

“It is very rewarding to serve as CEO of a \$20 million landscape contractor firm,” says **Bill Russell**, chief executive officer of Russell Landscape Group (RLG). The company, based in Dacula, GA, is as committed to Dacula’s people as it is to its landscapes. The company’s demonstrated that through its longtime involvement in the local community, Russell said.

“RLG’s strong community service and commitment to giving back financially to the area where we’ve prospered has afforded us great exposure, yielded new clients and increased referrals,” Russell says.

He pauses to tell *LM* more about opportunities and challenges facing his business and the Green Industry in today’s economy.

TOP TREND

› Irresponsible price cutting and low ball bidding.

I am very concerned with one current industry trend in which far too many firms are drastically reducing their maintenance pricing without regard or consideration for overhead and essential bottom line profit. The prevalence of irresponsible price cutting and low-ball bidding by a large number of companies has created an unfavorable environment, which drives markets downward to the point that we won’t return contract pricing to previous industry standards for several years. Russell Landscape Group will continue to strive to out-service the competition with its quality services at value pricing.

TOP OBSTACLE

› **High fuel prices and labor costs.** The obstacles Russell Landscape Group is currently facing in this challenging economy are numerous. They include intrusive immigration reform by state government, unavailable capital, astronomical fuel prices, increased tax burden and rising operational and healthcare costs. In an effort to reduce high fuel consumption and labor costs created when crews are stuck in traffic congestion, Russell Landscape Group recently established new branch locations throughout our five-state service market. These new satellite locations have reduced travel time and lost job production incurred as crews moved among client job sites.



Bill Russell

INSIDE INFO

Company:
Russell Landscape Group

Headquarters: Dacula, GA (Northeast Atlanta), with 12 branches in the Southeast.

Employees: 475

2010 revenue: \$20 million

Key to being a maintenance leader: The key to being a strong maintenance leader is to understand that one only wins when surrounded by people who are smarter than you are. People aren’t the greatest asset in any company; however, the right people are a company’s greatest asset (both the right employees and the right clients). A great maintenance leader gets the correct people on the bus and then positions them in the appropriate seats to ensure winning.

Russell Landscape Group’s ownership has found that if we help enough people get what they want, then we can achieve what we want. The largest challenge of being a maintenance leader in the present down economy, where quality is going up and prices down, is maintaining a positive attitude. Business is a competitive sport where true leaders go from challenge to challenge with undiminished enthusiasm. Attitude determines altitude and it is essential that company employees consistently witness a leader who is positive about the company’s future.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

› **Effective marketing.** RLG’s leaders network beyond the ordinary, and we have utilized our company website to generate business. The Internet continues to present opportunities for RLG. The presence of a website lends prestige to a firm, is inexpensive, and allows a drastic increase in communication speed. Our company website provides initial contact with numerous potential prospects who are then contacted by phone or in face-to-face sales meetings.

› **Our current client base.** Referrals are RLG’s largest new client generator. Taking care of our existing clients and providing them with more than they expect during tough times has afforded us a strong referral base.

› **Diversified services and landscape enhancement upgrades.** Commercial and residential properties, even in a challenged economy, are still focused on curb appeal by purchasing lifestyle elements such as fountains and outdoor patios. RLG is receiving one-fourth of its new revenue from add-on work orders. Our firm has experienced recent success by expanding services to include Department of Transportation highway contracts, community improvement districts, cell towers and snow removal services.

RLG is also seizing opportunities for growth by partnering with firms who specialize in specific Green Industry services, including hard-scapes, efficient irrigation systems, landscape lighting, mulching, water features and hydro-seeding. Our company often achieves a greater bottom line profit when contracting out specialty work and partnering with firms who specialize in a specific service.