

# MYBIGGESTMISTAKE

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



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](http://www.treetechinc.net)

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

**A**NDY 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.