

# MYBIGGESTMISTAKE

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



This Texas business owner says that by changing her company's focus and branching out into new markets, her business has endured.

**IN THE PAST** Marsha Newberry, owner and managing partner for Signature Contracting Services, says she might not have been as willing to adapt to change, but the state of the economy has almost forced her to, well, change her mind about change. Now, she attributes her Texas-based company's willingness to transform as the key to its survival and success in this difficult marketplace.

"We started as a landscape company and have

basically become a commercial contractor doing work on roads, bridges, and even rail lines," says Newberry. "Being able to diversify and being willing to change has become a necessity."

But, Newberry admits, change isn't easy. "If you have a group of people that knows how to plant flowers and trees and do landscaping work, but you want to diversify beyond that, you need to find people," she says. "This economy might have produced a lot of unemployed people, but it's still not always easy to find good people."

In diversifying, Newberry says one of the biggest challenges has been

finding banking support. With that source of financing closed off, it forced the company to get creative and start looking at jobs that other companies weren't taking on.

"We are up for work that other companies don't show interest in — such as a small job that a larger contractor would say they don't want to waste their time on," Newberry says. "It might be something as small as screwing a bolt

ing," she says. "Those times are gone. We do those things, but if that were all we did, we'd be in trouble. We have even gotten into telecommunications — something that has nothing to do with landscaping or contracting but has become another avenue in these tough times to help support what we now call the 'Mother Company' because we've developed so many different divisions and departments."

While diversifying helps her company thrive, Newberry says it's important to continue to build and maintain relationships. Work continues to flow largely because the company makes an effort to build relationships, even within its diversification.

"If you don't start building relationships, work isn't going to come back to you," she says. "We've gotten some itty-bitty jobs such as drilling one hole because we were the only ones willing to do it in the middle of the night. But then when the customers see we worked in the middle of the night to help them out, they're going to come back to us when they have something else. And maybe next time it will be a bigger job. The bottom line is that you have to be willing to do whatever it takes to survive and that's what we've done. Our philosophy is that failure is not an option."

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



Marsha Newberry

**COMPANY:** Signature Contracting Services, LLC

**HEADQUARTERS:** Grand Prairie, TX

**DIVISIONS AND REVENUES:**

**LANDSCAPE:** \$2,959,921

**GRADING/TRENCHING/BORING:** \$10,885,825

**TELECOMMUNICATIONS:** \$608,525

**MOWING:** \$695,725

**NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:** 261

**2010 REVENUE:** \$9,205,051

**PROJECTED 2011 REVENUE:** \$15,150,000

**IF YOU DON'T START BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS, WORK ISN'T GOING TO COME BACK TO YOU.**

onto a piece of concrete. By taking on these kinds of jobs, we became the go-to people for the extra work larger contractors don't want to do. That kind of work may be small, but it can add up and has actually supported our company during these tougher times."

Newberry advises other companies to become more willing to adapt.

"You simply can't be so rigid that you only want to plant trees and do mow-