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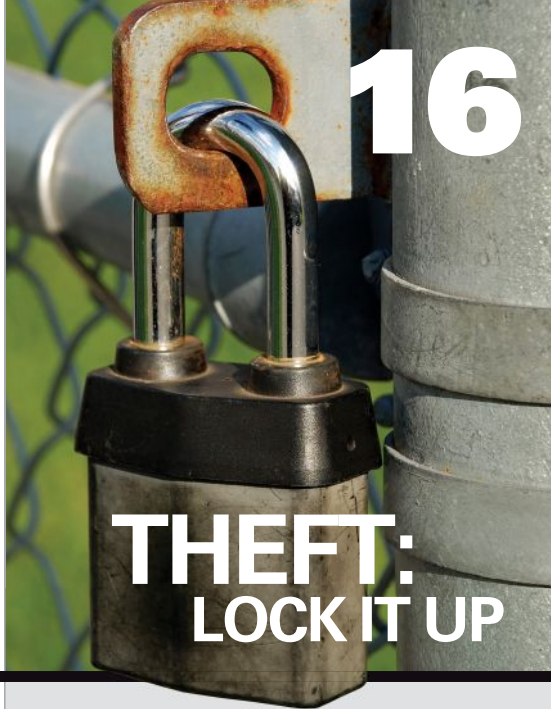


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FEBRUARY 2011
VOL 50, ISSUE 2



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NICOLE WISNIEWSKI EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Detach — it's refreshing every time

On a recent flight, intent on editing magazine copy, I asked my fellow passenger "What do you do?" intrigued by the pile of work with which he surrounded himself. An hour later, I wished I hadn't asked.

Stress seeped out of his every word, his every pore.

I felt bad for him. I had been there before. Did a stranger on a plane listen to me when I laid out all my stress, disguised under deadlines to meet and tasks to accomplish?

Then I took a moment to look around me.

Stress was everywhere. In tense shoulders hunched over laptops. In fingers rubbing wrinkled temples over furrowed brows. In eyes staring at distant points out of plane windows.

Intrigued, I did some research: 40% of adults report living with raised stress levels today; 68% of employees say they are highly stressed, fatigued and feel out of control; and 44% of workers say stress costs them an hour of productivity a day.

It's easy to become too identified with work — completely absorbed by it. But detaching from it has its advantages. When I've detached — whether it's to read a book to my daughter (inserting voices for characters), enjoy a walk or run or quietly sip a glass of wine — it's not only cleared my head but also brought increased productivity and fresh ideas.

Harvard Business Review has more suggestions for controlling stress: Manage your energy, not your time; identify and banish time thieves; find a buddy or mentor at work to vent to; and protect time outside work so you can refresh.

It's not easy to take necessary breaks, particularly when your time is limited, but it's a part of reminding ourselves we are more than just our jobs. As leadership coach Gill Corkindale advises: "Take time to reflect on what you want to achieve in life and think about your definition of personal success. This should help when work gets difficult and pressure becomes unbearable."

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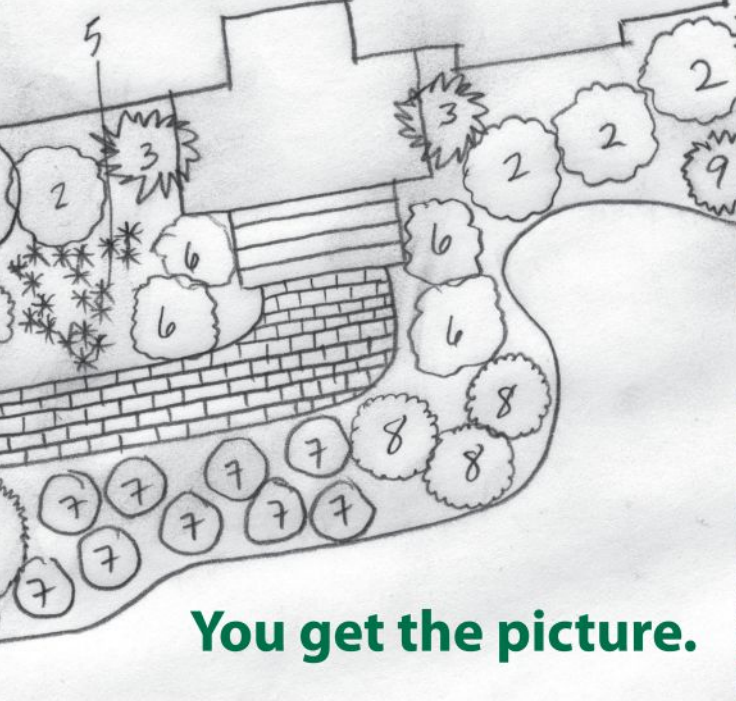
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Fertilizer prices on the rise; here's why

Fertilizer prices are rising again. This from Bruce Erickson, Ph.D., Purdue University in his latest TurfTip e-newsletter. Here he details his findings.

Why so high?

Fertilizer prices are on the upswing again, buoyed by the high prices of agricultural products that have stimulated increased demand. While the general U.S. economy struggles to recover from the financial crisis of 2008, the demand for agricultural products continues in a strong position due to favorable exchange rates, grain usage for biofuels, production concerns related to recent unfavorable weather in key crop growing regions, and a host of other factors. Higher fertilizer prices have put heavy users, such as farmers, lawn care companies, and golf course superintendents, on the defensive trying to best manage the input costs of their businesses. The following explains some factors that influence fertilizer prices and possible strategies in dealing with high and fluctuating prices.

Prices Influenced by World Markets and Energy Fertilizer prices reached record levels in 2008 just prior to the financial crisis, with the prices of some key fertilizer materials, such as anhydrous ammonia and diammonium phosphate, exceeding \$1,000 per ton. Prices retreated in 2009 and 2010, but began increasing again last fall. The price of urea is approximately twice what it was a decade ago. In the 1980s, the U.S. was a significant nitrogen exporter —

now more than 57% of nitrogen used in the U.S. is imported (2008 data). Most commercial nitrogen fertilizers originate from a process that uses natural gas to convert the nitrogen gas in the air into a form usable by crops. Natural gas prices in other parts of the world are a fraction of what they are in the U.S., so it is often more economical to produce there even considering transportation costs. Trinidad and Tobago, Canada, Russia and the Middle East are major suppliers to the U.S.

Phosphorus (P) and Potassium (K) fertilizer sources such as DAP (Diammonium phosphate, 18-46-0) and muriate of potash (0-0-60) originate mostly from open or underground mines, with the bulk of production controlled by a handful of companies. The U.S. is the world's leading supplier/exporter of phosphorus fertilizers, but imports most of its potassium from Canada. Investments in fertilizer mining and manufacturing are often long-term commitments, and companies often lack the ability to adjust quickly to short-term market conditions.

Fertilizer pricing is complex

Fertilizer is not traded on a common exchange like stocks, currencies or grains, so it can be much more difficult to get a read on prices. In addition, fertilizers are heavy, bulky commodities and their transport involves expense, time and logistical constraints. Many customers also depend on their suppliers for fertilizer storage and specialized application equipment. So the market is not as fluid as many other inputs — users aren't



as likely to shop around and then just go pick up what they need as they might for chemicals or seeds.

Dealing with high fertilizer prices

Using the correct form and amount of fertilizer to achieve the desired plant response maximizes efficient input use and keeping costs in check. Fertilizer suppliers may be willing to enter into contractual arrangements with their larger customers that specify a future quantity and price, to help them manage their own price risk as well as that of their customers. In addition, some larger fertilizer users have also built their own bulk storage facilities that allow them to capitalize on seasonal price advantages or other price trends.

For more information on fertilizer pricing, check out:

› Illinois Production Costs Report, Illinois Department of Agriculture: http://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/gx_gr210.txt

› Agricultural Prices, United States Department of Agriculture: <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/MannUsda/viewDocumentInfo.do?documentID=1002>

› Factors Shaping Price and Availability of the Fertilizer Market, Purdue Agricultural Economics: http://www.agecon.purdue.edu/news/financial/Fertilizer_Market.pdf

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PROGRESS

The power of landscaping

“Beautify with trees.”

This was the theme of 1969’s International Shade Tree Conference, as reported in the November 1969 issue of *Weeds, Trees & Turf*, which is known today as *Landscape Management*.

The group met at the Portland Hilton Hotel in Oregon. To “capture the atmosphere and interest of a particular area ... to design in a way that fits the region’s historical background,” the hotel chain incorporated a park with 70 trees, more than 100 shrubs, a dozen different ground covers, several thousand flower bulbs, a number of ferns and vines, a swimming pool and the usual tables and chairs on its second story.

There was a concern when the hotel was being planned in 1960 “about what was going to happen to downtown as outlying shopping centers became more numerous.” They realized using trees, turf, shrubs and flowers in the downtown shopping centers was bringing people in. “Lots of landscaping seems to capture people’s fancy,” explained Ford Montgomery, Portland Hilton general manager, at the time. “People feel a close relationship with living things.”

In 42 years, that hasn’t changed.

Portland is proud of its parks and its legacy of preserving open spaces. And so are numerous other large metropolitan cities across the U.S.

In fact, the environmental, lifestyle and economic benefits of green spaces have not only been researched and logged thoroughly, they are the reasons many urban environments continue to add green spaces within their boundaries.

Statistics recorded over the years by many groups, including Project Ever-

Trees, shrubs, plants and turf continue to provide benefits to urban areas.

Green, have shown landscaping’s positive effects.

▶ Trees in a parking lot can reduce on-site heat buildup, decrease runoff and enhance nighttime cool down. A test in a mall parking lot in Huntsville, AL showed a 31-degree difference between shaded and unshaded areas. Lawns are 30 degrees cooler than asphalt and 14 degrees cooler than bare soil in the heat of summer. In Atlanta, temperatures have climbed 5 to 8 degrees higher than surrounding countryside where developers bulldozed 380,000 acres between 1973 and 1999, according to NASA. Scientists predict the heavily developed corridor between Boston and Washington will be the next big hot zone.

▶ The Virginia Cooperative Extension

says a dense cover of plants and mulch holds soil in place, keeping sediment out of lakes, streams, storm drains and roads, and reducing flooding, mudslides and dust storms.

▶ Trees, shrubs and turf remove smoke, dust and other pollutants from the air. Every tree that’s subtracted from a city’s ecosystem means some particulate pollution remains that should have been filtered out. In Washington, that amounts to 540 extra tons each year, according to *Time Magazine*. One tree can remove 26 pounds of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere annually, equaling 11,000 miles of car emissions. One Virginia Cooperative Extension study showed that 1 acre of trees has the ability to remove 13 tons of particles and gases annually.



▲ THEN & NOW ▶

Today, trees, shrubs and plants are important assets to the city of Portland, OR just as they were in 1969.



Ah, the power of landscaping. In 1969, the Portland Hilton sacrificed income-producing rooms to make space for \$50,000 worth of it. And, says Montgomery, “we cannot afford *not* to have it now.”

The atmosphere landscaping creates, Montgomery adds, is where people will go. In 50 years, some things don’t change; in fact, they grow.



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Has health care become unaffordable?

A LOOK AT HEALTH CARE COST INCREASES THIS YEAR AND HOW LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS PLAN TO COPE.

WHEN IT COMES to health care costs, landscape business owners are in a quandary. Over the past decade the cost of providing health insurance for most have doubled, making it more challenging everyday to offer employees benefits.

For Bruce Bachand, vice president of Orlando's Carol King Landscape Maintenance, for instance, insurance costs increased 27% in June 2010. He's being told costs could go up as much as 50% by this June as a result of the new health care mandates.

On average, landscape businesses that offer health plans will see their costs jump 9% this year with most employees paying higher deductibles as a result. This from a survey of more than 700 employers by PricewaterhouseCoopers, which also revealed 2011 will be the first time a majority of U.S. workers are expected to have health insurance deductibles of \$400 or more.

In a similar survey conducted by the National Business Group on Health, the majority of employers (63%) said they were increasing the proportion of insurance premiums paid by their employees as a result of rising rates. Approximately 46% plan to raise the limit on annual out-of-pocket payments and 44% plan to raise deductibles for in-network services.

A health care analysis report by Hewitt Associates shows the average total health care premium per employee for large companies is \$9,821 this year, up from \$9,028 last year. The amount employees contribute toward this cost is \$2,209 — 22.5% of the total health care premium. This is up 12.4% from 2010, when employees contributed \$1,966 or 21.8%. Average employee

out-of-pocket costs, such as copayments, coinsurance and deductibles, are \$2,177 this year — a 12.5% hike from last year's \$1,934. These rates mean in 10 years total health care premiums have more than doubled from \$4,083 in 2001 to \$9,821 in 2011. And employees' share of medical costs, including employee contributions and out-of-pocket costs, have more than tripled from \$1,229 in 2001 to \$4,386 in 2011.

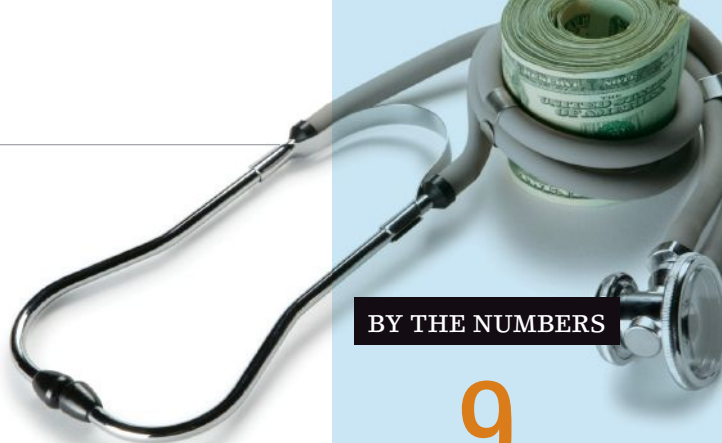
No wonder 47% of small business owners who provide health insurance to their employees said they are considering discontinuing health insurance because the costs are too high, according to Discover's Small Business Watch.

Nearly the same amount responding to Discover's study (46%) also said the Healthcare Reform Act passed by Congress and signed into law by President Obama in 2010 may hurt their businesses.

But the feedback on this is not consistent. Rick Ungar at *Forbes'* The Policy Page says major U.S. health insurance companies are reporting an increase in small businesses offering health care benefits to their employees as a result of the Act. But more will be known when small businesses file their 2010 tax returns this April.

While the Healthcare Reform Act is still being discussed and debated on Capitol Hill, Burton M. Goldfield, president and CEO of TriNet, an HR outsourcing company, recommends landscape business owners familiarize themselves with proposed changes and be prepared to act accordingly. For more information, visit the "Small Employers" page at Healthcare.gov.

To control their costs landscape contractors continue to cut costs and drive efficiency in their businesses. Some of Carol King's cost cutting measures included reducing paper use, utilizing email more, using smaller pickup trucks and more diesel trucks to cut fuel expenses and cracking down on overtime. "We challenge everyone to look at every nook and cranny to see if there are places they can cut back," he says. Health care specific, Carol King has raised employee deductibles and out-of-pocket expenses.



BY THE NUMBERS

9

% average health insurance increase for business owners this year.

SOURCE: PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS

69

% of small business owners who are having difficulty obtaining affordable health care for themselves and their employees.

SOURCE: DISCOVER SMALL BUSINESS WATCH, JANUARY 2011

38

% of small business owners who say rising health care costs have a major impact on their businesses.

SOURCE: DISCOVER SMALL BUSINESS WATCH, JANUARY 2011

47

% of small business owners who said they are considering discontinuing health insurance benefits for employees because the costs are too high.

SOURCE: DISCOVER SMALL BUSINESS WATCH, JANUARY 2011

44.8

% of American adults who get their health insurance through an employer.

SOURCE: GALLUP, NOVEMBER 2010

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Theft inside the dolphin tank

Don't play with the dolphins.

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The message printed in bold letters on a small scrap of paper attached to my time card was plain enough. I understood. Yes, this is a story about dolphins and what I learned about them in the strangest job I will ever have. But, as much as I learned about dolphins one summer long ago, I learned as much about people — that even trusted employees, when offered the “perfect storm” of opportunity to steal, may steal. A surprisingly large number, in fact, if you believe what some “experts” say.

What circumstances encourage employee theft? They're staggeringly simple:

1. a need;
2. an inviting opportunity; and
3. a perception of minimal risk of any detection and arrest.

While there's little you can do to assuage an employee's needs, you can dramatically reduce opportunities for theft and increase the risk of detection within your operations by learning from the experiences of other owners in this month's cover article (see page 16).

OK, back to the dolphins.

Decades ago, I took a seasonal security job at a large amusement park and was promptly assigned to babysit four young Atlantic bottlenose dol-

phins. Each day, hundreds of people filled a huge, concrete, bowl-like arena to watch them launch themselves through hoops and perform other stunts. They represented a huge investment for the amusement park — the reason why I was hired to safeguard them from 11:30 p.m. to 7:30 a.m., six nights a week. Or at least that's what I surmised at the time.

We became acquainted, the dolphins and me. Perhaps even friends. Who knows? Sometimes we played together in the dark. One of the dolphins, feeling frisky, would snatch up a ball that had been bobbing in the pool and toss it out toward me. If I tossed it back, likely as not, another dolphin would chuck it back to me. Sometimes this, or some other diversion we invented, went on well into the night. It didn't occur to me that they, like me, would be tired once each day broke. Sleepy dolphins can't leap as high as rested dolphins.

Now, my people lesson.

Occasionally, prior to going to our assignments, the third-shift security force gathered for training. That's when a park police sergeant would go over a list of do's and don'ts, including the park's zero-tolerance policy on theft. He tried to impress upon us that he fully expected 70% of the park's seasonal employees to steal or attempt to steal something during their employment there.

The inference wasn't subtle. After all, we were seasonal employees, too. Unannounced visits to our security stations by police officers in the night's darkest, quietest hours reminded us of this.

I don't know how the police there came up with the 70% figure. I suppose they based it upon their on-the-job experiences. While I recall bristling over the suggestion that I might steal, too, looking back on that summer, blithely unaware of it then, I helped validate that 70% prediction. After all, wasn't my frolicking with the dolphins, resulting in them not performing as they should each day, *stealing* from the enjoyment of the hundreds who came expecting a great show?

The park police sergeant ... fully expected **70%** of the park's seasonal employees to **attempt to steal during their employment.**

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

THEFT: LOCK IT UP

In ultra-competitive times
where razor-thin margins are the rule,
no business can afford additional losses.

Some of your equipment is going to get stolen. It's just a matter of time. Your company's hand tools, trimmers, edgers, mowers, skid-steers, backhoes and even service trucks and equipment trailers — they're all vulnerable.

"Some of our stuff is going to get ripped off, hand tools especially. We know that and budget for that," says Jim Horung Jr., president of Elbers Landscape Co., Buffalo, NY.

"If thieves want to get your stuff, they'll find a way," says victim Scot Corley, owner of Lawns of Distinction, Ocala, FL.

What both companies fear most and guard against are the more costly thefts, the job-delaying rip-offs.

But thieves can be ingenious, both owners agree. The economic conditions spawned by the 2008 recession haven't helped, either. In fact, more than half (56%) of readers respond-

ing to a recent *Landscape Management* survey say they've experienced an increase in theft the past three years.

Horung cites the recent theft of equipment, including a snow blower, from his company's warehouse. Someone disabled the building's alarm and punched through a high, boarded-up window. Besides what they took, they forced open and badly damaged a warehouse door in extracting the units, he says.

Corley's losses, detailed later in this article, were greater and almost put him out of business.

Everyone interviewed for this report had his or her own theft story. Some were relatively minor (at least in terms of dollar value); others were financially and emotionally devastating. All agreed theft is an ever-present possibility and even minor lapses in security open their operations up to the loss of equipment, materials and, depending upon resulting service disruption, customers.

Whether the loss results from pre-meditated actions or spur-of-the-moment opportunity, heed the advice of the people we interviewed for this article, and implement their practical strategies to lessen the chance or severity of theft losses at your business.

On the rise

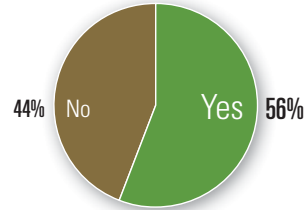
“There’s definitely been a big jump in theft claims this year,” says insurance professional Greg Botson, president of Avon, OH-based Botson Insurance Group, who just before this interview received a call from a client who had a truck and snow plow stolen. “We’ve had maybe 25 claims within the past year where a landscaper gets almost everything stolen.”

Even though respondents to our recent survey indicate the most commonly pilfered items are handheld power equipment (because it is easy to carry away and quickly sell for cash), this winter season — an unusually snowy one east of the Mississippi — has seen an unusual number of snow plows and skid-steers turn up missing as well. This is according to a spokesperson at the National Equipment Register (NER), a 10-year-old unit of Verisk Analytics that provides theft reporting and equipment identification services for equipment owners and insurers. Its services help facilitate information sharing with insurers, equipment owners and law enforcement to reduce theft and recover equipment.

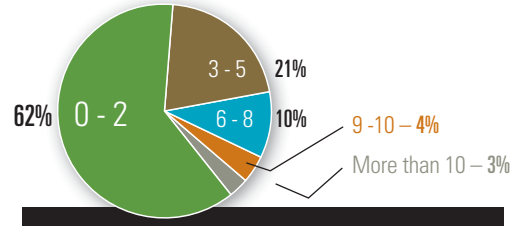
Indeed, that national database of stolen equipment estimates equipment losses (which includes professional mowing units) could be as much as \$1 billion annually. The NER maintains a database of more than 17 million equipment ownership records and 100,000 theft records. Those numbers continue to grow year to year as more owners take advantage of the service, which is recommended by their

RECESSION DRIVES THEFT

HAS EQUIPMENT THEFT INCREASED IN YOUR BUSINESS OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS?



HOW MANY INCIDENTS OF EQUIPMENT THEFT HAVE YOU HAD IN THE PAST THREE YEARS?



insurance carriers and law enforcement.

NER’s estimate doesn’t address the loss of smaller production tools and materials, most of which goes unreported. Also not included are stolen service vehicles, which is not as uncommon as you might think. Adding to this tsunami of financial losses is the soft, but nevertheless real, expenses attached to renting equipment to temporarily replace stolen units, management time lost to filing claims, and disrupted customer services.

But numbers alone don’t tell the whole story. The human toll is just as discouraging.

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WHAT THIEVES WANT

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON PRODUCTS/MATERIALS STOLEN BY OUTSIDE THIEVES?

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Hand tools – 37% | Trucks – 11% |
| Fuel – 23% | Plants/nursery materials – 9% |
| Mowers – 20% | Construction equipment – 6% |
| | Hardscape materials – 3% |

Handheld power equipment



'They knew what they were doing'

Florida landscaper Corley, mentioned previously in this piece, is practically starting over. At 50 years old and after 20 years in the business, Corley says he's been "limping along" since this past summer. That's because during a 10- to 15-minute stretch in the pre-dawn hours of July 19, 2010, thieves (Marion County sheriff deputies believe there were three) wiped him out. In spite of what Corley believed to be excellent security measures, they made off with his custom, 24-ft. enclosed trailer, three relatively new Scag mowers and a full compliment of STIHL equipment. He estimates his loss at \$50,000, a huge blow for his tiny company.

"You've heard the term obsessive-compulsive?" asks Corley. "That's the way I was with my equipment. I took excellent care of it, and I kept it clean. The hardest thing to replace was my custom trailer. It was a steel trailer, not aluminum. It was rugged. They wanted that trailer."

Everything was stolen from a chained and locked maintenance yard surrounded by a 7.5-ft. fence topped with barbed wire. The yard was lighted, and was monitored by three security cameras, but dew that morning coated the camera lenses with condensation. The thieves, including the truck they hooked to the landscape trailer, were recorded only as blurry images.

Corley believes he was the victim of a small, but well-organized gang of thieves, a conclusion he reached after learning of several similar break-ins in the same general area.

"They obviously had good contacts and surveillance. They knew what they were doing," says Corley, who was

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thankful for local friends in the landscape business who lent him a trailer and a couple of mowers immediately after the theft so he could service his customers, many of whom have been with him 10 to 15 years.

Corley was victimized in spite of what most of us would consider excellent security measures:

- › storing his equipment within a fenced-in area, parking it in a circle and chaining smaller units to larger equipment;
- › installing functioning security cameras and motion sen-



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Thieves have stolen equipment off trucks while workers were on jobs.

sors in storage areas and on jobsites, whenever possible; and
› making law enforcement aware

of the presence of his equipment and requesting more frequent patrols, especially in known high-theft areas.

Stacy Kaufman, marketing and sales director for the NER, says these types of thefts are all too common. The thieves are usually familiar with the equipment's operation and value. Often, in fact, it's also someone who is familiar with the owner's habits and the company's security weaknesses. Sometimes this is a former or current employee, someone with a grudge against the owner. Sometimes it's another contractor. Regardless, the sooner the equipment is reported stolen, the better chance of its recovery, she says.

"Most of the equipment that is recovered is found within 100 miles of where it was stolen. It may be repainted and have a new pin number on it. And it may even be used on jobs to compete against you," Kaufman says. To date, the NER, through its information-sharing network, has led to the recovery of more than \$35 million worth of stolen equipment. But even so, in 2009 the recovery rate for stolen loaders was about 25%, for mowers just 10% and for smaller pieces, a smaller percentage yet. These items can be converted to cash, pronto.

Kaufman advises owners to maintain and regularly update an accurate list of all their important equipment with accurate serial numbers if they ever hope to recover it once it's stolen, regardless of whether contractors use NER's services. (There is a modest fee for registering equipment.) She emphasizes the word accurate. "I

continued on page 24

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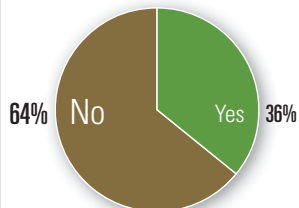
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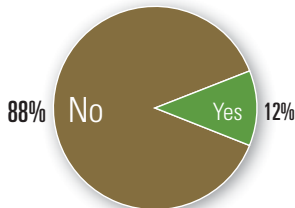
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EMPLOYEES & THEFT

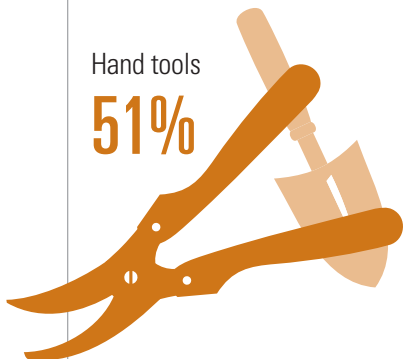
HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED EQUIPMENT THEFT BY EMPLOYEES?



HAS THEFT BY EMPLOYEES INCREASED IN YOUR BUSINESS OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS?



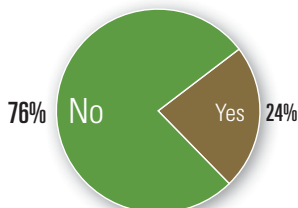
WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON PRODUCTS/MATERIALS STOLEN BY EMPLOYEES?



Hand tools
51%

- 41% – Handheld power equipment
- 39% – Fuel
- 14% – Customers (as side jobs)
- 11% – Trucks
- 10% – Plants/nursery materials
- 4% – Mowers
- 4% – Hardscape materials
- 0% – Construction equipment

DO YOU HAVE PROCEDURES IN PLACE TO REDUCE EMPLOYEE THEFT?



WHAT MEASURES HAVE YOU TAKEN TO AVOID OR DECREASE EQUIPMENT THEFT BY EMPLOYEES?

- 48% – Stricter penalties for employee theft as part of company policy
- 48% – Keep better records of equipment (PINs; serial numbers; make, model and year)
- 35% – Crew & equipment labeling to match employees with specific pieces of equipment
- 38% – Better security on trucks and/or investing in enclosed trailers/trucks
- 38% – Better security and lighting at storage facility
- 25% – More tracking devices and labeling on equipment
- 10% – Remove components to prevent equipment operation
- 8% – Request more visits/patrols from local law enforcement agencies



10

STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING EMPLOYEE THEFT

Theft by employees can include bookkeeping fraud, wasted on-the-job time (see “Theft in the dolphin tank,” page 14), clandestinely acquiring customer lists or using company equipment to do “personal” work. But, to the point of this article, it more often involves pilfering equipment, tools, fuel and landscape materials such as topsoil, mulch and chemicals.

Minimize employee theft by making sure there is an accounting for everything that is used, plus demonstrating to your employees how theft has an impact on their benefits.

Consider these 10 practical strategies to reduce victimization by your own employees:

- 1** Conduct thorough checks on the references of prospective new hires, as well as checks on their educational credentials and criminal history.
- 2** Establish a clear zero-tolerance policy on theft and security, and make sure all employees understand it.
- 3** Examine and update financial controls, such as keeping checkbooks locked up and limiting the number of people authorized to write checks; having good documentation on where money is spent; auditing internal financial documents regularly; and checking invoices to make sure they match what was delivered.
- 4** Implement a closely monitored inventory system for all tools and materials.
- 5** Assign and make employees responsible for the care of their own tools.
- 6** Have employees store all tools in a locked, but visible screened-in enclosure.
- 7** Keep all chemicals secured in locked, metal storage containers. Only selected supervisors have keys to these areas. These containers, as well as the tool enclosures, should be equipped with locks that require keys that cannot be duplicated at any hardware store.
- 8** Block access to the premises. Lock the doors. Turn on the security system. Employee theft often happens after hours.
- 9** Use GPS to track service vehicles and to monitor vehicle and fuel use.
- 10** Act decisively and immediately fire any employee proved to be stealing, as described by your company’s policy of zero tolerance.



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continued from page 20

estimate that 25% of the equipment that is stolen is reported with inaccurate serial numbers," she says.

Planned or a lark?

As pointed out earlier in this piece, there are two basic types of theft — pre-meditated and opportunity theft, meaning someone sees something they can easily steal thanks to carelessness or poor security and off they go with the item. Sometimes it's difficult to determine which is at play.

Drew Roberts, CPCU, ARM, an Orlando, FL-area agent specializing in writing schedules for Florida landscape companies, says about half of the major theft claims his agency has received are from owners whose trailers and equipment were snagged from storage sites. The other half was the result of trailers stolen from jobsites. Roberts, whose BearWise Landscapers is a division of Black Bear Agency, says it's difficult to assess how many smaller pieces of equipment are stolen from landscape companies because equipment loss coverage (theft, fire, hurricane, etc.) generally carries a \$500 deductible and these losses are usually "eaten by the owners," he says.

But, according to Roberts, major factors contributing to theft include:

- › the value of the equipment (newer units are more likely to be targeted than older ones);
- › poor equipment and site security;
- › the relative ease of selling stolen goods in the used equipment market; and
- › low risk of detection and prosecution.

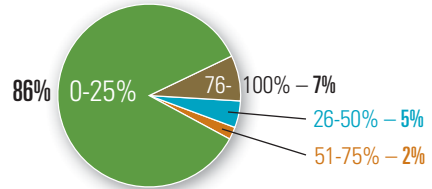
"Professional" jobs are not uncommon. LoJack, which offers vehicle and equipment tracking solutions, says it's helped law enforcement uncover more than 80 construction equipment theft rings and chop shops since 2000.

The recovery rate for stolen larger production equipment is depressingly low — just 18% in 2009, according to statistics maintained by the National Crime Information

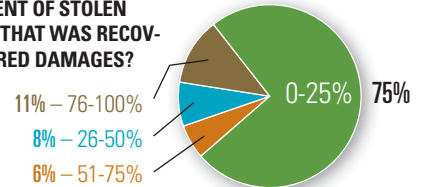
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FULL RECOVERY?

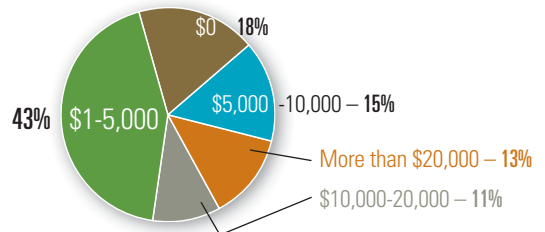
ON AVERAGE, WHAT PERCENT OF YOUR STOLEN EQUIPMENT HAS BEEN RECOVERED?



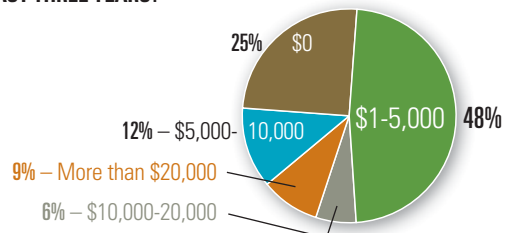
WHAT PERCENT OF STOLEN EQUIPMENT THAT WAS RECOVERED INCURRED DAMAGES?



WHAT WAS THE DOLLAR AMOUNT OF THE EQUIPMENT THAT WAS STOLEN FROM YOU DURING THE PAST THREE YEARS?



WHAT ADDITIONAL AMOUNT HAVE YOU SPENT REPLACING STOLEN EQUIPMENT DUE TO DAMAGE OR LOSS OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS?



Better security and lighting at storage facility

59%

DETECTING THIEVES

WHAT MEASURES HAVE YOU TAKEN TO AVOID OR DECREASE EQUIPMENT THEFT BY OUTSIDERS?

Better security on trucks and/or investing in enclosed trailers/trucks — 49%

Keep better records of equipment (PINs; serial numbers; make, model and year) — 38%

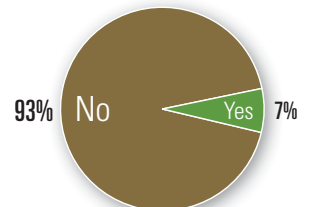
More tracking devices and labeling on equipment — 25%

Request more visits/patrols from local law enforcement agencies — 17%

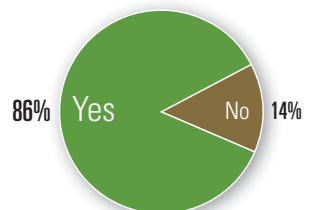
Remove components to prevent equipment operation — 14%



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continued from page 24

Center (NCIC). Of the 13,452 thefts of heavy equipment — the category that includes commercial mowers — only 2,428 were later recovered. Most of those units were ultimately recovered within 100 miles of where they were taken.

The five states with the most incidents of heavy-equipment theft, per the NCIC, are Texas, Florida, North Carolina, Georgia and South Carolina. Together, they account for 43% of total equipment theft.

Contributing to the low recovery rate were:

- › delays in discovering/reporting of theft;
- › inaccurate or non-existent owner records;
- › lack of pre-purchase screening of used equipment;
- › limited law enforcement resources dedicated to equipment investigations;
- › complexities in equipment numbering systems; and
- › limited, possibly inaccurate, equipment information in the law enforcement system.

“Opportunity” theft of the snatch-and-grab variety is more prevalent, but implementing and maintaining basic anti-theft measures more easily discourages (although rarely completely prevents) this type of pilferage.

WEB EXTRA

For more tips on securing your biggest pieces of equipment, visit www.landscapemanagement.net/securingbigtoys

RECORD-KEEPING TIPS

- ✔ Keep a record of the manufacturer, model number, year, product identification number (PIN) and purchase date for each piece of equipment.
- ✔ Record the serial numbers of equipment and major component parts.
- ✔ Label equipment with unique owner-applied numbers.
- ✔ Mark PIN and owner-applied numbers in multiple locations on your equipment.
- ✔ Paint your tools and equipment a distinctive color.
- ✔ Keep an accurate and updated inventory of your equipment.

“I would say 90% of thefts from landscapers are opportunity thefts, and 90% of them are by amateurs,” says James F. Martin, CIC, CRM, CRIS, vice president of liability claim for CNA Insurance Co.

Fighting back

Tool loss is a big financial cost and a major irritation to Greg Krause, Gary Krause Landscaping, Jacksonville, OR. He doesn't kid himself that the problem will disappear, so he

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discourages it by requiring his employees bring and provide their own basic tools (tape measures, hammers, etc.), and tagging his name and address on his company's tools. "You almost have to grind it off," he says of his identification markers. "If any of my tools turn up in a pawn shop, my name and address are there to see."

He maintains anything an owner can do that makes something harder to steal will reduce losses. "Thieves are lazy. That's why they're thieves," says Kraus.

But not all opportunity theft is as trivial as a missing pruner.

Lee Helmberger, owner of Lee's Lawn Service, Omaha, NE, is still incredulous over the sudden disappearance of his parked Ford F-250 and 16-ft. trailer several years ago from a street in downtown Omaha. It was hot-wired and whisked away while his landscape crew was on a lunch break. The truck, sans trailer and equipment, resurfaced 45 days later when police notified Helmberger to move it because it was illegally parked. He found the truck with its fenders crumpled and its signage scratched off "like someone had gone over it with a cheese grater," he recalls.

Helmberger, like Corley, was fortunate he had friends in the industry to lend him equipment so he could continue to provide services to clients until he was able to replace his vehicle and trailer. It takes a month or more to process an insurance claim for lost vehicles or gear, even when an owner provides clear documentation.

"If you're down for 30 to 45 days, you're going to lose a lot of your customers," says Helmberger who, while grateful for the friends who provided him loaner equipment, also learned how important it was to maintain good credit with vendors. "We had to get equipment rather quickly and our vendors were willing to give it to me and be reimbursed later when we got our insurance settlement."

Because he keeps good equipment records, including meticulously logging the serial numbers of individual units, Helmberger says his insurance com-



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EQUIPMENT THEFT

pany “was pretty good” about settling this claim.

To that point, CNA’s Martin advises landscape company owners not only to record serial numbers and keep equipment sales receipts, but also to maintain an up-to-date photographic records of all of their equipment and tools.

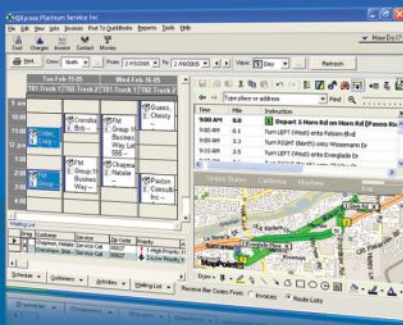
“Take pictures of your fully loaded trailer, because if you have to make a claim, you’re not going to remember every tool on that

Members of this The Grounds Guys crew transport their equipment from site to site in an enclosed trailer.



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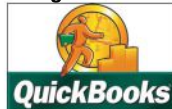
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trailer,” says Martin. “It also helps to prove what you’ve lost. Even open your toolbox and take a picture of everything in it. Let’s say you have a tool box of Snap-on tools; they’re pretty expensive to replace.”

While Martin, like other insurance professionals we interviewed, emphasizes the importance of adequately insuring your property, he also contends that it doesn’t relieve you of the responsibility of maintaining tight equipment security. Prevention is far less emotionally and financially painful than replacement.

Trailers and equipment used on job-sites are typically covered by an inland marine policy, also sometimes known as a “floater” policy. It’s a prudent investment, especially against the loss (theft, fire, hurricane, etc.) of any equipment that could damage your company’s ability to maintain customers.

Botson, of Botson Insurance Group, says owners have the choice of insuring their mowers and other major pieces of equipment at depreciated value or at replacement value. “We recommend replacement value,” he adds. “Let’s say you have a mower that you bought three years ago and you can sell it for \$5,000. If it gets stolen, and you have it scheduled for replacement rather than depreciated value, you can buy a new one once the claim is settled.”

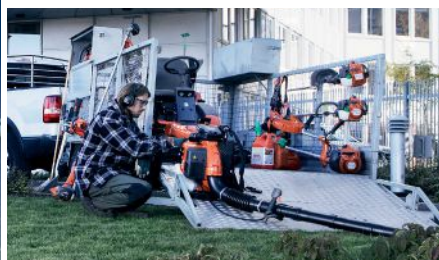
Martin also points out that there are many soft costs related to replacing what you’ve lost.

“For every dollar you get back in insurance for stolen items, you’re going to be spending two or three more dollars,” he explains.

And, in these ultra-competitive times where razor-thin margins are the rule, what small business can afford these types of losses? **LM**



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BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at bwilson@questex.com.

Success is in the market mix

The current economic downturn has focused attention once again on the importance of market mix. For example, the public works sector has been hit particularly hard by price erosion. Many companies have had to cut prices dramatically to even be close on re-bid situations. Thus, it is not a good time to have public work as a significant part of your business mix. Other segments have also been hit to different degrees.

When selling new work, contractors tend to take whatever they can get — and all too often, they do not examine their market mix. This should be looked at annually, and a study should be done by segment as to the profitability of each segment to determine whether you have a healthy balance.

For example, many companies believe homeowners associations (HOAs) are not profitable, yet I work with many companies that do nothing *but* HOA work and have made top-tier profits. Some companies say the best market segment is comprised of high-end offices. My belief is a diversified client portfolio is best.

There are several reasons for this. If you concentrate most of your business in a single segment, you sooner or later will feel the brunt of hard

times for that segment. There have been several times in my career when the high-end office market became overbuilt, for example. When the recession hit, maintenance prices in that segment took a big hit. Apartments have gone through their cycles as well. Public work goes through outsourcing and self-performing cycles.

Another, less obvious problem with concentrating too much work in a single segment is that a company may inadvertently become too dependent on a single customer. I have seen this happen to companies when two or more property management companies that they had business with merged. Suddenly, they had 50% of their business with one customer. It's not a good feeling.

Mix and match

To me, a good market mix is to be in multiple market segments. There are some challenges in that their needs vary slightly, but not enough to be a barrier in my mind. I would prefer that no one segment be more than 50% of my entire portfolio of business.

It becomes somewhat of a challenge to get into some segments because clients want references of similar accounts. My experience is if you have good references overall, your price is competitive and you sell yourself well, you can overcome that rather easily with most prospective customers.

When looking at new segments of the market, consider the pros and cons of each type of work:

- ▶ Is there high or low potential for enhancement work?
- ▶ Does the customer — as in the case of public work — look primarily at low bids?
- ▶ How easy will it be to maintain long-term business relationships?
- ▶ How do the customer's needs line up with your own company culture, in terms of being able to meet the customer's expectations?

These are important questions to consider as you plan to diversify.

“To me, a good market mix is to be in multiple market segments. There are some challenges ... their needs vary slightly, but not enough to be a barrier in my mind. I would prefer no one segment be more than 50% of my portfolio of business.”

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P R O V E N S O L U T I O N S

ACUTABOVE

GREEN INDUSTRY MAINTENANCE LEADERS » BY DAN JACOBS

Like many Green Industry business owners, **Jon Dozier** and **Jarrett Martin** have a love of the great outdoors. The two began building Merry Acres Landscape & Lawn Maintenance nearly a decade ago, and they try to share their passion with their customers. The duo derives “immense satisfaction from being able to apply their creativity and vision to positively transform clients’ lawns and outdoor living spaces.” Dozier offers some insight into the Green Industry.

TRENDS

› **Propane-fueled equipment.** Merry Acres was one of the first in the region to adopt propane-fueled lawn mowers, and our propane provider has told me there are others in the area moving in this direction. Plus, I was just down at our equipment dealership recently, and they told me they have a propane-fueled model they are keeping in stock because they have guys who are interested. Companies are always asking themselves, “Is there a way I can operate more efficiently?”

› **Economically influenced changes.** One of the major trends we’ve seen since the downturn of the economy has been on the installation side of our business. Whether it is landscape, irrigation or hardscape, we have seen fewer of those projects since the downturn of the housing market, and we have had to investigate more projects on the commercial side of our business. But we haven’t really had revenue fall off in the maintenance business; in fact, we’ve ticked up percentage-wise on the maintenance portion of our business. It’s close to 50% of our business, and was down to 30% a year or two ago.

› **Cost-conscious customers.** People are looking to save a dollar in this economy, and also looking to receive the most value from the money they do spend. We’re not the cheapest guys in town, and if that’s what you’re looking for, we’re not your guys. But we offer a lot for what we do. We tailor the packages and options we have to meet our customers’ budgets. If our proposal is over what the customer is willing to pay, we will go back and rework the plan with their input instead of walking away.

OBSTACLES

› **Fuel costs.** Every day, it seems that the price of fuel, whether it be gasoline or diesel, is climbing. It’s hard to quote a job accurately when planning it six to nine months in advance, because you don’t know what the cost of fuel will be at that time.

› **Labor pains.** Labor is always an obstacle. As sad as it sounds,



Jarrett Martin (left) and Jon Dozier adopted propane early on.

INSIDE INFO

Company: Merry Acres Landscape & Lawn Maintenance, MerryAcres-Landscaping.com

Founded: 2002

Headquarters: Albany, GA

Key to being a maintenance leader: Our key is that we take advantage of every opportunity and phone call that comes in to our office. Our motto is that no one project is too big or too small for us to take on. Bigger projects are always needed, but at the same time, smaller projects help sustain the overall health of our business.

finding someone with a valid driving record and driver’s license is tough, as well as finding guys who want to come to work and labor. There are many factors to look at with a team of 25. We always try to promote our employees, and replenish our staff at the bottom. I feel very fortunate that we are able to keep such a great staff; the majority of our employees have been with Merry Acres for more than three years.

We have very little turnover. I think this year we’ve had two positions turn over out of 25.

› **Cultivating new clientele.** The economy has created an obstacle for us to overcome to create new business. Clients, primarily residential clients, are very hesitant to make a change and switch to a different company. People know how small businesses are struggling to retain clients and believe switching companies would be detrimental to the overall health of that small business. Clients have become more hesitant on finding another option.

OPPORTUNITIES

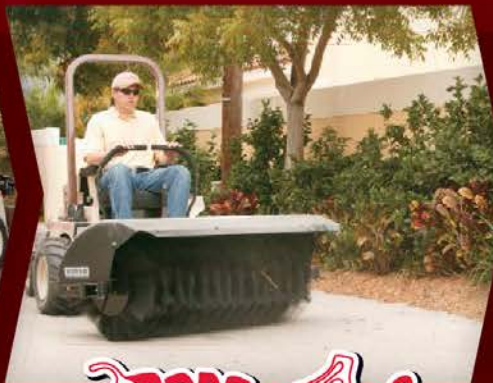
› **Cost management.** We have a fleet of eight propane-fueled lawn mowers, as well as a Ford F-150 work truck fueled by propane autogas. This equipment gives us the opportunity to better manage our costs, since we purchase propane for our on-site refueling station by negotiating an annual price. That allows us to lower our costs right now because we negotiate our propane price around June, and we’re locked in for a year. We use about 10,000 gal. of propane a year.

› **Diversification.** We pride ourselves on being a one-stop shop. We offer an array of services: landscape, irrigation, hardscapes, outdoor lighting and mosquito misting, which is similar to an irrigation system: You program the system to run about three times a day, and it fogs for about 15 to 30 seconds.

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Necessity breeds profitability

A Midwestern region's need for grub control leads to an instantly profitable add-on division.

AFTER A LARGE outbreak of grubs in the Illinois area 12 years ago, Jack Robertson recognized the need for adding a grub control service to all of his lawn care packages. It was a necessity at the time, yet it's since become a profitable division.

"When we started the white grub control service, it was automatically added to everyone's program and if they wished to decline, they could," explains Robertson, the president of Robertson Lawn Care Inc., a company with primarily residential clients. "But by letting them have the option to decline the program, it put the ball in their court. If they end up having a problem, they can't say it's something we did wrong."

For those who do decline the service, which is performed annually around the start of summer, Robertson mails a postcard reminder to customers explaining their lawns are not protected. "It's a sales tool, but even more so, it's a communication tool," he says. "A cover-your-butt type of thing making sure clients know we've given them the opportunity to protect their lawns. We don't want to force the service down anyone's throat."

GOING WITH GRUB CONTROL

The obvious but quite important factors in whether to add a grub control service is if there is a need in a particular market and whether it will be profitable. The Midwest, where Robertson is located, certainly has a grub problem, helping that division to thrive. Since landscape companies should already have the necessary equipment, the product itself becomes the only investment. But the product is costly, adds Robertson, so you should ensure it will be a profitable entity to start recouping those costs. "Your clients don't want to have a grub problem," he says. "It can lead to skunks and raccoons hanging



Jack Robertson

around their yards and digging holes."

Lawn care companies don't want their clients to have grub problems either, points out Robertson, making it even more of an incentive to sell them on the service. "A grub problem becomes a concern for the landscaper, too. It can hinder seeding, cause brown areas, and make caring for the lawn more difficult."

Each year, Robertson starts the grub control applications in early June. It's done once annually, however, he says sometimes retreating the property is necessary, especially after heavy rainfall. That makes pricing the service profitably even more important. The best time to sell the grub service is in the springtime, so you can get clients lined up for the summer. However, Robertson says this is also a challenge. "The spring is not when customers are thinking about the grub problem they might have had last September," he says. "It's out of sight, out of mind when you're selling it. and that can make the sale more challenging."

One of the most important things, says Robertson, is to sell a preventive service. It's better to protect the lawns with a simple application than try to apply a curative application to lawns that already have problems. "Grubs will turn a customer off to the landscape company, even though it's not your fault in any way they're causing a problem," he says. "The last thing you want is an unhappy customer so it's best to keep them from having any problems in the first place."

The author is a freelance writer with six years of experience covering landscaping.



The notorious — and ugly — grub.

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY NAME: Robertson Lawn Care Inc.

HEADQUARTERS: Springfield, IL

WHY GRUB CONTROL: There's a strong need for grub control in the Midwest.

INITIAL INVESTMENT: Product only. The basic lawn care company would already have a spreader, the laborer and a truck. It's just choosing which product you like best.

INVESTMENT RECOUP TIME: Immediate, assuming the need for the service is there. You should pre-sell the product to ensure immediate profitability.

WHY CUSTOMERS LIKE IT? Nobody wants a grub control problem. If they're investing in making their lawn look nice, why let grubs ruin that?

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Integrated Turf Care takes sustainability seriously. The Coral Springs, FL-based company is a platinum member of the Audubon Lifestyles and a chartered member of the International Sustainability Council. It's clear **Kenny Perkins**, CEO, is excited about what his company has to offer. "Work is fun for me again," he says. "I never minded coming to work, but now I look forward to doing this every day. I'm loving being on the forefront of where this industry is going."

Kenny, tell us why you're so enthusiastic about organic turf fertilization. We now have organic products that perform as good as synthetics. That hasn't always been the case. I tried organic processes several years ago, and I wasted maybe \$90,000 because the products didn't perform well. We're now using a natural organic product — a 15-0-0 granular and a 10-0-0 liquid — that's produced by a high-pressure composting process using food waste. Some of the products have lysine, which is a single-source nitrogen product derived from corn. We get it and other turf and ornamental products from Purely Organic, a company located in Maine.

Obviously, you're pleased with the results. We've had great success. We're applying a granular in the spring and fall, and a liquid product in fertigation systems on several different proper-

ties during the summer. We probably have 80 or 90 acres under fertigation.

Fertigation, that's applying fertilizer in irrigation water. When did you get involved with that? We started this past summer. I got the idea while I was meeting with a distributor and got involved with a discussion concerning a turf problem at a golf course. I had experience injecting rust inhibitors in irrigation systems, so it dawned on me that I could inject fertilizers, too. I investigated the idea and called Michael Chaplinsky and learned about his company, Turf Feeding Systems.

Please share your experience with fertigation so far. One of the properties we've improved is the St. Mary's Medical Center in West Palm Beach. It's about 10 acres. The hospital is committed to having a sustainable landscape, and that's what we offer. I've been working

to bring its older irrigation system up to standard. We started fertigating with organic fertilizers in mid-summer and within four or five weeks, the improvement was dramatic. They've been very pleased.

What other benefits do you feel your organic program offers customers? Once we get the properties under control, we believe we can reduce the amount of fertilizer we use and still get great results. The increased biological activity within the soil will allow us to reduce the amount of nitrogen we apply, reduce pesticide use and save water, too. That's what sustainability is about, right?

We understand that your firm joined Audubon Lifestyles as a Platinum member. What does that mean? We're proud to be a part of Audubon Lifestyles. Audubon Lifestyles is a non-profit organization based on the principles of



AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Integrated Turf Care

ONLINE: IntegratedTurfCare.com

CEO: Kenny Perkins

HEADQUARTERS: Coral Springs, FL

SERVICE AREA: Miami/Dade/Broward/Palm Beach Counties

FOUNDED: 1986, merged with another company in 2006 to become ITC

EMPLOYEES: 40 employees (peak season)

SERVICES: lawn maintenance, fertilization, pest control, landscaping, irrigation, soil analysis

PERSONAL HIGHLIGHTS/HOBBIES: Motorcycling ("I'm a speed freak.")

FAMILY: Wife, Robin

sustainability. Our company's focus is offering sustainable landscape solutions.

Obviously, you feel the direction you've chosen differentiates your company in your market. Absolutely. What we're offering is industry-altering services and products, game changers. I've been in this industry since 1986, and I sense a true metamorphosis taking place these last two or three years with the industry's understanding of the importance of enhancing soil biology to reduce chemical and water use.

WHAT WE'RE OFFERING IS **INDUSTRY-ALTERING SERVICES** . . . I'VE BEEN IN THIS INDUSTRY SINCE 1986, AND I SENSE A **TRUE METAMORPHOSIS** TAKING PLACE." —KENNY PERKINS



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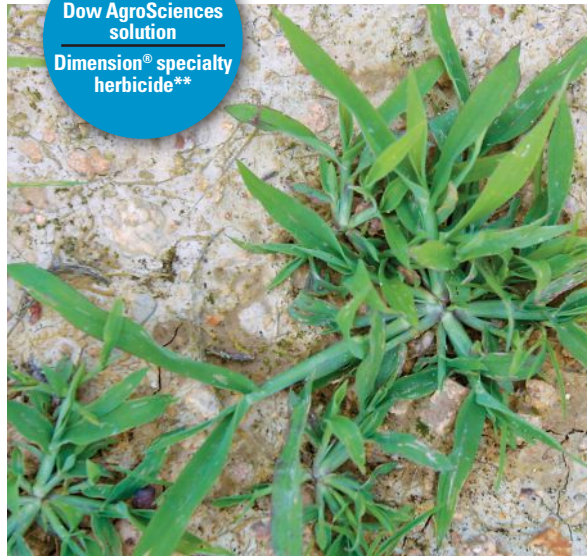
IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This low-growing winter annual thrives in open turf, and becomes upright as it matures.
- ▶ Corn speedwell has small lower leaves that are rounded and toothed; the upper leaves are pointed.
- ▶ The plant, which is entirely covered in fine hairs, grows small bright blue flowers with white throats.
- ▶ A distinctive heart-shaped seedpod grows below the flowers.
- ▶ It does not typically last long after flowering, and cannot live in high temperatures.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Increase turfgrass density and minimize open turf areas by fertilizing, mowing and irrigating.
- ▶ Control winter annual broadleaf weeds before seed set.
- ▶ Treat early stages of growth with a product containing multiple broadleaf herbicides, such as 2,4-D; MCP; dicamba; clopyralid or triclopyr.
- ▶ Apply a pre-emergent broadleaf herbicide such as isoxaben in late summer.

* Confront is not for sale or use in Nassau and Suffolk counties, New York. Other state restrictions on the sale and use of Confront apply.



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LARGE CRABGRASS

Digitaria sanguinalis

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This light green, bunch-type grass features seed-head spikelets in two to nine finger-like branches along the stalk.
- ▶ The summer annual germinates when soil temperatures reach a consistent 55° F.
- ▶ Its tall, membranous ligule has jagged edges and no auricles.
- ▶ Leaves are rolled in the bud, and the collar is broad with long hairs.
- ▶ It grows under close mowing, and prefers open areas with thin turfgrass.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ When soil temperatures reach 55° F in the spring, apply a pre-emergent crabgrass herbicide.
- ▶ Choose the formulation that works best for your operation. There are several liquid, granular or fertilizer granule options.
- ▶ Consult the appropriate product label for recommended rates for your area, as well as reseeding and overseeding recommendations.

** State restrictions on the sale and use of Dimension apply.

For more information regarding these and other turf weeds — and related control technologies and tips — please visit www.DowProvesIt.com or call 800/255-3726.

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P R O V E N S O L U T I O N S



THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 25-year industry veteran. Reach him at kkehoe@questex.com.



Achieve your sales goal

Not achieving sales goals is one of the chief causes of low net profit. Let's focus on two causes of this problem — and the attendant solutions.

Cause 1: Planning

Too often, not enough time goes into the details required to turn a goal into an invoiced reality. Specifically, most managers underestimate the number of leads necessary. Identify specific numeric targets in your annual plan, and break them down into weekly goals. Table 1 provides an example of this type of sales planning.

TABLE 1

Sales goal — \$1 million
New sales sold and produced in a fiscal year

Close rate — 20%
Percentage at which bid dollars close

Bid goal — \$5 million
Sales goal divided by closing rate

Average job size — \$15,000
Dollar value of average job or contract

Number of bids — 333
Bid goal divided by average job size

Qualification rate — 50%
Percentage of leads that are qualified to bid

Number of leads — 667
Number of bids divided by qualification rate

Per the Table, achieving \$1 million in sales at a 20% close rate requires \$5 million in proposals. Close rates are falling as competition has increased. In grounds maintenance, 17% is now a typical rate. In design/build, it's higher — usually around 35%. In bid/build, it may be as low as 5%.

Translating bid dollars into a bid number requires an assumption about average job size. Recognizing that all leads are not qualified (for an assortment of reasons), it makes sense to apply a qualification rate to determine a

number of leads. This qualification rate can be as low as 40% in grounds maintenance, for example.

The bottom line is that \$1 million in sales requires a starting point of 667 leads. Keep in mind, a lead is a job or property. Therefore, a single property management relationship may generate many leads.

TABLE 2

Prospecting time — 0.5 hours per
333 total hours (leads times hours)
Average time it takes to make prospecting call

Qualification time — 0.5 hours per
333 total hours (leads times hours)
Average time it takes to meet and qualify

Bidding time — 5 hours per
1,667 total hours (leads times hours)
Average time it takes to measure and estimate

Closing time — 2.5 hours per
833 total hours (leads times hours)
Average time it takes to present, close and follow-up

Total hours — 3,167
Hours required to achieve the goal

Solution: Build a solid list of leads. The best sources include existing relationships, lapsed customers, previously bid but lost jobs, and geographically oriented door-knocking or mailing campaigns.

Cause 2: Division of labor

More management thinking should go into time and talent allocation. Specifically, in today's world it is highly improbable that one person can effectively execute the sales process: prospecting, qualification, measuring, estimating, presenting and closing. To understand what you need, you must identify time requirements by activity. Table 2 does this.

The sales process is labor-intensive. If time and talent are improperly allocated, the goal will not be achieved. Table 2 makes this clear: To sell \$1 million, more than 3,000 hours of someone's time is a realistic estimate. Obviously, a single individual will not be able to get it all done — especially during crunch times.

Solution: Focus your salespeople on prospecting, qualification, presenting and closing, and assign measuring and estimating tasks to someone else who is far better and faster at it anyway.



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Hilltop haven

THE MISSION

Create the epitome of Tuscan ambiance with Old World charm.

The landscape of this 65,000-sq.-ft. clubhouse, situated on a Central Florida hilltop and overlooking the residential community it serves, features 300 trees, 3,500 shrubs, 8,700 groundcovers, 2,800 annuals and 71,000 sq. ft. of turf. Austin Outdoor, based in Bunnell, FL, dedicated more than 10,000 hours to the project.

To create the feel of a property that has been here for generations, the team, led by Brian Wester, installed mature plant material. This was a challenge, because the landscape went beyond the perimeter of the building — with courtyards and niches at every turn. The tight working environment was overcome by precise placement, using a 100-ton crane.

There was one other major obstacle, notes Wester, who was district manager at the time of installation but has since been promoted to the Southeast regional vice president for Yellowstone Landscape Group, Austin Outdoor's parent company: the strict water restrictions the team faced in light of the site's sandy soil conditions. To compensate, they used drought-tolerant, native plants and drip irrigation.

Austin Outdoor did all the installation work on the \$1.12 million project, except for lighting, water features, hardscapes and parking.



1



2



3

PHOTOS COURTESY: (1-3, 6) MSI DESIGN; (4) ALEX SHELVER; (5) AUSTIN OUTDOOR; (7) JOSHUA METZGER

THE WORK

4



5



6



7



1 | A thing of beauty. The clubhouse is the heart of this community, overlooking two lakes. The owner made sure that much of the natural beauty of the surrounding environment was highlighted, while creating an atmosphere reminiscent of Tuscany.

2 | Perfect placement. An 100-ton crane was used to install the field-grown oaks, including an 18-in. caliper with a 15-ft. spread and 25 ft. tall — no small feat when working in the tight spaces as the courtyards offered.

3 | Italian renaissance. The Tuscan ambiance was achieved through the use of Italian-style plant material, including tall Italian Cypress, drifty Mexican Sage, stately Black Olive trees and flowering Rosemary.

4 | Smart irrigation. Austin Outdoor installed more than 7 miles of dripline, using the nearby lake as the water source. In total, more than 3,000 hours were devoted to the irrigation installation.

5 | Water conservation. Native, drought-tolerant plants include blue Plumbago, trailing Lantana and wispy Fakahatchee grass.

6 | Lots of pots. Potted plants were an important theme element. But moving and arranging more than 100 pots was sometimes a challenge during the process.

7 | Turf choices. The 4-acre site features Bahia grass and Zoysia grass. A full-time crew of eight, plus Wester, worked for nearly 18 months to complete the landscape installation.

Austin Outdoor is a horticultural organization dedicated to creating, building and maintaining sustainable landscapes. This particular installation garnered a 2010 Environmental Improvement Grand Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). For more information, visit AustinOutdoor.net.

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Stihl

The engine technology on the new Stihl MS 261 and MS 261 C-Q chainsaws reduce emissions up to 50% and provide up to a 20% increase in fuel efficiency as compared to previous models, resulting in longer periods of use between refueling. They come equipped with a decompression valve for easier starts and an advanced anti-vibration system that helps reduce user fatigue. The compact, space-saving design of the split-barrel carburetor and the stainless steel muffler reduce overall weight. Other features include a side-access chain tensioner, tool-less fuel and oil caps with retainers, and a translucent fuel tank. Captive bar nuts are retained in the sprocket cover to prevent their loss and are designed for self-guided mounting. Pre-separation air filtration provides greater air cleaning efficiency and longer run times between filter maintenance. StihlUSA.com/chainsaws

Shindaiwa

New Hybrid 4 engine technology combines the best elements of two-stroke engines (light weight, high power-to-weight ratios, minimal maintenance and all-position operation) with the best elements of four-stroke engines (precise ignition/exhaust timing and reduced emissions). It's available in 24.5-, 34- and 79.7-cc engine sizes on 18 Shindaiwa product families, including the trimmer, brushcutter, hedge trimmer, blower, multi-tool, edger and PowerBroom lines. Hybrid 4 products have lower emissions, better fuel economy, more torque than traditional two-stroke models, and a low tone sound. They also feature reduced starting effort with built-in decompression and offer longer engine life, thanks to dual-stage air filtration.

Hybrid4Engine.com



continued on page 46

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Echo Inc.

The new PB-770 backpack blower delivers an average air volume of 765 cfm at the pipe and 204 mph maximum air speed. It's equipped with a 63.3cc Power Boost Tornado engine with Pro-Fire ignition for quick and easy starts. Available in both hip- and tube-mounted throttle versions with cruise control, the unit features dual-stage, side-mounted, heavy-duty air filtration and the Posi-Loc pipe system for a secure connection. The padded backrest features a special lightweight straight back "L" frame with dual adjusting shoulder straps to accommodate longer usage needs. In addition, it features an exclusive vented back pad that allows air to circulate around the user. A vent cover is included to block this function during cold-weather use. Echo-USA.com



Husqvarna

The 327LS trimmer's ergonomic features, such as LowVib and an adjustable handle, keeps the operator comfortable for hours of extended use. Featuring a steel drive shaft, the trimmer's E-Tech II engine provides higher torque, lower noise pressure and lower emissions — reduced to levels below existing (and future) EPA requirements, without compromising power. Additional features include: snap lock air filter cover and pleated paper filter with rubber seal; standalone starter for faster and easier maintenance; dual starter pawls and large-diameter starter rope for increased durability; fuel tank protection plate for safe transport; and large diameter bevel gear for longer life and reduced grass winding. Husqvarna.com



LAWN CARE: INSECT CONTROL

FMC

Talstar EZ Granular insecticide featuring Verge granule technology is now available. The clay-based granule breaks down quickly to release the active ingredient and disappear into the landscape, providing long-lasting control of surface-feeding pests such as ants, billbugs, chinch bugs, fleas and ticks. Virtually dust- and odor-free, the new formulation reduces applicator exposure while providing improved ballistics for a more uniform distribution of product. It is labeled for broadcast and perimeter pest control around residential and commercial buildings, and on lawns and athletic fields. FMCproolutions.com



Gowan

Azahar is a broad-spectrum botanical insecticide that controls a wide variety of insect pests on ornamentals, including whiteflies, fungus gnats, cutworm, loopers, mealybugs, scale and thrips. Registered for use in organic production, Azahar can replace or enhance traditional chemical treatments. GowanCo.com

LebanonTurf

ProScape with Merit is a cost-effective combination product that protects against grubs and a wide variety of other harmful insects. Fortified with MESA slow-release nitrogen for extended feeding, ProScape with Merit provides brilliant color and quick response. Late spring or early summer applications produce season-long results. LebanonTurf.com



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continued from page 46



PBI/Gordon Corp.

Available this spring, new Zylam 20SG Systemic Turf Insecticide contains dinotefuran, a soluble granule labeled for key turf insect pests such as chinch bugs, annual bluegrass weevils, crane flies and mole crickets. It is highly soluble, which allows for rapid plant uptake and quick translocation throughout the vascular tissue, protecting

the entire plant from hard-to-control turf insects. A liquid formulation labeled for tree and shrub insect pests will be available later this year to control a wide range of pests, including armored and soft scale and lacebug, whiteflies, thrips, emerald ash borer and caterpillars. PBIgordon.com



Syngenta

Meridian insecticide (thiamethoxam) is designed to provide turf managers with a high degree of control and application flexibility in managing a broad spectrum of grubs and insects. It also is effective and suitable for use on trees and shrubs. Meridian 0.33 G granular formulation contains .05 oz. of active ingredient per pound of formulated product, and is packaged in 40-lb. resealable bags. Water-dispersible Meridian 25 WG (pictured) contains 4 oz. of active ingredient per pound of formulated product, and is packaged in 4- and 17-oz. bottles. GreencastOnline.com

Dow AgroSciences

Derived from the fermentation of a naturally occurring organism, Conserve SC specialty insecticide combines the effectiveness of synthetic insecticides with the benefits of natural insect control products. Conserve SC provides fast kill and control of a wide variety of turfgrass and ornamental insect pests, including sod webworms, fall armyworms, black cutworms, gypsy moth larvae and leafminers. It is labeled for use on all turfgrass species, as well as many ornamental plants, and has a very low impact on the environment. Conserve SC is highly active at low use rates, and it requires no special handling or use restrictions. DowProvesIt.com



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Arysta Lifescience Corp.

Aloft combines two modes of activity for maximum performance: Bifenthrin provides immediate knockdown (within hours) of early-season adults, including black turfgrass atanius, annual bluegrass weevil, cutworms and billbugs, as well as surface-feeding pests like chinch bugs, armyworms and sod webworms. Then, the outstanding systemic and residual activity of clothianidin provides preventive, season-long control of all white grubs, plus "reach-back" control of any escaped larvae from early-season adult and surface feeder eggs laid prior to Aloft application. ArystaLifeScience.us

Arborjet

AzaSol is a water-soluble, powdered azadirachtin product developed for biologically based insect control. The 6% solution offers the highest concentration available on the market. It can be applied via soil drench, chemigation, injection or spray. Studies show azadirachtin, derived from neem plants, to be an effective broad spectrum biological insect control, proven natural anti-feedant, growth regulator and anti-ovipository and insect repellent, providing protection from insects ranging from annual bluegrass weevils to whiteflies. Azasol.com



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BASF Professional Turf & Ornamentals

Amdro Pro Fire Ant Bait insecticide delivers proven, cost-effective control of imported and native fire ants. Amdro Pro gives landscape professionals flexible dose and application options for single mounds or large areas. When used as directed, Amdro Pro eliminates the queen and her colony within seven days of a mound treatment, and rids an entire infested area of fire ants within two weeks of a broadcast application. *BetterTurf.BASF.us*



Mauget Inc.

TreeAzin is a systemic bioinsecticide product produced by BioForest Technologies Inc. and distributed by Mauget. The

anti-feedant and growth disruptor is labeled for use against defoliating insects, including emerald ash borer. It's formulated with azadirachtin, a natural extract of the neem tree seed, and is the only tree-injected neem seed product with an Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) listing. *Mauget.com*

Bayer Environmental Science

TopChoice insecticide is based on the powerful active ingredient fipronil. Just one broadcast application of the ultra-low-dose granule provides 95% control of fire ants for up to one year. TopChoice also controls mole crickets, fleas, ticks and nuisance ants when treating for fire ants. *BackedByBayer.com*



DuPont Professional Products

More than 550 independent university trials prove it: One application of DuPont Acelepryn insecticide controls the 10 toughest grubs at the lowest application rate ever utilized for white grub control. One early application also provides control of key surface-feeding pests, including cutworms, webworms and billbugs. In addition, research and field usage show that Acelepryn is an effective option for use in an annual bluegrass weevil control program. The reduced-risk product is available in a liquid formulation, a granular formulation and on fertilizer. *ProProducts.DuPont.com*

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MAINTENANCE: TRUCKS, TRAILERS & ACCESSORIES



Pack'em Trailer Accessories

Pack'em by Rack'em is an economically priced line of equipment-handling racks that are lockable. The PK-6 trimmer rack comes with four keyed-alike padlocks — three are for the trimmers and the fourth is for an

optional backpack blower rack. The blower rack is part of the PK-OP1, which also comes with a cooler rack and a trim line holder to be mounted on the trimmer rack. PackEmRacks.com



Little Wonder

The new trim and fit 14-hp Shredding TruckLoader is ideal for one-man operations and light-capacity trucks. Durable composite and polyethylene materials — up to 50% lighter than steel — lessen unit weight without sacrificing strength. The discharge chute is molded to cradle a special rubber compound liner, while the rugged 12-gauge steel housing is lined with a hard-wearing, noise-absorbing conveyor belt material. The intake hose is made of translucent, flexible urethane that is abrasion- and tear-resistant, with a smooth interior for unrestricted material flow. It features a new tubular steel wide grip handle for operator comfort. Easy access features include a hinged housing cover that opens a full 180° for unrestricted access to the impeller and housing liner, common hardware so one tool opens both the housing and discharge chute, bolt-in liners that are easy to remove and replace, low-oil sensor, remote oil drain and dual-stage air cleaner. LittleWonder.com



Roush CleanTech

Roush CleanTech has developed liquid propane autogas injection fuel systems for 2009 and 2010 Ford F-250 and F-350 trucks, including the option of either an in-bed 55-gal tank (450 miles) or under-bed 23-gal. tank (225 miles). Propane autogas refueling stations for vehicles are located in every state, increasing convenience for landscape contractors. There are more than 200 in Texas and California each; 100 or more each in Arizona, Florida, Michigan, Missouri and Pennsylvania; and there are more to come. With thousands of refueling stations available in the United States, contractors who rely on drivers to refuel trucks at the end of the day can still take that approach. RoushCleanTech.com



Step n Tow Systems

The Step n Tow swing-out step allows easy access to the bed or roof rack of your pickup truck or sports utility vehicle. It features a galvanized, powdercoated finish and an 18-in., 90° swing-out non-skid rubber step that's rated at 350 lbs. in the open or closed position. Add the universal mount, and Step n Tow will accept any tool that normally fits into a standard 2x2 receiver, such as a mounted vice or an electric winch. StepNTow.com

Super Lawn Technologies

The SLT Eco Series allows landscape professionals to neatly organize, store and transport tools, power equipment and mowers in a professional-looking "warehouse on wheels." Ideal for a growing landscape business, the enclosed body style protects tools and provides billboard-sized advertising. On-board fuel tanks improve productivity, while locking toolboxes and tool storage provide effective security and protection. SuperLawnTrucks.com



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LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT (ISSN 0894-1254) is published monthly (12 issues per year) by Questex Media Group LLC, 306 W Michigan St, Suite 200, Duluth, MN 55802. **Subscription rates:** one year, \$54, two years \$76 in the United States & Possessions; \$87 for one year, \$127 for two years in Canada and Mexico; all other countries \$165 for one year, \$246 for two years. For airmail delivery, include an additional \$75 per order annually. Single copies (pre-paid only): \$8 in the United States; \$10 in Canada and Mexico; \$15 all other countries. Back issues, if available: \$16 in the U.S.; \$20 in Canada and Mexico; \$30 all other countries. Add \$6.50 per order for shipping and handling. **Periodicals postage paid** at Duluth, MN 55806 and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Please send address changes to *Landscape Management*, P.O. Box 1268, Skokie, IL 60076-9268. Canadian G.S.T. number: 840 033 278 RT0001. Publications Mail Agreement Number 40017597. Printed in the U.S.A.



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A business owner who wore too many hats finds putting his marketing campaign in the hands of outside experts pays off.



The TreeTech team working in their element.

OWNER: Andy Felix

COMPANY: Tree Tech Inc.

HEADQUARTERS: Foxboro, MA

2010 REVENUE: \$7.7 million

2011 REVENUE (EXPECTED): \$8.4 million

EMPLOYEES: 80

SERVICES: tree preservation, tree trimming, tree removal, land clearing, tree and shrub fertilizing and insect and disease control

CLIENT MIX: 60% commercial, 40% residential

WEB: www.treetechinc.net

BEST ADVICE: Consult outside experts in marketing — you never know what ideas they might offer to help grow your business.

ANDY FELIX HAS always done it all. Tree Tech Inc., the company he founded in 1986, started with a work crew of just two men, one truck and a chipper. Felix loved trees, worked hard and accomplished his goals. Today, his business has more than 80 employees offering customers in Massachusetts and Rhode Island tree preservation, tree trimming, tree removal, land clearing, tree and shrub fertilizing and insect and disease control services.

Running and growing Tree Tech meant Felix learned to wear a lot of hats — one of those being marketing. But the 5% increase in growth in 2010 was all a result of doing something different on this front, something Felix realizes he should have done a long time ago: hiring a professional marketing firm after 24 years of do-it-yourself marketing.

“As I got older and wiser, I realized I’m not an expert in putting together a viable

marketing campaign,” Felix says. So he started exploring the options offered to him by local marketing firms, settling on a firm owned by an old college acquaintance.

“We established some needs and goals, and she came back with a wide array of ideas that were really creative,” he says. “In fact, I actually am afraid if we do implement all of her ideas that we wouldn’t be able to fulfill the demand we get back — so we’re implementing some of them, slowly.”

Though Felix has just begun to execute some of these new marketing concepts, he believes it’s already made a difference. “We’ll have the same net profit from 2009 despite the economy and the fact that we had some contracts expire this year,” says Felix, who brought in about \$7.7 million in 2010 and is projecting \$8.4 million for 2011. “So I feel the marketing effort has helped replace some of the work we lost. And because of the marketing effort, I also think we’ll be able to grow, even in a difficult time.”

One of the marketing ideas suggested to him was a hammock giveaway with the tagged slogan “Rest easy because we’ll take care of your trees.” Any new customer who called to inquire about the business would get a hammock. Felix says the key to giveaways is to come up with desirable products that would

encourage new customers to call, but are still affordable to buy in bulk. This was one of the ideas Felix decided to hold off on. “Our goals are not for rapid growth and tons of new clients,” admits Felix. “We just want to gain enough new business each year that we can replace lost accounts and grow slowly and steadily. I’m happy with where we’re at and am hoping our marketing efforts will help maintain that.”

Cost-wise, Felix says investing in an outside marketing expert was worth it. “You definitely get what you pay for with a smart marketing approach,” he says. “In fact, I’d say it could actually save you money. I’ve learned certain marketing decisions I made in the past have been a mistake. We put a lot of money into some cable television commercials that didn’t generate any new business. And we’ve done some radio ads that were just not effective. But when you hire a good marketing person, they really get solid aim at the target and make your dollars count.”

Though business owners often feel the burden of trying to do everything, Felix says they shouldn’t be ashamed to admit they can’t do it all by themselves. “You may be an excellent businessperson and run your business successfully, but you still may not be good at marketing,” he says. “If you really want to grow your business, it’s a good idea to find someone who is an expert in marketing.”

Payton is a freelance writer with six years of experience covering landscaping.

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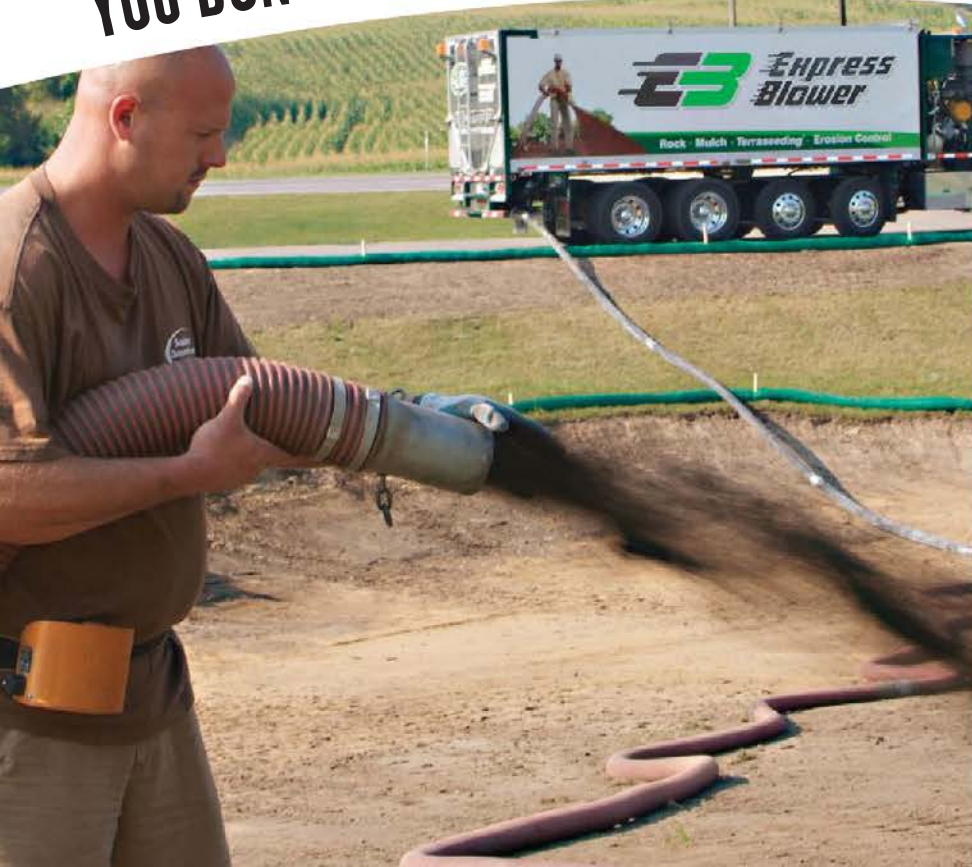
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The John Deere GreenFleet™ Discount Program

At John Deere, we think you should be rewarded for making good decisions. So when you buy a minimum of two pieces of John Deere Commercial Equipment, you become eligible for discounts with our GreenFleet program*. Buy more and the discount increases with the number of eligible pieces purchased. And you get that same discount when you buy additional John Deere equipment for one year after your first purchase.

Better yet, as your business grows, so do your savings. Call your local John Deere dealer today and ask how you can save with our GreenFleet program.

Your partner from the ground up.



JOHN DEERE

*Initial purchase must include 2 or more new qualified units purchased on a single purchase order. See dealer for details. Equipment shown not available at all dealers. Eligible Equipment: Compact Utility Tractors and 110TLB. Utility Vehicles: All 4x2, 6x4, HPX, TS/TH/TX, CX, E-Gators and XUV Gators; Garden Tractors: X700 Ultimate and X500 Multi-Terrain Tractors; Professional Mowing Equipment: 717A – 797 Series, Z800A & Z900A & 997 Series ZTrak Mowers, Quik-Trak Mowers, Commercial Walk-Behind Mowers (36"+ decks), Front Mowers, and 1600 WAM; LESCO: CWBM and Stand-on Z-Mowers Commercial Worksite Products (CWP): Skid Steers, Compact Track Loaders, Compact Excavators and 244J Compact Wheel Loaders.