



FIRSTCUT

NICOLE WISNIEWSKI EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Contact Nicole at 216/706-3735 or via email nwisniewski@questex.com.

Adapt to grow

remember my first months in the landscape industry very well. In addition to writing about the state of the industry, crew sizes, tree transplanting, winterizing irrigation systems, designing landscapes for safety, preemergent herbicide application timing and landscape businesses and their owners, I covered the mergers and acquisitions announcements coming in at a rapid pace.

The increased news was a result of February 1998's formation of LandCare USA and TruGreen LandCare (TruGreen's landscape maintenance division). The two were locked in a heated acquisitions race. As my editor at the time said then, "you can call the Green Industry a lot of things, but not boring."

The excitement died down after one giant — TruGreen — bought the other that same year. And, now more than 10 years later, though the news isn't flooding in as quickly, there is competition over merging and/or acquiring strong brands in the

commercial maintenance segment of the industry, which has historically brought recurring revenue, stability and long-term growth and, as a result, has proven to be an attractive investment for private equity firms and outside industry investors.

The most interesting part of reporting on this news is watching how the industry adapts each time.

The people I talked to for our cover story this month all had a similar advice for businesses struggling and stabilizing in today's economy: Don't be afraid to turn something upside down and look at it a different way; don't be fearful of bringing in outside help to question the way you do things with the goal of making systems more efficient. You don't have to change your business or offer different services, but by getting your "ego out of the way" in order to become a better business, as investor Martin Zweig points out, you and your team will become smarter and your business will become stronger.

As former Major League baseball pitcher Nolan Ryan has said: "Enjoying success requires the ability to adapt. Only by being open to change will you have a true opportunity to get the most from your talent."

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