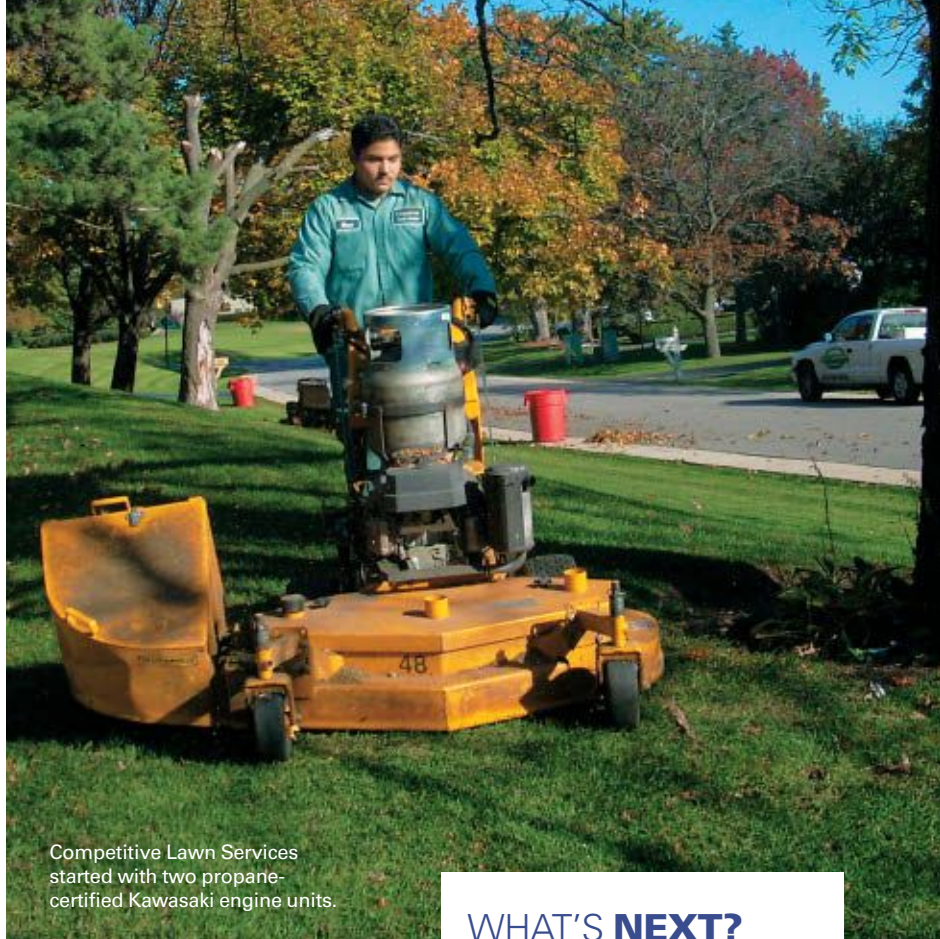
Because diesel fuel contains 12% more energy than gasoline and 52% more than propane, according to the Energy Information Center, it can produce more work per gallon of fuel. Extrapolated over 875 hours of use (35 hrs/wk X 25 wks), fuel savings can amount to as much as 500 gallons per mower, says Ray Garvey, marketing coordinator for The Grasshopper Co.

Additionally, improved engine technology, the introduction of ultra-low sulfur "clean" diesel and the growing availability of biodiesel provide new diesel-powered mowers with many of the same environmental advantages of alternative-fuel units, says Garvey.

He adds that Grasshopper tested propane for mowers extensively in the 1970s before deciding diesel offered its mowing customers more advantages than other energy sources.

Toro, which has done extensive testing on biodiesel fuels and other fuels for years, offers diesel mowers that accept up to 20% biodiesel (B20) in a blend with petroleum diesel. Biodiesel, says the company, is a non-toxic, clean-burning fuel that is biodegradable.

Toro says that B20 is approved for use for all of its 2008 or newer diesel-powered mowers, and offers biodiesel kits to refit 2003 or newer diesel-powered commercial equipment.



Competitive Lawn Services started with two propane-certified Kawasaki engine units.

In spite of appealing reasons for using biodiesel/petrodiesel blends, acceptance by landscape contractors to date has not been robust.

"Biodiesel hasn't really taken off as well as we had initially hoped, and we believe one of the biggest reasons has to do with the pricing disparity that now exists between gas and diesel fuels," says Randy Harris, senior marketing manager for Toro Landscape Contractor Equipment, Bloomington, MN.

"For years diesel fuel prices were much lower than gas. But, about the time we introduced our B20 equipment, diesel fuel prices shot up well beyond gas prices, and remain higher even today. More than anything else, that seemed to put a damper on the appeal of diesel and, ultimately, biodiesel.

"In addition, many contractors express concern about limited availability of biodiesel fueling stations, while others worry about their crews inadvertently mixing-up diesel and gas when refueling."

The National Biodiesel Board maintains a list of retail locations selling biodiesel on its website (biodiesel.org).

WHAT'S NEXT?

» Increased adoption of alternative fuels, especially for mowing government and large commercial sites.

» More prodding from environmental groups, farmers and government for the use of renewable fuels such as biodiesels and ethanol.

» More use of fuel injection on engines.

» Catalytic converters for the exhaust systems of gasoline- and diesel-powered mowers.

» Greater control over fuel spillage and fuel theft.

» Growing adoption of low-permeation fuel systems.

The site lists 1,334 locations across the nation. By contrast there are an estimated 115,200 retail operations selling gasoline in the U.S.

John Deere's new diesel mowers also accept B20.

"We and every other manufacturer are looking to step our way up to higher and higher contents for biofuels," says Deere's Pavcik. "We're dedicated to coming out with alternative-fuel machines, but we want to make sure they deliver the power and job productivity that customers want."

Gas still a contender

Does this growing attention to alternative fuels mean the end to gasoline units? Don't count on it, says Pavcik.

Engine manufacturers remain confident they can produce small, spark-ignited gasoline engines that meet all emission requirements and still offer great value for the price, he says.

"Technology coming to the small, air-cooled gasoline engines is becoming similar to the technology in the gasoline engines in today's automobiles," he says. "Fuel injection is coming on pretty strong. It offers the mower operator

between 10% to 30% fuel savings, depending on where they're running it in the duty cycle."

Manufacturers are making progress in curbing emissions, as well, he points out. Today's mowers generate significantly less exhaust emissions than they did in 1995, when California first regulated small-engine emissions.

Equipping new mowers with closed-loop fuel injection equipped with oxygen sensors and catalytic converters will reduce emissions even more.

While alternative-fueled units offer specific advantages, gas-powered units will remain commercial mowers' work-horse into the near future.

Beyond that . . . we'll see. **LM**

BIODIESEL PRECAUTIONS



- » Make sure you buy biodiesel from a reputable source.
- » Buy fuel that is already blended. This will help ensure that the biodiesel has been properly handled and treated for climatic needs.
- » Never buy from someone making fuel in his or her garage or backyard.
- » Biodiesel is a cleaning agent, which means petroleum deposits may end up in the fuel filter until the system is clean. Stick to your regular maintenance schedule unless your mower feels sluggish when accelerating. This is a symptom of a plugged filter and should be checked immediately.

Source: *The National Biodiesel Board*

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THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author is the owner-manager of 3PG Consulting. Contact him at kkehoe@questex.com.

Sales: The hardest position to fill

The greatest personnel challenge we face these days in building a grounds maintenance business is finding and managing sales representatives. We are deep into the second year of an economic recession, without any real and sustainable uptick in demand or prices in sight. Revenues are flat, at best, for more than 80% of the industry.

Revenue growth comes from two sources only: acquisition or salesmanship. Either way, you are taking market share at the expense of others, and you are buying business. And after two years of cutting costs, there is little overhead left to spare. Therefore, an investment in sales and/or acquisition is a must.

The typical first investment for business owners is hiring a salesperson. The challenge is recruiting someone in sales these days feels a lot like sticking your hand in a bag of jelly beans and hoping to pick the right one. Otherwise, you run the risk of him or her taking too long to produce results.

But if you as the owner are not prepared to invest the time to be the salesperson — and most

owners don't want to — you must find *someone* to do battle out there for you. The alternative is a slow erosion of the top line, resulting from contract losses and decreased enhancement sales.

Reaching your goals

Success in sales is primarily driven by the quantity and quality of sales activities. The key activities are first calls, follow-ups, needs assessment, and negotiation. Even the best salespeople need help managing the quantity and quality of these activities.

As you can see from the chart below, there is very little time to waste in a selling cycle. A sales goal of \$1 million in new contracts at a target job size of \$30,000 per year requires 33 new jobs sold. Applying a close ratio of 22%, the salesperson will need to bid 152 jobs. Given that not every lead qualifies (only 40% typically), the salesperson must make 379 first calls and a minimum of three additional follow-ups to get to bid the job.

Each of these activities requires *time*. By applying reasonable estimates for each activity, it becomes obvious there is little time for marketing activities and inefficiency.

Therefore, because it is not always possible to recruit the best salesperson on the first attempt, you must be certain you establish expectations clearly at the start. Before you hire a salesperson (assuming you do not take the job), there are two things you must impress upon him or her:

- 1. You are being hired to do sales, not marketing.** Marketing is an office activity, and sales is a field activity. You must live in the field.
- 2. Expect your activities to be scrutinized weekly.** You will be managed to pipeline numbers, and if this makes you uncomfortable, don't take the job.

The best hire, of course, is someone who has strong local contacts and relationships and can hit the ground running. You need to find someone who is a planner/doer, undistracted by marketing activities and unperturbed by the close and helpful management of their activities.

	Benchmark factors	Activity	Hours per activity	Hours required	Weekly activity
Sales goal	\$1,000,000				
Target job size	\$30,000				
Number of jobs to be closed	33	Negotiation*	8	267	0.7
Closing ration (likely)	22%				
Number of proposals required	152	Needs assessment**	4	606	3
Qualified ratio (likely)	40%				
Number of first time calls	379	First calls ⁺	0.50	189	3.8
Minimum follow-up calls required	3				
Number of follow-up calls	1,136	Follow-ups ⁺	0.50	568	11.4
TOTAL TIME REQUIRED*				1,630	

* Total time required does not include company meetings, measuring properties and estimating time
 * Negotiation — face to face includes proposal writing, presentation preparation, call time and drive time
 ** Needs assessment — face to face includes preparation, call time and drive time
 + First/follow-up — includes phone and data base documentation time

The next great leap in broadleaf weed control is coming.

October 2010.



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AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Lawn Doctor

CURRENT LEADERS: Russell Frith, president/CEO; Robert Magda, sr. vice president of manufacturing; Ewald Alstadt, vice president of operations & support services; Janice Capiro, vice president finance & administration; Scott Frith, vice president of marketing & franchise development

HEADQUARTERS: Holmdel, NJ, with 460+ locations

EMPLOYEES: 1,500 to 2,000 peak season

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: Past president, Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA); past board member, Professional Landcare Network (PLANET); certified franchise executive of the International Franchise Association

ALSTADT'S HOBBIES: Freshwater and ice fishing

WEBSITE: Lawndocor.com

“Even after 30 years with Lawn Doctor, we still get calls here from people saying, ‘I want to speak with the guy with the funny name that I can’t remember,’ and the calls are automatically passed on to me,” says **Ewald Alstadt**, vice president of operations & support services for Lawn Doctor. “I’m an immigrant, one of the legal ones. I was born in East Germany, and all of my family escaped into West Germany before the Berlin Wall was put up.”

Briefly describe your role with Lawn Doctor. My role is to coordinate and provide support for the Lawn Doctor operating system in the key processes and procedures it provides all franchise owners in our system — the new ones and those that have been in our family for 20-plus years or more. This includes training, business planning/management, marketing, sales, service, equipment, agronomic, horticultural, pest, technology and customer relations.

What’s the most important thing you have learned since joining Lawn Doctor in 1981? First is that Mother Nature is unpredictable, and sooner or later reminds you she is the boss. Second is you must have a plan, whether it’s a business plan or a personal plan for your life. You should have an end in mind and a list of action items that must be executed in order to accomplish your goals. You must plan, and you must execute the plan.

What’s the biggest change you’ve seen in the industry in recent years? Customers are buying differently, they’re communicating differently and their expectations have shifted. We need to focus on customers’ needs, and use new ideas and technology to meet those needs. We have to get better at using our business and operating data to make better business decisions regarding customers’ specific desires.

What about the lawn care business do you find most rewarding? It’s been absolutely awesome to be able to work with new franchise owners and help them get started, grow their business and become successful using our operating system. I’ve formed some great relationships with franchise owners that are priceless to me. This is a great business that affords

owners tremendous operating flexibility, low inventory levels and the freedom to determine their own comfort zones and lifestyle ceilings.

Obviously, you believe franchises still offer great opportunities for individuals. A franchise provides a strong branding message that the public recognizes. From a franchise owner’s perspective, it offers a jump-start to starting the new business or opening up in a new market.

While a franchisor can’t guarantee that an owner won’t make mistakes — everybody makes mistakes — it will do everything it can to reduce the number of mistakes. A franchise also offers the opportunity to join a network of other franchise owners to share ideas and best practices in a non-competitive framework. And, finally, and this is certainly critical

to the success of any franchise and to the individual company owners, it provides a regularly updated and improved operating system that covers every aspect of the business — from the financials to the field service itself.

“THIS IS A GREAT BUSINESS THAT AFFORDS OWNERS ... THE FREEDOM TO DETERMINE THEIR OWN COMFORT ZONES AND LIFESTYLE CEILINGS.” — EWALD ALSTADT, LAWN DOCTOR



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HAIRY BITTERCRESS

Cardamine hirsuta

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ The leaves on this winter or summer annual consist of two to four pairs of round leaflets arranged alternately along the stem, up to 12 in. high. Individual leaflets are round in outline.
- ▶ Small white flowers occur in clusters at the end of stems.
- ▶ It's often found in wet, disturbed areas such as landscape beds, containers or poorly drained turf.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Hairy bittercress can have multiple genera-

tions per year, and is spread by seed that projects when the plants are disturbed. Pre-emergent herbicides are considered to be the best way to maintain control of this weed.

- ▶ When putting in landscape beds, start with weed-free soil. A few weeks after transplanting, apply a pre-emergent herbicide and cover with a layer of mulch. Be sure to read and follow the pre-emergent herbicide label to ensure all of your desirable plants are tolerant of the product.



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YELLOW WOODSORREL

Oxalis stricta

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This perennial features hairy stems and reproduces via seeds and rhizomes.
- ▶ Leaves alternate along the stem with three heart-shaped leaflets.
- ▶ Bright yellow flowers have five petals that flare outward.
- ▶ It prefers moist to slightly dry conditions in rich loamy soil.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Yellow woodsorrel is not easily controlled with two-, three- or four-way

post-emergence herbicides. Repeat spring applications are usually needed. Ideally, a pre-emergence herbicide should be used to keep woodsorrel from becoming a problem. Check the product label to see whether woodsorrel is controlled.

- ▶ Perennial broadleaf weeds are capable of living more than two years. Proper turf maintenance is the key to controlling this weed. Fertilize, mow and water turf to encourage dense growth.

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Lakeside living

THE MISSION

Create a sustainable landscape for outdoor living that complements the contemporary lakefront home.

Owning a home on Idaho's spectacular Lake Coeur d'Alaine might be great, but struggling for access from the property to the water is not. Enter the team of Land Expressions LLC, Mead, WA. With a triple-dream theme of sustainability, safety and beauty, the firm designed and installed a path that winds its way from the house to the lake — and incorporated some living spaces along the way.

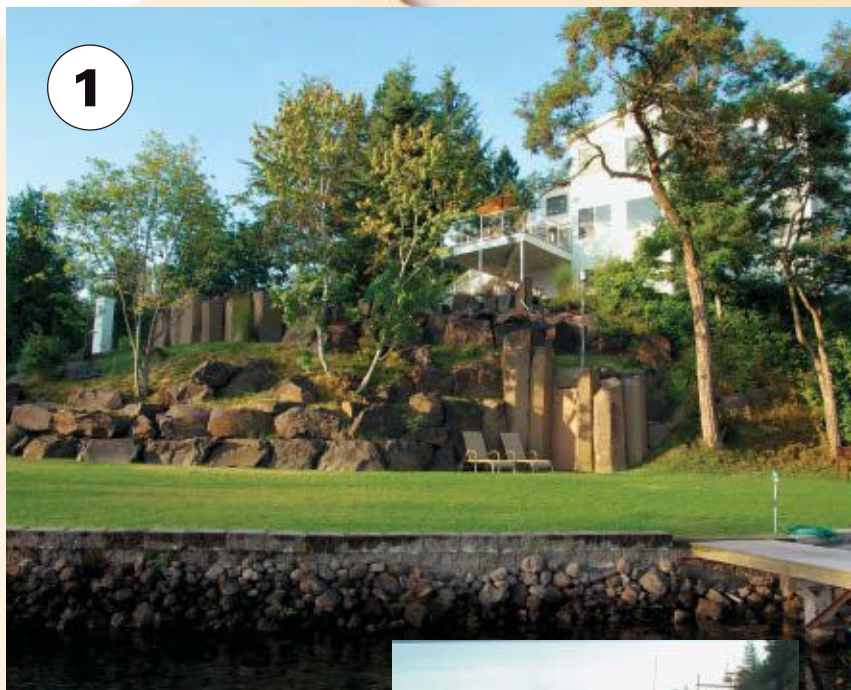
Persuading the client to take a sustainable approach, Land Expressions President Dave Nelson and his team designed and installed a meandering path from the house to the lake. Rock outcropping and basalt columns retained the slope for the patio spaces, taking advantage of the lookout points. The mixed use of stone and concrete pavers created a natural, functional living space.

Limited access for equipment on-site created a challenge as did the arid climate of northern Idaho, which often resists native re-vegetation. The team found the perfect solution by focusing on native grasses and colorful wildflowers. Drought-tolerant trees were retained and carefully protected during the construction process.

"The site was also considered to be 'high-risk' because of the slope and proximity to the lake," notes Land Expressions' Steve Anderson. "Through grading, all storm water runoff was captured in swales."

Sheep fescue was used for a drought-tolerant grassy play area near the lake. In addition, a concrete vault storage room, faced with columnar basalt and a camouflaged door, was designed to blend into the hillside.

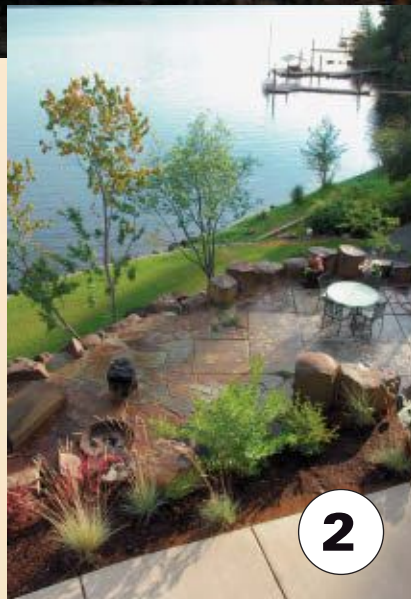
PHOTOS COURTESY: LAND EXPRESSIONS LLC



THE WORK

1 | Keeping it casual. The owners of the contemporary home loved clean lines and strong contrast. They wanted to expand the hillside living space, and were leaning toward a traditional terraced landscape. The design process led the client into a sustainable landscape by showing how a soft natural frame offered a pleasing — and low-maintenance — contrast to the home. Note the hillside storage room tucked away behind the lounge chairs in the picture.

2 | Lakeside patio. Strong vertical retaining walls were built from columnar basalt, maximizing floor space near existing trees. Horizontally, a column is used as a bench for the fire pit. Drip irrigation conserves the water



needed for minimal ornamental plantings near the cozy sitting area, and the overlook offers a spectacular view.

continued on page 35 >>

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**Doug McDuff, President
Landscape America
Wrentham, MA**



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www.nufarm.com/us



« continued from page 32

THE WORK

3 | Smart solutions. Terracing with local natural boulders allowed for meandering paths to easily access multiple patio levels and the waterfront. Preserved plants come right up to the path.

4 | Fans of soft rock. Near the water, stone steps softened by native grasses underscore the natural theme and offer a counterpoint to the vertical columns.

5 | An upward climb. The steep hillsides of Lake Coeur d'Alene too often separate limited outdoor living spaces from the water's edge. The owners wanted this deck connected with the water's edge. Existing steep gravel paths were difficult to maneuver through and were adjacent to an unsightly block wall.

Land Expressions' services include landscape architecture, planning and design, as well as landscape and water feature construction. With more than 20 years in the landscape business, the company takes pride in taking care of all of its customers equally, no matter how large or small. This particular installation garnered a recent Environmental Improvement Distinction Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). For more information, visit LandExpressions.com.

BETTER RESULTS



4-Speed™ XT Saves Contracts

APPLICATION RATE:

1.3 oz/1,000 sf of 4-Speed XT plus spreader-sticker (1 oz/gallon finished spray)

APPLICATION EQUIPMENT:

LT Rich Z-Sprayer, 1/3 gal spray tips

TIMING:

July 13, 2009

SUMMARY:

"This was not ideal herbicide application timing for ground ivy control, but we still had great results on it and all the other weeds on the 4-Speed XT label. As a result, we saved several contracts. We'll be using a lot more 4-Speed XT and other Nufarm products in the future."

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BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author is a partner with the Wilson-Oyler Group. He can be reached at bwilson@questex.com.

Build now for future growth

“**G**rowth? Wouldn't that be nice” is what some companies are saying these days. Still, others have been able to grow through the current downturn in the economy. It might be a mistake to take an overly conservative approach and not plan for growth. When the time comes, you want to be able to take advantage of opportunity, not miss it.

One major challenge for small companies is trying to balance making a profit with building a deep, solid stable of employees who can handle new growth. Most owners try to make these decisions on the fly or on gut instinct. A more systematic way is through the budget process. If, in your budget planning process, you create a budget item for interns or hires for future growth, you can quantify and manage the cost.

Many companies have been able to train employees doing productive work — or you might have them in a non-productive training program, but only for weeks at a time, not all year. Either way, the cost is not as great as you might fear without running the numbers.

Today's hires, tomorrow's leaders

We recommend hiring interns and/or college graduates into your organization along the way, so you have future managerial talent. Many in the industry believe the role of account managers and other middle managers, moving forward, will require a better understanding of technology for communication. College-trained people generally possess these skills, and can be promoted faster.

Too often, owners try to hire experienced people from other companies when they need managers. The success rate on these types of hires is lower. One simple explanation is that there is a reason this type of employee is available. The fact is, when a company has a good employee, it rarely lets him or her get away.

Strange, isn't it, the same companies hesitant

to invest in training and developing a deep bench, are willing to pay big dollars to headhunters to find people when they're needed? The same investment redirected to training and development of key employees is a much better use of those funds.

We subscribe to the build-from-within strategy. This works well if you have the right mindset and system for mining talent. For example, within your ranks of gardeners, identify the higher-potential employees for promotion to crew leader. Most companies wait until they need a new crew leader, then either try to go outside to hire an experienced one or promote the best gardener. The flaws in these approaches are that the best gardener is not *prepared* to be a crew leader — and, again, hiring from the outside has a lower success rate.

The better approach is to identify a high-potential employee and team him or her with a good crew leader. This ensures the employee is trained and ready when needed. There is no real increased cost for this; it just takes organization and planning.

Education vs. experience

Most companies that hire college grads find they move up the ranks more quickly because of a higher level of interest in horticulture and a better education base. True, these grads often initially do not work physically as hard as their peers, which can be a problem, but remember you are hiring them for their potential. As an owner, you must be their advocate and help them become successful.

This is not to say that you should *only* hire from within for experienced people. If you do hire experienced people and bring them into your company, you bring differing viewpoints and experience sets, which is good for all organizations.

It is a good policy to always be looking for good people. When a good one comes along, bring them on to help build the bench. It is when you have to go outside in a time of need that you often end up settling just to get “someone.” That's when mistakes are made.

SNOW+ICE

GUIDE



Snow tech, down cold

New sprayer designs allow the flow rates to be adjusted from the cab.

PHOTO COURTESY: SNOMEX, A DIVISION OF TRYNEX INTERNATIONAL

TO A SNOW AND ICE management contractor, a truck is like a second home. Fifteen-hour workdays aren't uncommon, so having a comfortable, reliable vehicle is crucial. And, let's face it, equipment that allows the operator to spend a bulk of time inside the warm cab — and not out in the cold — is extremely valuable.

Just as trucks have evolved and become more durable, efficient and ergonomic over the years, snow and ice management equipment has improved as well. In recent years, plow, spreader

New designs to winter maintenance equipment keep contractors productive — and in the cab.

BY **BARRY TRUAN**

and sprayer manufacturers have implemented several new features, designs and upgrades to existing equipment. Here's a look at some of the most significant developments and how they are having a positive impact on contractors' day-to-day operations.

Lighten up

Perhaps the biggest advancement in recent years has been constructing equipment with lightweight, yet durable materials to reduce weight concerns. These significant weight reductions are beneficial to both the operator and the truck: Less weight from equipment equals reduced stress on the truck's ball joints and the vehicle itself, resulting in a truck that will last longer and require less maintenance. A contractor can spend more time in the cab — plowing snow and spreading or spraying deicing materials — and less time outside repairing the truck.

One example is the use of a material called Lexan. Originally used in the visors of space helmets, Lexan has

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OR



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Wings are standard on many new models of plows. They are available as simple attachments for contractors who would like to implement them on existing plows.

1990s. Its main function is to lower the impact force to the plow and eliminate potential damage to it and the truck when a trip hazard (such as a sewer cap or speed bump) is encountered. The unit features spring mounting, which tips the plow forward — also called “tripping over” — to avoid a hazard. A 4- to 6-in. cutting edge is attached to the bottom of the snow plow to further lessen impact.

This technology originally came with a drawback: The entire plow would engage in the tripping action. The bottom portion of plowed snow would be left behind, and the contractor would have to go back and replot. With newer advancements on some plows,

just the cutting edge folds under when a trip hazard is encountered. The snow pile stays with the plow and the contractor doesn't have to go back and reclear lost snow.

This simple enhancement greatly improves efficiency during the workday. But the jobsite isn't the only place efficiency is important. For many, a work truck doubles as an everyday vehicle, so the ability to attach and

remove equipment easily is imperative.

Easy on, easy off

Roughly 10 years ago, a plow, its lights and hydraulics all needed separate mounting. If a contractor wanted to use the truck for a quick trip to the supermarket, he or she would have to remove the plow, as well as the lights and hydraulics. Not only that, the process was time-consuming and very difficult for one person.

With today's newer mounting brackets, plow mounting and dismantling is faster and easier. The plow and its accessories are attached and removed as one unit.

This process has also been improved with current spreader technology. Consider a contractor who frequently needs his pickup for towing purposes.

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become a popular material in plows for good reason: It weighs much less than traditional heavy-gauge steel.

Consider the effect on a 7.5-ft. plow. A steel-constructed unit of this size would weigh roughly 850 lbs. A Lexan-constructed model could weigh up to 90 lbs. less — approximately 10% lighter — than a similar sized, steel-built snow plow.

Many manufacturers are also trending toward polyethylene, another lightweight, yet durable material. For a typical salt and sand spreader, polyethylene construction can reduce its empty weight by as much as 40% when compared with a similar steel-built model.

These significant weight reductions not only increase the truck's longevity, but also give the operator more flexibility in terms of the amount of equipment he or she can carry or attach without exceeding the gross vehicle weight rating.

Spreading their wings

Speaking of lighter weight, imagine being able to add 20 in. of blade width to a snow plow, while still keeping its weight to a minimum — all while pushing snow more efficiently. Thanks to the launch of plow wings in the past five



To expose the truck's hitch, the spinner can be quickly removed on some of today's spreader models.

years, this is now possible.

Plow wings eliminate the need to angle a plow in deep snow by “cupping” the ends of the unit, which encourages snow to roll off both sides. A contractor doesn't have to spend time angling the plow, and the added length means the unit can clear more snow per pass, further increasing efficiency. In fact, it's estimated wings can reduce plowing time by up to 50%.

While wings are a perfect illustration of one of the more recent developments in equipment, this next feature is an example of a newer enhancement to an established plow technology.

Road trip

Plow manufacturers have been including a feature called a “trip edge system” on plows since the mid-

SNOW + ICE GUIDE

With some models, the spreader assembly must be unbolted — or the entire spreader must be removed from the truck's bed — before accessing the receiver hitch. Many manufacturers offer new designs to make this process easier. Some new systems mean a snow and ice contractor now only



Ergonomic, easy-to-operate control pads have replaced older toggle-switch models.



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has to remove one pin and the spinner assembly to expose the truck's hitch. The conversion takes place in seconds and can be done by one person.

These features are extremely beneficial for the many contractors who have multiple uses for their trucks. However, contractors still spend countless hours in these vehicles, so many demand a higher level of comfort.

Stay in control

Think of setting up an office or home workspace for ultimate comfort and productivity. Adjusting a chair to a certain height or ideally positioning a computer monitor and keyboard are examples of ways to make a workspace more ergonomic. For a winter maintenance contractor, the truck's cab is the office. So it's no wonder that plow, spreader and sprayer manufacturers have designed new control options to let users customize and make their workspaces more comfortable.

First, being able to control all equipment from inside the cab is a major benefit. Take sprayers, for example. Previously, a contractor would have to park, exit the truck, and venture out in the cold to manually activate or adjust the sprayer. But today's new in-cab control systems allow the operator to set liquid flow rates and activate the sprayer, all from the warmth and comfort of the cab. In-cab controls are also available for plows and spreaders.

Second, when in-cab controllers were first introduced, they weren't very user-friendly; many were only offered in the form of toggle switches. After several hours of flipping the switches,

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**THERE'S A REASON THAT
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continued from page 40

operators would be left with sore fingers and indents from the repeated on-and-off motion.

Fast-forward to the present, when one can choose from several easy-to-operate controllers. Options include joysticks, pistol-grip pads or simple rect-

angular pads that can be mounted to a dashboard or attached to the driver's leg. All of the available options let a contractor personalize his or her control set-up, resulting in the most comfortable, productive "office" on four wheels.

For as much time as snow and ice maintenance contractors spend with

PROTECT THY TRUCK

Whether you're getting into the snowplow business or spending this winter's blizzards indoors, make sure you have the right insurance for your truck. Commercial auto insurer Progressive offers these tips.

» If you're planning to plow, call your agent or insurance company to make sure your truck is fully insured for its value, including the cost of a plow or other equipment. If you have a full coverage policy, you should be ready for the snow — but check with your agent or insurance company to make sure.

» If you're planning to store your trucks and want to save money on your insurance while you're not driving them, consider switching to a comprehensive-only policy. This coverage protects your vehicles against incidents like vandalism or hail that can happen when they're sitting for long periods during the off-season.

» If you decide to cancel your liability insurance, check with the department of motor vehicles first. There may be some additional steps you need to take to comply with the insurance laws in your state.



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their trucks, improvements to the equipment — no matter how small — shouldn't go unnoticed. As engineering becomes more advanced, new features will continue to be implemented. Combine the aforementioned developments with inevitable future enhancements, and the day-to-day operations of these professionals will keep improving.

It's not a minute too soon. When a work environment includes below-zero temperatures, dangerous wind chills and unpredictable drivers, every extra minute spent inside the cab — and not outside working on the truck and its equipment — is extremely valuable. **LM**

TRUAN is sales coordinator for TrynEx International. He can be reached at Barry. Truan@trynexfactory.com.

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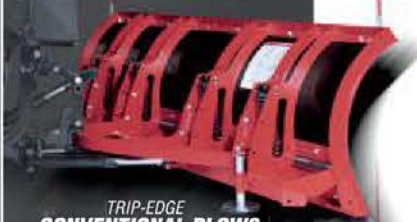
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Hiniker offers a *comprehensive line of professional grade* snowplows to meet the demands of the toughest conditions and snowplow operations.

V-PLOWS: Trip-edge design gives smooth operation and effective protection with a nine-inch high pivot point. Double acting cylinders provide positive moldboard position control.

C-PLOWS: Get the heavy-duty performance of the Hiniker trip-edge conventional plow plus the added versatility of a high performance backdrag plow. An amazing time-saver in driveways, parking lots and loading docks.

SCOOP PLOWS: High capacity concave shape captures snow to efficiently clear lots and parking areas. Angles left or right for conventional plowing.

CONVENTIONAL PLOWS: 30 inch tall high-curvature blades roll deep snow off quickly and efficiently. Commercial plowers will appreciate the extra strength and efficient design.

HOMEOWNER PLOWS: Low-maintenance poly moldboard surface reduces friction, never needs painting. 6 vertical and 2 diagonal ribs provide strength and support.

The *Quick Hitch* mounting system is interchangeable with all Hiniker snowplow models, adding versatility to your snowplow fleet.



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PRODUCTS

Fully hydraulic

Available in two models — the 6.5-ft. Power-V XT and the 6-ft. Poly Straight-Blade Snowplow from **The Boss** — these new UTV plows feature a high-performance, fully hydraulic system. The hydraulic pumps are fully enclosed to protect against corrosion and hydraulic freeze-up for unmatched durability. Operation of the hydraulic and electrical system is done with the touch of a button from inside the cab, making lifting, lowering and angling the snowplow fast and easy. In addition, the sloped-profile undercarriage does not hinder ground clearance or inhibit trail riding when the snowplow is detached. BossPlow.com



Snow and ice melt

With a complete line of ice and snow melters, the Vaporizer name has become synonymous with environmentally responsible and effective ice melting products. Its manufacturer/producer, **Gro-Well**, is centrally located in the northeastern U.S. and offers pick-up and delivery options. Gro-well.com



On-road rock star

After five years in development at Custom Chassis Inc., **GVM** will begin producing the PowerPlatform — a multi-purpose machine offering high speed, maneuverability, a large cargo capacity and excellent operator visibility, while still maintaining a road-legal 102-in. tire width — in December 2010. The first units will be ready for delivery in early 2011. The four-wheel-drive municipal machine can reach road speeds up to 45 mph. It features three steering modes: front steering, coordinated steering and crab steering. The frame design allows it to turn with a 9-ft. shorter radius than a pickup truck. This capability allows the vehicle to turn around on a two-lane road intersection and maneuver through cul-de-sacs. GVMInc.com

Go iSNOW

Measure with accuracy

The user-friendly and secure Web-based **Go iSnow** program helps accurately measure properties from up-to-date, high-resolution aerial photos, allowing for more accurate bid creation. Measure — and color-code and label to your custom specifications — parking lots, sidewalks, loading docks and other areas to give customers a professional and realistic idea of what your services can entail. GoiSnow.com

Pivot point

The heart of the Ice Breaker is the trip design. Traveling unsafely over manhole covers at any speed can be devastating. The **Degelman** Ice Breaker was designed with one of the highest pivot points in the industry that geometrically minimizes tractor shock. The coil springs themselves never hit dead bottom and wrap round 1.75-in. solid steel shafts. The spring return is even dampened by specially designed urethane donuts to reduce shock. Degelman.com



Garage melter

According to **Snow Dragon**, the SND580 is the first snowmelter that can be used on the top deck of a parking garage, as well as for standard snowmelting applications such as shopping plazas and parking lots. The dual-axle unit weighs approximately 10,000 lbs. filled with fuel and water and 6,500 lbs. empty, allowing it to be towed by a properly sized Ford 150, Dodge Ram 1500 or higher. It measures 16 ft. in length, 6 ft., 3 in. in width, and 6 ft., 2 in. high at its tallest point. The melt rating on this 5.8 million snowmelter is 18 tons/hr (75 to 175 cu. yds.). SnowDragonMelters.com

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WIDE-OUT™ ADJUSTABLE WING SNOWPLOW: AN UPGRADE THAT PAYS FOR ITSELF

"In our condo complexes we have to carry snow over hills and around corners. With the WIDE-OUT you can angle the blade and contain the snow even around corners. You can't do that with a V-plow. So what used to be a one-hour job, is now a 30-minute job. We can do 10-11 properties in the same time it used to take to do 6-7 properties. I guarantee you I can plow twice as fast."

Kale Christman // The Ground Specialists // Valparaiso, IN

"The best thing about the WIDE-OUT is that beginners are more efficient right from the start. Especially when it comes to containing snow between cars in busy parking lots. According to our numbers, we're 35% more efficient, so for every three trucks we outfit with a WIDE-OUT, it's like getting a fourth truck and driver free. And that makes us more profitable. Period."

Shannon Shaw // Pinnacle Property Maintenance // Columbus, OH

"Since I upgraded my old V-Plow to a WIDE-OUT, I'm able to finish my jobs at least 20% faster. When you can use 80% of the blade versus half, and angle the blade to carry snow around corners without spilling off, it makes a big difference. Next year I plan to upgrade another truck with a WIDE-OUT."

Paul Kiedrowski // Oconomowoc Lawn // Oconomowoc, WI



Financing Available



www.westernplows.com



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Blade III

Earth & Turf introduces three new easy-to-install, clamp-on snow blades for Compact Tractors. The SC series available in a 60- and a 72-in.-wide, 19.5-in. high blade designed for compact tractors under 35 hp. The S series is a 90-in. wide, 26-in. high, clamp-on blade for tractors 35 hp and over. All three are full featured blades with manual angle 30 degrees left or right, full blade spring trip that can be locked out for light grading jobs and bolt on reversible cutting edges to save money. EarthAndTurf.com



Compact units

SnowEx's new SR-110 and SR-210 utility spreaders are equipped with wireless controls, which eliminate the need to route an electrical harness to the cab and allow plug-and-play operation. Both models attach to a variety of vehicles, including pickups, SUVs, cars, utility vehicles and ATVs. Both feature a 3-cu.-ft. capacity hopper. The pocket-sized wireless remote controls the rate of the two-speed spinner and toggles the electric motor on and off. The SR-210 (pictured) spreads up to a 25-ft. range and features a vertical high-flow auger that works in conjunction with the spinner; the SR-110 spreads material up to a 20-ft. range and uses a gate feed system, allowing it to handle small calcium chloride pellets or bagged ice melters. TrynexFactory.com



Stake your claim

By using **Discount Snow Stakes'** strong, yet flexible fiberglass composite snow stakes, you will efficiently mark off properties — minimizing any damages that may occur during the snow removal process, and lowering all your overall costs. DiscountSnowStakes.com



Quick-change blade

Designed for use with articulated four-wheel drive **Ventrac** compact tractors, the new 55-in. KV552 V-blade snowplow maximizes efficiency with the ability to quickly change from V plow to scoop to straight blade, all from the convenience of Ventrac's exclusive S.D.L.A. control system. Standard features include a 48-in. V width, hydraulically activated wing cylinders, mechanical trip, adjustable cast iron skid shoe discs, reversible high carbon hardened steel cutting edges, and a center shoe for gliding over rough terrain. Ventrac.com

High efficiency

The **Manplow** Pro 36 features an extra-wide, 36-in. blade and the exclusive EZ Glide Edge, both of which increase efficiency. Spend up to 75% less time shoveling. Your 9.5-lb. Manplow will arrive with the EZ Glide Edge already attached to the blade. Simply tighten the four bolts, and you're ready to go. Hardware and wrench are included, and replacement EZ Glide Edges are available. Manplow.com



Patented process

H & H Processing is a manufacturer of high-performance ice melter products. They offer on-site salt stockpile treatment and ready-made ice melt products in bulk for roadway and parking lot anti/deicing. Its Winterguard Pro blended ice melt is available in bags by the pallet and truckload delivery. Its patented manufacturing process delivers both product performance and value. handhinfo@aol.com

Tapered blade

Meyer's second-generation V-plow, the Super-V2, features a 70-in. attack angle and a blade that tapers from 38 to 30.5 in. to provide snow rolling and throwing action similar to that of a highway plow. The Super-V2's bottom-trip design holds most of its load if an obstruction trips the plow, reducing the number of passes required to finish a job. The bottom-trip design also

allows the plow to trip, regardless of how the wings are configured. Components of this new Meyer plow are interchangeable with the standard Meyer Super-V plow. MeyerProducts.com





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Corona Clipper

The Spring Brace Leaf Rake, model RK 24003, features a fan-shaped, 24-in. head with 24 tines that combines flexibility with durability. A stress distribution bar prevents the rake's flexible metal tines from breaking under pressure. The RK 24003's frame and tines are fully coated to resist rust, and its 54-in. wood handle is designed to withstand years of tough professional use. CoronaClipper.com

Grasshopper

Grasshopper Turbine Blowers clear debris from congested, hard-to-reach or wide-open areas and long stretches of walkways and curbs quickly and quietly. They also offer 360° nozzle rotation — controlled remotely from the operator's station — to direct airflow precisely. This reduces high-volume cleanup time along walking paths and around sport facilities, parking lots, playgrounds and cemeteries. GrasshopperMower.com/turbine



Gravelly Turf

The robust ProVac 1060 features a large, 3.5 cu. yd. hopper capacity for large leaf collection jobs. Its 60-in. adjustable intake scoop allows the operator to pick up pinecones, trash, leaves and more. Debris can be removed from turf or cement. An optional hand vac unit provides an extra 10 ft. of reach to vacuum leaves from under shrubs, along a fence line or between stadium bleachers. The unit features an 18-hp Kohler Command Pro Engine and a 6-gal. fuel tank for fewer refueling stops. It features an all-welded, rectangular structural frame, 14-gauge steel construction, ¼-in. abrasion-resistant plate and a 17-in.-diameter, six-blade steel fan impeller. Because no power takeoff is needed, the self-contained unit can be pulled with a utility vehicle or anything with a pin-type tow bar. Ariens.com

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LAWN CARE: SPRAYERS

Husqvarna

Three new sprayer models have standard features such as high-grade Viton/Nytril O-rings, seals and gaskets; pistol grip with built-in filter; fiberglass or brass wand; and extra-long hoses. Professional backpack sprayers feature a repairable internal piston pump and offer spray pressures from 15 to 168 psi. Commercial backpack sprayers are available with an external piston pump or a sealed diaphragm pump, both of which are repairable and offer spraying pressures from 15 to 50 psi. The diaphragm pump has been

engineered so there's no friction between moving parts, and the piston pump has been retooled for better sealing and longer wear. Husqvarna.com



TurfEx

The new US250 sprayer features a universal mount that allows it to attach to the front of most available zero-turn mowers. This mounting system stays within the mower's footprint, unlike competitive tow-behind units. The US250 is completely electric powered, meaning there are no engines or hydraulics to maintain. Driven by a 12-volt electric motor, the sprayer draws its power from the mower's battery. The pump is rated at 2 gal. per minute at 60 psi, and the corrosion-resistant polyethylene tank holds up to 25 gal. To apply liquid, the US250 features an adjustable spray wand, which is attached to 25 ft. of hose. Tynexfactory.com

DESIGN/BUILD: SKID STEERS & ATTACHMENTS

Titan Tire Corp.

The new Ultimate tire line is designed to provide extra-long life with up to twice the tread depth of conventional skid-steer tires. Damage resistance is accomplished by an extra-heavy sidewall and a larger rim guard, while the high void-to-lug ratio offers traction. It's available in two sizes: 10-16.6 and 12-16.5. Titan-Intl.com





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Vermeer Corp.

With a rated tip capacity of 2,400 lbs. and SAE rated operating capacity of 840 lbs., the new S800TX mini skid steer can efficiently lift and transport a large load of material in and around confined spaces. The hydraulic system of the S800TX is capable of providing 14 gpm, while a spring-cushioned, ride-on platform offers broad jobsite visibility. The 40.5 in. wide unit is powered by a 35-hp diesel engine. A universal mounting plate allows operators to quickly switch attachments. Vermeer.com

Caterpillar

A new laser-based AccuGrade grading system for Cat C-Series skid-steer loaders, multi-terrain loaders and compact track loaders combines the capability of the "Level Best Grading Box" with the C-Series loader's integral electro/hydraulic controls, to create an accurate, automated grading system. The system establishes flat or single-slope grades to within ± 0.25 in. without grade stakes or the expense of grade checkers and stake-setting surveyors. Machines grade more area per hour — and are more fuel-efficient in the process. Cat.com



John Deere Construction

The D-Series skid steer loaders (318D, 320D, 326D, 328D and 332D models) feature 24% more room than their predecessors and 6 in. more headroom. They're also quieter, positively pressurized and feature a larger door opening. The 50% noise reduction in and around the D-Series cab comes from a hydraulic fan drive, an auto idle feature (which also saves fuel) and electronically controlled engines. Johndeere.com



Bobcat

The S650 skid-steer loader (pictured here with a snow blade attachment) is part of the M-Series line of compact loaders and excavators launched in 2009. It has a rated-operating capacity of 2,690 lbs. and an operating weight of 8,327 lbs., and features a vertical-lift-path design. Standing 6 ft., 9 in., the unit has a maximum travel speed of 12.3 mph and a standard hydraulic flow of 23 gpm. Options include selectable joystick controls, two-speed travel and high-flow hydraulics. Bobcat.com/loaders

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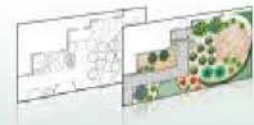
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GREEN INDUSTRY MAINTENANCE LEADERS » BY DAN JACOBS

Not many CEOs will admit they knew little or nothing about the industry when they took over the reins, but that's the situation **Anil Hiremath** found himself in when he moved from the auto industry to The Groundskeeper six years ago.

"I was just so ready to get into a work environment — a company — where I could really make a difference," Hiremath says. Hiremath came from Toyota, but now uses his business acumen to run this Tucson-based landscaping operation. Here he discusses the issues the company and the industry face.

TOP TRENDS

» **One-stop shop.** Customers are not just expecting one or two things from a contract provider; they're looking for a full range of services. To be a successful contractor, you can't just say 'we're here to trim and prune, pick up trash and cut the grass.' You've got to really be thorough in what you can cover. Customers don't want to be nickel-and-dimed. You have to find a creative way to package that stuff into one monthly amount that works for you — and works for them.

» **Money vs. relationship.** Bidding methodologies are starting to change. We're put through more online and reverse auctions. They want one price for all of their properties. It's taken relationship out of the equation and, to a certain extent, quality and customer service.

» **Vendor consolidation.** Larger customers are looking to consolidate what they do. They are looking to save money by having consolidation of vendors. They're making us do the work of managing the property vs. having facility managers manage a bunch of vendors.

TOP OBSTACLES

» **Increased competition.** We're seeing a ton of outsiders coming in. People who are primarily construction or design/build are now getting into maintenance because of the lack of work on their side. It increases competition, and many of these guys don't have a thorough understanding of how to bid, and then perform these



The Groundskeeper's
Anil Hiremath

INSIDE INFO

Company: The Groundskeeper

Headquarters: Tucson, AZ

Employees: Nearly 800 full-time

2009 revenue: \$36 million

LM Top 150 Ranking: No. 25

Key to being a maintenance leader: "For us, hands down, it's easily been how we're training and really focusing on our employees with regard to maintenance. There is a specific difference among design/build, construction and even improvements/enhancements. Every new employee has a 30-day routine they've got to go through. We've stuck to our rule of no more than 20% construction. When you really focus on your core competency, that's how you become a maintenance leader. You can't be all things to all people."

maintenance jobs. It's really muddying the water and making it tough for those of us who hang our hats on this shingle.

» **Pricing pressure.** There's the continued downward pricing pressure due to the economy. We've actually seen the price decreases — or at least the rate of the decreases — significantly slowing down. It may have bottomed out, but we don't see that trend reversing itself in the next few months or, even, year.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

» **Initiative.** This has been a time to build partnerships with our clients. We are being proactive: 'We know your budgets are down; we know your revenues are down. We're willing to accommodate a lower price. Let's discuss the scope of services.' It's not realistic to say we're going to provide a 15% or 20% price cut and keep the same level of service. The clients who value you are going to want to negotiate. These guys are going to remember that when the cycle turns.

» **Quality people.** There are a lot of talented people out there. We've always wanted to maintain high levels of quality and customer service. We don't have to keep an individual who doesn't want to go that extra mile for the customer because there are people willing to do that. There are a bunch of talented folks looking for opportunities to further their careers.

» **Entrepreneurial spirit.** It's really been beneficial for us to allow our branch managers to be a little bit more entrepreneurial. We're not dictating their book of work in terms of the customer mix. We're really allowing people to say, 'The opportunities here for us are ...' and we're supporting those folks.

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The technology trap

Due to unexpected volume, we cannot take your call right now. Please try again later.

Those words were etched into my brain after spending several hours hitting the redial button, trying to preorder the iPhone 4.

Yes, I'm one of "those" people. This was after repeatedly (and simultaneously) trying to log into Apple's website to place an order. Neither the phone system nor the website was working — apparently overloaded by the sheer unexpected volume of calls.

I eventually was able to preorder my phone (and one for my wife), but it took a 10-minute walk and a 20-minute wait in line at a nearby AT&T store. That 30-minute investment in human contact accomplished what nearly five hours of labor-saving, efficiency-improving technology couldn't.

Simply put, no matter how advanced our tools become, there is no replacing face-to-face interaction.

Whether it's email, smart phones, social media, radio, television or some yet-to-be-invented form of technology that gives us greater access and insight into our customers' lives and buying patterns, nothing will surpass the value of a handshake, a smile and time spent in the presence of customers.

There are a number of challenges tied to the over-reliance on technology. No matter how good the tools, no one wants to live in a house built by untrained carpenters, plumbers and electricians overseen by an inexperienced contractor. Landscape contractors have access to the same materials. Why is it some

are able to charge more for their services? They've proven their employees have the knowledge, skills and tools to get the job done well. They make clients feel comfortable from start to finish. Technology becomes a seamless part of the experience.

If only Apple and AT&T learned that lesson. When I finally pre-ordered the phones, I was given tracking numbers, which I checked daily (I told you I was one of those people). I also was told I would be sent an email notification when our phones were available for pickup.

The tracking info indicated the phones arrived at the AT&T store on a Thursday. I stopped by the store, even though I hadn't received the email indicating I could pick them up. They weren't ready. I tried again the following day (even though I still hadn't received the "pick-up" email). This time they were ready, and I happily took the two gleaming gadgets home.

The first email — which I read on my new iPhone — came four days after my torturous wait ended. It read, in part:

We are working hard to fulfill your order as soon as possible. Due to the extraordinary demand for the iPhone, your order is not yet available for shipment. Reservations are processed in the order that they are received. Thank you for your patience.

Now, don't take this as a rant against technology. Clearly my obsession with the new iPhone shows I'm no technology hater. Most of the problems boil down to human error. Whether it's inexperience, lack of training or laziness, technology is only as effective as the person interfacing with it. In other words, make sure your people are trained — and don't allow them to use technology to replace human interaction. No matter how helpful gadgets become, they should never replace human interaction.

According to two recent emails I received, I might have two more devices ready for me sometime in the near future. Anyone out there looking for a couple of iPhones? Just call my automated line at 1-800...





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