



THE BENCHMARK

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Build a sales machine

In the old days, the phone rang and there was more business than we could handle. Yeah, I really miss the old days, too. But we aren't likely to see them again for at least five years — or until the real estate market heals.

All that being said, it is essential to build a sales machine within your business. There are five parts of a well-functioning sales machine:

1. Your **plan** must address the volumes required to achieve a return on investment.
2. Your **pricing** must be competitive enough to win a fair share of what you bid.
3. Your sales **people** must be able to execute the plan — weekly.
4. Your **methods** must make it easy for your team to focus on the primary objective: maximum face time with prospects.
5. Your **message** must resonate in the prospect's gut. (*Hint: Their primary need is not for higher quality landscape*).

More on the message

Your message must demonstrate an understanding of the prospect's core needs. Only after this has occurred can you offer solutions. The prospect's needs are both logical and emotional, but are always driven by business considerations.

Let's use an example of primary needs in the commercial maintenance services arena. The following message:

- › demonstrates an understanding of the prospect's world;
- › suggests (not provides) potential solutions; and
- › provides a common platform for print media, advertising, marketing, emails, proposals and sales calls.

When you consider the following challenges you face, selecting the right company to achieve your business goals becomes more than a matter of a green lawn.

Supply and Demand: Vacancies for commercial space over the next five years are expected to increase by 10% in our market. This put pressure on rents and retention. When you consider that retention is driven by rental rates, and rental rates are driven by good management and curb appeal, it makes sense to fashion a maintenance services strategy that gets you the best return on investment.

Energy Cost: The cost of energy and water are expected to rise by 20% by 2012. Combining this with pressure on rents, property managers can ill afford to waste water or continue to invest in high energy-consuming landscapes. It makes sense to assess these costs and invest in necessary upgrades to save money.

Litigation: The primary sources of litigation stem from issues regarding accidents related to poor maintenance practices — 70% of which are outside the building where people come to and from the office. Mitigation can involve line of sight, lighting, water/snow slip-and-fall, and damages from maintenance equipment and contractors. When you consider the probability of these events, a prevention plan can save you plenty.

Weather: Storms cost property owners more than \$400 million in our market last year. The greatest threats stem from windblown trees, hail damage to walls and structures, and poor drainage because of outdated landscape design. These are high-cost insurance items that can be addressed by low-cost landscape practices. Managing this annual reality has a direct impact on your annual revenue.

This is a sales message. It is directed at the real needs of the commercial property manager in this particular market. It is the way you get in the door to become a contender instead of just a bidder. Everyone has problems these days, and the problems are all money problems. Sell your services as a solution to these problems, and the prospect will listen.