

It's hard enough to run a company in one country. **Robert Wilton**, president of Clintar Landscape Management, runs operations in two.

"Our growth plans are more U.S.-directed than Canada; we think we've got more to offer a larger population," Wilton says. "We're (currently) most concentrated in southern Ontario. To go west in Canada is not unlike the U.S. The population concentration is not in the Midwest. There's a lot of empty space."

LM recently spoke with Wilton to discuss the trends, obstacles and opportunities facing his North American maintenance business.

TOP TRENDS

» **Reducing salt.** The environmental concerns are increasing. We see a lot more interest in doing the right thing — not only in our lawn operation, but also in our winter operation. Our customers like that we're attempting to reduce the amount of salt that we're using in the wintertime. All of our salt application equipment has onboard wetting systems to spray the salt as it leaves the truck. We can get just as good coverage of ice melting with less salt.

» **Reducing water.** The wallet always dictates. It does cost more to be green. Our green push is coming to the forefront. It's stronger in Canada than in the U.S., but it's there. We've partnered with a company to help us sell water conservation to our existing clients. We can keep landscapes alive with less water.

» **Increasing technologies.** We're probably pretty good at taking advantage of technology. We do have things like GPS. We have web-based accounting and job costing. The technology is there; it's learning how to use it. It's pretty nice for me to look at a computer screen and see where 300 or 400 vehicles are.

TOP OBSTACLES

» **Labor.** Finding and keeping good people. Keeping, training and motivating people. We've taken the approach of increasing



INSIDE INFO

Company: Clintar Landscape Management

Founded: 1973

Headquarters: Toronto

Branches: 23 (including HQ, branches are franchise-owned)

Employees: 300 part-time, nearly 200 full-time

2009 revenue: \$45 million

LM Top 150 Ranking: No. 18

Key to being a maintenance leader: Do what you said you were going to do. The industry is fraught with broken promises. If you promise to meet a client at 10 o'clock in the morning, be there at five minutes to 10. If you promise to get a job done tomorrow, get it done tomorrow. No excuses. Do what you promise. The industry has a very bad reputation for not doing that. We pound on it every day.

our training quite substantially. This isn't just technical training; it's management training, supervisory training. We're finding people like to be trained. We're getting good response from the training, which does include certification. We think it's paying off. We've always trained, but we've intensified it to combat some of the other competitive factors that we're facing.

The people thing is what stands out the most. If you have good people, you have efficiencies. The cash flow works. If I stand back and look at the question of what impedes our growth, it all comes back to our people. How smart are they? How hardworking are they? Do they have the right incentives?

» **Pricing push.** We read about price pressure. We think knowledge and efficiency are the ways to combat it. Our customers are suffering. Budgets are tighter. We chase a market that's not available to the disorganized, low-ball group. We tend to go after and keep larger, more professionally managed property management organizations.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

» **New service offerings.** We plan on doing things we don't currently do or doing things that we now sub-contract. For example, we don't do a lot of tree work. We get requests all the time to do tree work. We either turn it down or sub it out. We're now looking seriously at bringing that service in-house.

Because we're working on peoples' outdoor properties, there are a variety of things they spend money on, such as asphalt parking lot, hard surface maintenance. We see that we can push further into that. It requires investment, of course, but there are opportunities everywhere if we're running a good business, an efficient business. We don't have all the customers we want. We want more.

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