



Word of mouth is no longer enough

To increase sales, landscapers move beyond referrals as their only means of marketing.

Landscapers lose clients. It's inevitable. "They die. They lose jobs. They sell their houses and move. They divorce. They get sick. They can't afford us." Jerry Tindel lists the many ways he's lost Cutting Edge Lawn Care clients in Austin, TX.

The goal, obviously, is to replace these clients because "clients are the lifeblood of all future growth," Tindel explains. "If you don't continue to grow, you will slowly shrink to nothing."

To avoid wasting away, contractors market. And in today's wary economy, they are marketing a lot more than they used to. To improve business growth

MORE VISIBILITY

48

% of small businesses who plan to increase marketing in 2011.

SOURCE: CITIBANK

next year, 48% of small businesses say they will increase marketing, according to a September Citibank survey.

Paramount Landscape president Brian Golembiewski has already spent three or four times what he typically spends in a normal year on marketing. This includes putting together a short movie about his company, buying e-mail lists and sending out e-blasts, and dropping off fliers and business cards to potential clients' properties.

"We didn't have to do much marketing in the past — we got a lot of work just by word-of-mouth," Golembiewski admits. "But with what is going on now, we're doing a lot more marketing to recover lost maintenance. I am laying the groundwork now because I know it can take awhile to materialize."

Jeff Bowen is embarrassed to admit that up until this point he hasn't spent even 1% of the company's revenue on sales and marketing. "We were a word-of-

mouth company," he says. "But we will no longer be a word-of-mouth company. We will be more like the big boys and sell the way they do. We think we need to start a more official marketing and sales plan."

To accomplish this, Bowen is now looking for a salesperson who can develop sales strategies, grow and track the numbers and tie it all to marketing.

Maintaining current business and sources of revenue is No. 1 on contractors' priority lists for the next six months, followed closely by growing business, according to *Land-scape Management's* survey. And over the past two years, one-third of all small business owners continue to report weak sales as their top business problem, according to the National Federation of Independent Business. With sales being top priority, it's no wonder increased marketing is a key part of the contractor business game plan.

As Christy Webber, president of Chicago's Christy Webber Landscapes, insists: "Now is the time to make sure your name is still out there." **LMI**

TAKE-AWAYS

2010 Marketing Setbacks

1. Lack of marketing presence.
2. Increased competition and market oversaturation decreases effectiveness of traditional means.
3. Doing nothing beyond word-of-mouth.

2011 Marketing Goals

1. Increase marketing budgets to keep your name in front of current and potential customers.
2. Try different, and maybe less traditional, marketing methods; don't rely solely on customer referrals.
3. Take advantage of low-cost marketing opportunities (public relations, social media marketing, etc.) to engage customers.