



PRIDE, QUALITY & BRAND HAVE LOST THEIR EDGE

Residential and commercial customers alike have always craved a neatly manicured landscape that makes the neighbors and office parks next door envious. And they would do almost anything for it.

Not anymore.

Over the past two years, "pride has certainly become second to price," says Terry Delany, president of Fayetteville, AR-based GroundServ.

As a result of the recession combined with high drought periods, John Gibson, Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape's president, has even noticed that customers' acceptance of the standard of care on their properties has declined. "It became a badge of honor to have brown spots in their yards because it meant they weren't watering as much," he explains.

Quality has also faded. "Contractors are lowering their service levels and quality, as well as their pricing, further diminishing the traditional fair market," says Donnie Garritano, president of Las Vegas-based D&K Landscape.

And if pride and quality have slipped a few rungs down the ladder, Delany says brand has gone with it. "Customers used to look at a company like mine and it used to matter — we have trained employees who can be counted on to show up every Tuesday; we have systems and clean, recognizable trucks," he says. "But that doesn't matter anymore. We still tout our attributes, but the client just flips to the back page of our proposal to see the price."

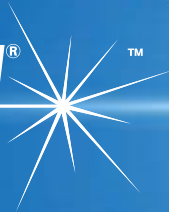
Customer association with brand



has declined across industries, fed by consumers' confidence in their buying power and need to spend less, confirms eBoost Consulting's Johnny Chan.

But don't stop entirely touting your brand, throw quality out the window or wallow in consumers' dwindling property pride just yet. Ever the optimist, Gibson believes there's some pride left. "There's less of it," he qualifies. "There's societal pressure now to spend less, but I don't believe personal pride of property will ever completely go away. The pendulum will swing back." **LMI**

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