



It took **Jerry Grossi** and his partner Ed Dudgeon more than a few years to figure out the property maintenance company they formed more than 30 years ago would be more successful by concentrating on lawn care and landscape irrigation. Now, Arborlawn and Spartan Irrigation, the two divisions of their company, are well known throughout central Michigan.

Arborlawn promotes its IPM approach. What does that mean for customers? I'd hope that's important to them, but it's probably more important to us as a company. Acting and working responsibly is an ethic we work hard to maintain. When we connect with our customers, they see our sincerity and know our business philosophy. We have to make sure we do everything, even more than what our customers demand daily.

Michigan has been devastated by the loss of manufacturing jobs. As a company serving central Michigan, what do you see for the approaching season?

2010 looks like 2009 judging by the amount of work we're seeing bid and the lack of construction. It's looking pretty quiet. We're going to come out of this bad economy. We can see the light at the end of the tunnel, but it may take a few years.

How are your customers responding to this recession? Many of our customers are looking to reduce their

costs. We can only do one of two things: Cut the price or program, which is what some customers are asking us to do. Our goal this season is to keep our customers, even if they reduce the level of service. We feel once the economy improves, they'll appreciate what we've done for them and they'll add to their programs again.

What are you doing marketingwise to keep your company's brand top of mind?

There's no silver bullet. We still use many of the old techniques — direct mail, fliers, asking our customers to help us — and they still work. For the commercial market, there's still a lot of cold calling. The past couple years, we've been working on our Web site, where a lot of our future marketing will be focused. We really marketed our Christmas Décor services on our Web site this year.

It's obvious you see a larger role for digital communications in your company's future.

We're running more Google, Facebook and banner ads. Also, sometimes customers call asking if we offer specials or coupons, and we direct them to our Web site.

Describe your experience with your e-newsletter.

Our penetration for customers with e-mail addresses is 40%, and we've tried very hard to gather as many e-mail addresses as we can. It's difficult to gather them, but 40% isn't a bad coverage rate. Obviously, we want to connect with all of our customers, so we still also direct mail a hard copy of our newsletter. We need more customers' emails so we can get away from the hard copy because of the expense. Actually, we have two versions of our newsletter, one for lawn care and one for irrigation.

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Arborlawn Inc., Lansing, MI

FOUNDED: 1976

TITLE: Vice president, co-owner, with partner Ed Dudgeon

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: One

MARKET AREA: Central Michigan

EMPLOYEES: 45

SERVICES OFFERED: Lawn care, irrigation, tree and shrub care, perimeter pest control, ornamental bed weed control, mole control, mosquito control, Christmas Décor

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: Past President of PLCAA 2000, GIE board of directors, past president GIE/OPEI board of directors, past president of the Michigan Turfgrass Foundation

HOBBIES: Traveling and golf

FAMILY: Wife, Sherin, and two sons

WEBSITE: arborlawn.com; spartanirrigation.com

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