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Read up on the newest job-tracking tech and what products this season has in store (page 47).

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Illustration: Jeff Bennett

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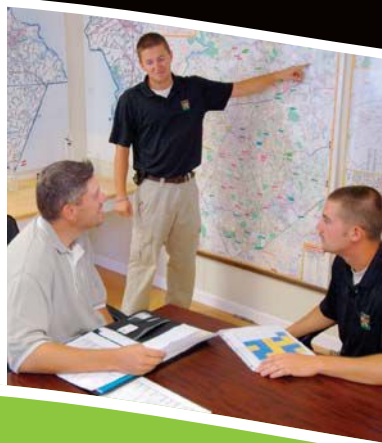
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THE LM DAILY

DID YOU CATCH THE LATEST FROM THE BLOG?

In his latest blog post, titled "Big clients can kill you," LM blogger and Green Industry consultant Jeffrey Scott shared these insights:

- » The clients you say "no" to can be your best clients!
- » Big clients upset your sales cycle. You run out of time to develop new business because you are so busy with the "big" job.
- » Big clients are fun to brag about, but they can kill your morale and your wallet.

HERE'S HOW READERS RESPONDED:

BLOG COMMENTS

Good stuff, Jeffrey. I'm glad you learned the lesson for all of us :-). "Don't look for a silver bullet. Look for a better system and a better approach to your business." Love that quote. Nice work!

Chris Heiler
LandscapeLeadership.com

So true! Especially about the 10 percent part ... happens often with money manager types.

Jan Johnsen
Johnsen Landscapes & Pools
Mount Kisco, N.Y.

Great article...

Rick Gottschalk Jr.
Garrick-Santo Landscape Co.
Wilmington, Mass.

TWITTER

RT @Grasshopper Mowr: Big contracts can come with big headaches, and big losses. Thoughts from Jeffrey Scott on the @LandscapeMgmt blog @GoiLawn



Big contracts can come with big headaches, and big losses. Thoughts from Jeffrey Scott on the @LandscapeMgmt blog: bit.ly/LXgvol @GrasshopperMowr

Don't look for a silver bullet. Look for a better system and a better approach to your busi-



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new features you'd like to see on our redesigned website. Send your thoughts to Editor Marisa Palmieri at mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net.

ness - buff.ly/LXgvol via @LandscapeMgmt @Inbound_Agency

Good article and timely @budsnblades

FACEBOOK

Deciding to terminate a contract with a client is always a tough choice.

See why you should look hard at your big clients.

Shared by South Carolina Landscape and Turfgrass Association

Great article. I couldn't agree more.

Justin Stelter
Justin Stelter Landscape Gardening
Franklin, Tenn.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

Contact Marisa at 216/706-3764 or via email at mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net.

Accepting recognition

Sixteen: The number of years Green Industry volunteers have come together to beautify Arlington National Cemetery during the annual Renewal & Remembrance (R&R) event, held by the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET).

400: The number of volunteers at this year's event on July 9.

\$2 million-plus: The estimated value of the labor and materials donated by the Green Industry since R&R's inception.

155 and 36: The number of acres limed and aerated, respectively, this year.

240 pounds: The amount of lime I applied with a walk-behind spreader as a member of the Section 7 liming crew. (That's 240 pounds more than I've ever spread in my life, let alone going uphill!)

As an American and a member of the Green Industry, I encourage you to attend R&R at least once. But know this: It's inspiring, energizing and it never gets old, so you will probably go back year after year.

Before this year's dedication ceremony, I spoke with volunteer Miles Kuperus, owner of Farmside Landscape in Wantage, N.J., and another number occurred to me: the number of participants in R&R—or any community service project—who share what good works they're doing with their clients and the public. I'm not sure exactly what the figure is, but knowing how humble members of the

Green Industry are, I know it's not enough. I understand companies resist promoting their service projects because they don't want to appear as if they're trying to cash in on their altruism; at the same time, I encourage them to accept recognition.

That's why I was impressed to hear Kuperus, who has participated in R&R for the past 10 years with his wife and five kids, sends a letter to clients sharing details about the event. I don't know how many other companies do this, or how many take advantage of the press release template PLANET provides, but I bet it's the minority. That should change.

It's not a bad thing to promote your company's service work, even if you do it out of the goodness of your heart and not for a pat on the back. Think of it this way: The goodwill you generate in the community will raise the profile of your company, boosting business, and could afford you the opportunity to give back on a larger scale. And there is no shame in that.

Proud to partner

In the name of recognizing those who serve others, I'm proud to say *Landscape Management* is the media sponsor of PLANET's new Community Stewardship Award, a program to honor exceptional Green Industry volunteerism efforts.

If you're a PLANET member, please visit landcarenetwork.org/awards/communityaward to enter the program in one of six categories (small service provider, medium service provider, large service provider, supplier, student chapter and state association) by Nov. 15. Each winner will be featured in *LM* in 2013 and will be recognized next July at PLANET's R&R event.

If you're not a member of PLANET, we'd still like to hear about your service projects. Please email me (mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net) a 250-word description of your company's volunteer efforts with photos, if possible. We'll be happy to feature some worthwhile projects next year, like we did this month for the great work Heaviland Enterprises provided a school in need of some shade trees (page 32).

It's not a bad thing to promote your company's service work, even if you do it out of the goodness of your heart and not for a pat on the back.



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PROGRESS

Time to rock and roll

It's a sunny summer morning in downtown Cleveland. Phil Cavotta, clad in a hard hat, construction vest and jeans, is overseeing a landscaping project at the Cleveland Clinic.

The \$500,000 job involves planting 150 maple and pear trees and laying nearly 12,000 yards of special-blend topsoil. "The lawn area will be the size of a football field," says Cavotta, senior advisor at Cleveland-based Cavotta Landscapers.

Cavotta Landscapers has done many landscaping projects for the Cleveland Clinic over the last 30 years. It had a project in the works there even when *Landscape Management* first wrote about the company in 1995. But it also had another high-profile contract then—the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. At the time, the Rock Hall was one month away from its grand opening.

"We saw people coming and going all the time," Cavotta recalls. "I met Yoko Ono, I met the Bee Gees, [Rock Hall architect] I.M. Pei, so many people."

In 1995, Cavotta recounted to *LM* meeting Wolfman Jack there three weeks before his passing. "I remember the Wolfman like I'm talking to you now," Cavotta recalls. "I imitated him, the way he spoke. He didn't mind. He just laughed."

Pei wanted the landscape surrounding the museum to be simple so it wouldn't overshadow the building's design. So the Rock Hall project was a "small job but a big honor," Cavotta says. "I was proud to work on that job, No. 1, because rock 'n' roll was coined here in Cleveland, Ohio.

A contractor recounts working on the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame grounds and tells what life holds now.



(Above) Cavotta's employees on the job in August at the Cleveland Clinic, where they're planting 150 trees. (Left) The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum at sunset.

"They had people from all over the world visiting," he continues. "It's one of those things, it was really cool to see them bringing in the Beatles' guitars, or memorabilia from Joan Baez. It was all part of Americana, and it's here in Cleveland."

Like any project, the Rock Hall job had its challenges. The heat reflecting off the museum's glass toasted taxus plants the Cavotta crew had installed. Workers had to replant them and redesign the sprinkler system to keep the plants moist.

"This is called the crunch," Cavotta told *LM* in August '95. "It will be done on time. But these last weeks are going fast

and everybody's push, push, pushing."

At the Clinic in August 2012, Cavotta's crew still is pushing—pushing to meet the project's Aug. 31 deadline. "You gotta get it done no matter what," Cavotta says.

He's worked in the family business long enough to know that; he started in it as a 14-year-old, mowing lawns.

Cavotta's grandfather Felix launched the company as a garden center in 1917. He grew it by gardening the homes of Cleveland's richest families, including the Rockefeller.

"My grandfather said, 'You hook up with these people and do an honest day's work, they'll give you an honest day's pay,'" Cavotta recalls.

The business survived the Great Depression and continued to grow. Phil and his sister, Marilyn Cavotta Pride, inherited the business from their father, Michael, in the mid-1990s. Today, Marilyn is company president, Phil serves as senior advisor and Anthony Gabriel—the company's heir apparent—is vice president.

Over the years, Cavotta Landscapers has grown to a \$1 million company offering commercial and residential landscaping services. Even so, for landscape contractors nationwide, in 2008 "the bottom fell out," says Cavotta. "I love what I do. But it's a tough field."

Despite the challenges, Cavotta, 59, plans to work for as long as there's work to do. "You keep on plugging," he says. "I stick with it. It's in my blood."

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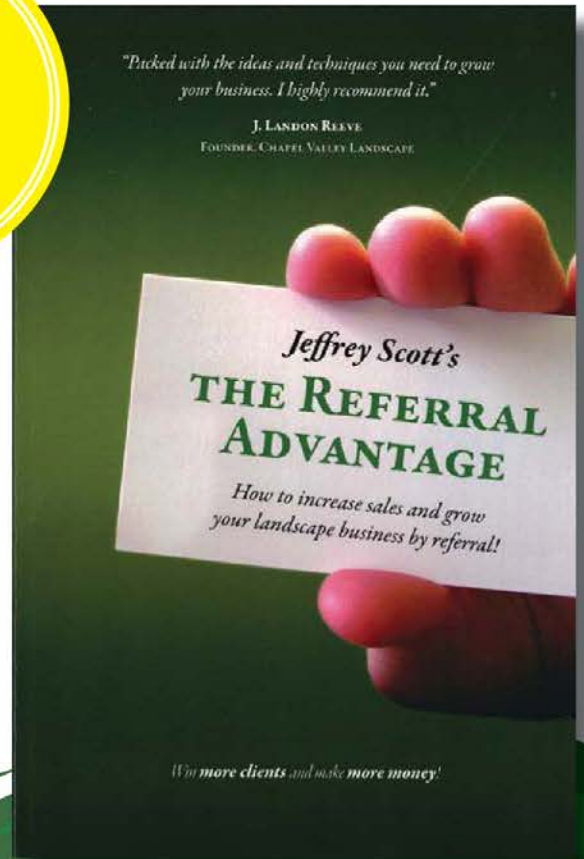
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Author: Jeffrey Scott

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INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT

THE GREEN INDUSTRY AT A GLANCE

MOWING RATE ROUND-UP

Late last month the *Wall Street Journal* published a round-up of mowing rates across the country. Here's how different regions stacked up.

DALLAS Lawns of Dallas

\$40 for a 10,000-square-foot lawn

Per-1,000-square-foot price: **\$4**

PARKER, COLO. BestYard

\$36.25 for any lawn up to 3,000 square feet

Per-1,000-square-foot price: about **\$12** or more

LANSING, MICH. ArborLawn

\$36 for a 12,000-square-foot lawn

Per-1,000-square-foot price: **\$3**

NEW MILFORD, CONN. YardApes

\$67.50 for a 27,000-square-foot lawn

Per-1,000-square-foot price: **\$2.50**

PORTLAND, ORE. Other Side of the Fence

\$35 for a roughly 2,500-square-foot lawn

Per-1,000-square-foot price: **\$14**



DROUGHT TAKES ITS TOLL

This year's historic drought has caused more than half of all U.S. counties to be deemed disaster zones by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), CNN reports. USDA economist Timothy Park called it "the most severe and expensive drought in 25 years."

Tom Vilsack, secretary of agriculture, declared disaster zone designations for an additional 218 counties in 12 states on Aug. 1 due to damage and losses caused by drought and excessive heat. The states are Arkansas, Georgia, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee and Wyoming.

To view CNN's interactive map of how drought conditions have spread in 2012, visit goo.gl/7lYnn.



SMALL BUSINESS OPTIMISM DECLINES

In a disappointing reversal of several months of slow but positive growth, the National Federation of Independent Business' June Index of Small Business Optimism dropped three points, falling to 91.4. The decline is significant and relinquished the gains achieved earlier this year. Labor market indicators and spending plans for capital equipment and inventories accounted for about 40 percent of the decline. Political uncertainty remains historically high and continues to be a primary cause for a reticence among small-business owners to expand.

"All in all, this month's survey was a real economic downer," says NFIB Chief Economist William Dunkelberg. "The economy has definitely slowed; job growth will be far short of that needed to reduce the unemployment rate unless lots of unemployed leave the labor force—no consolation. Taxes remain a top concern for the small business community."



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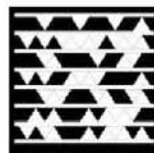
USE PROPER APPLICATION EQUIPMENT

By Julie Pospesch | FMC

Even when the appropriate pesticide is applied using the right equipment, applicators will not achieve optimal results if their tools are not prepared properly. To ensure even, effective treatment, only use sprayers and spreaders that have been calibrated to the approved equipment settings for the pesticide being applied. Be sure to take into account field speed, application rate, spray pressure and the size of the treatment area. Accurate calibration helps ensure that a pesticide is applied at a rate that delivers effective control without endangering humans, plants and animals living nearby. After application, it is just as important to wash equipment and perform any necessary maintenance.



Julie Pospesch is the Market Specialist for FMC Professional Solutions in Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.



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Contractors take to the Hill

PLANET's Renewal & Remembrance and Legislative Day on the Hill programs offer the opportunity to give back and speak up.

The Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) held its annual Renewal & Remembrance service event at Arlington National Cemetery and its Legislative Day on the Hill program last month.

"This year's Renewal & Remembrance event once again showed the commitment and dedication to service that our PLANET members have," said Norman Goldenberg, president of PLANET. "It is such an honor to see our members, their children and our sponsor companies come together to help Arlington National Cemetery provide the best possible green spaces for our military heroes and their families."

Renewal & Remembrance included more than 400 PLANET members and their families, who spent their time helping to mulch, prune, aerate, irrigate, plant, spread lime and provide cabling and lighting protection for some of Arlington's historic trees. (For more on Renewal & Remembrance, see page 8.)

After Renewal & Remembrance, the focus switched to legislative issues. More than 100 PLANET members



and their families met with legislators or staff from their local districts to talk about important issues, including overregulation, NPDES permits, H-2B and Lyme disease. PLANET members visited with representatives from approximately 20 states.

"This event allows PLANET members to meet with their elected officials and discuss issues that are important

U.S. Rep. Bobby Schilling (R-Ill.) (center) with Alan and Mary Ann Skoog of Skoog Landscape and Design of Sterling, Ill.

to their businesses and the lawn and landscape industry as a whole," said Goldenberg.

The Irrigation Association partnered with PLANET to host this year's Renewal & Remembrance and Legislative Day on the Hill.

DOWN-Y BUT NOT OUT

Cornell experts offer tips for managing impatiens downy mildew in landscape settings.

This year, downy mildew has been widespread on landscape impatiens in Florida, the Mid-Atlantic and the Northeast. Cornell's Margery Daughtrey and Nora Catlin

offer the following tips for management:

» Scout plantings for symptoms (look for the diagnostic white sporulation on the undersurface of



leaves, pictured here) and remove—including roots—any infected plants immedi-

ately. Bag them and remove them from the site.

» Don't replant previously infected beds with susceptible varieties of impatiens. Replant with alternatives, such as New Guinea impatiens, begonias or coleus.

» Focus on prevention and consider integrated pest management.




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OFA, ANLA to create new association

The new group will be established by January 2014.

OFA – The Association of Horticulture Professionals and the American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA) will begin the process of organizing a new association. Following several

months of working together in a joint venture, the working group, comprising leaders from both organizations, determined it was time to formally create a new trade association, which will



replace OFA and ANLA.

OFA and ANLA announced in January a joint venture to support business education and government relations activities. The vision statement adopted by OFA's board of directors expressed the desire to form a new organization if it brings more value to its members and the industry. Since June 2011, OFA's executive committee has been meeting with ANLA's leaders about the opportunity for and viability of a formal relationship between the two organizations. As early as the first meeting, the idea of forming a new organization has been discussed by the joint venture working group.


"We are listening to our members," said Mike McCabe, owner of McCabe's Greenhouse & Floral in Lawrenceburg, Ind. "Results of a membership and organizational study performed at the end of last year indicated that members of both associations want the organizations to work closer to unify the industry. They want their industry association to be all encompassing—one that touches and links all pieces of the horticulture industry, which can be offered by a new organization. After significant exploration and evaluation the elected leadership of OFA determined this is the best way to meet the needs of our members and the industry."

The timeline is to have a new organization established between July 2013 and January 2014.

"This is not a merger. This is taking the best of what both associations do to create a new organization that will advance the industry and better serve our members," said OFA CEO Michael Geary.

Following ANLA Executive Vice President Bob Dolibois' scheduled retirement at the end of the year, Geary will become the chief staff executive of both ANLA and OFA beginning on Jan. 1. The organizations will continue to be governed separately, but Geary will lead the daily operations of both associations.

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Weed Man named a military-friendly franchise

The company was recognized for volunteerism and financial incentives offered to veterans.

As a result of the financial incentives offered to veterans who open a Weed Man franchise and the community initiatives the company implements to support military families, Weed Man was recently recognized as a 2012 Military Friendly Franchise by *G.I. Jobs* magazine.

"It is our goal to support our nation's heroes by providing them with a business opportunity that has a low overall investment, but enables them to be financially successful," said Jennifer Lemcke, COO of Turf Holdings and Weed Man USA. "Franchising is a great avenue for veterans to turn to, as it offers an established business model and

Weed Man®

a support system that will help them achieve long-term growth goals."

The honor ranks Weed Man in the top 10 percent of all franchises nationwide, and recognizes the company for demonstrating best practices in recruiting military members as franchisees. As part of the company's incentives for veterans, Weed Man offers a 25 percent discount off the franchise fee. The initiative is in support of the Veterans Transition Franchise Initiative (Vet-Fran), a voluntary effort of International

Franchise Association (IFA) member companies to provide franchise business opportunities to honorably discharged veterans transitioning to civilian life or seeking a career change.

Weed Man also has partnered with Project EverGreen's GreenCare for Troops program for the past six years. Weed Man franchise owners across the country provide free lawn care for military families. Currently, more than 15,000 families are registered with the GreenCare for Troops program.



Ideal Landscape Group adopts propane mowers

St. Louis-based Ideal Landscape Group added 30 propane-powered mowers. It anticipates the switch to propane-powered mowers will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 50 percent compared to gasoline mowers.

The environmental benefits are a plus, but according to Tim Kircher, Ideal's maintenance division manager, there's a strong business case to be made.

"Making the switch to propane isn't just about emissions," Kircher says. "We're certainly proud of the part we're playing there, but there are additional benefits that are significant as well, including longer engine life for the mowers and reduced maintenance costs because the cleaner fuel deposits less carbon in the engine."

The most compelling reason to make the switch, Kircher says, is the savings. The price of oil continues to hover around \$90 a barrel, pushing the average cost of gasoline in St. Louis to approximately \$3.35 per gallon. The price for propane is significantly less.

"In addition to the savings we'll enjoy on the service side, we're also paying less than half for the fuel. In a business like ours, where the cost of fuel is one of your largest expenses, that's significant."

SWINGLE ACQUIRES LAWN CARE FIRM

The move expands the company's reach in northern Colorado

Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care, Denver, acquired Saratoga Ventures, a lawn services company in Boulder-Longmont, Colo. Terms were not disclosed.

The acquisition will help Swingle provide increasingly improved and expansive service for residential and commercial lawn service clients in northern Colorado.

"Our team's focus will be on servicing our existing client base while fostering loyalty among new customers as we integrate them into the Swingle family," said Thomas Tolkacz, ceo of Swingle.



TORO CELEBRATES 50 YEARS IN UNDERGROUND IRRIGATION



Fifty years ago, The Toro Co. got its start in the underground irrigation business with the purchase of Moist O'Matic, Riverside, Calif.

Moist O'Matic had made advancements in the use of plastics and new designs to make water-efficient sprinklers, valves and control systems. In

1962, Toro's fourth president, David Lilly, initiated the purchase of Moist O'Matic and hired irrigation contractor John Singleton to pioneer Toro's entry into golf irrigation. Today, Toro owns more than 225 irrigation patents. It has added to its irrigation capabilities over the years with multiple acquisitions.

CHANGING YOUR COMPANY NAME MIGHT BE A HASSLE, BUT IT COULD PAY OFF.

When **D.J. Vander Slik** was mowing lawns in Grand Rapids, Mich., at age 12, a customer asked him for a receipt. He didn't have any, so the homeowner helped him write something up, jotting down D.J.'s Lawn Service on the slip.

"I thought, 'Sure, that sounds good,'" Vander Slik says of his 12-year-old self.

The name stuck, and when he graduated from high school in 1999 Vander Slik turned his business into a full-time venture. He grew it steadily over the next decade, adding branches in Kalamazoo and Holland, and services like snow plowing, fertilization and weed control, tree and shrub care, design/build and irrigation.

By 2010, the company was ready for a change, and he asked clients their thoughts about rebranding at a quarterly focus group.

Vander Slik originally considered dropping his first name from the brand, but the client response was: "We always just call you D.J.'s."

"If I had to do it all over, I'd do something nicer and softer," he says. But with more than 75 trucks on the road in three cities, his clients and team convinced him that dropping D.J. could be "like committing suicide."

So, D.J.'s remains, but "lawn service" was ousted. The company is now D.J.'s Landscape Management, which reflects its full service offerings.

Vander Slik is not the first landscape contractor to go down this road. Like his, many landscape businesses were hastily named or took on their founders' monikers by default. As companies mature, want to change their focus or freshen their brands, they discover there are challenges—and costs—along the way.

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ILLUSTRATION: JEFF BENNETT



For a checklist of key things to consider when launching a new name, visit the Web Extras section of landscapemanagement.net.

BY MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

D.J.'s LAWN SERVICE

BEFORE

D.J. Vander Slik's company worked with a local marketing firm to redo its logo when it rebranded. The goal was a fresh look that incorporated the new name and the old colors.



AFTER

DJs | LANDSCAPE
MANAGEMENT

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Choosing a name

Perhaps one of the most important things in the Green Industry, where new companies pop up every day, is to make sure no one else is operating under your name or one that's similar.

That's what drove Tara Gray to change her company's name in 2009 from The Other Side Lawn Co. to Green Paws Lawn Care. When she and her husband founded the company in 2004, they didn't research other company names. "We didn't know a whole lot about choosing a business name," she acknowledges.

In the company's third year there were several times when potential customers requested quotes from Gray, mentioning her

company also took care of their neighbors' lawns. When she looked up these addresses, she was confused because she didn't have any accounts on their blocks.

"This happened several times before we discovered there was another company named The Other Side Landscape and Maintenance that was located about 30 miles from us," she says. "While we weren't really in each others' service areas and our names weren't exactly the same, they were still close enough for us to decide to make the change. Since we were already getting calls about this other company we could see the possibility of problems."

The Grays spent that winter looking for a unique name, doing research online and at the state comptroller's office.

"I spent a lot of time just searching to make sure we didn't repeat our first mistakes," she says. They decided on Green Paws Lawn Care, a name Gray says ties their professional brand to their personal love of animals.

Vander Slik's company also conducted online research to see if there were other businesses with similar names in the state. Additionally, he worked with a local marketing firm to create a new logo and with Green Industry consultant Judy Guido. She has worked on naming strategy

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THE OWNER AS THE BRAND

One factor to consider when changing a company's name is whether selling the business is in the future, says Ron Edmonds, principal consultant of The Principium Group, a Green Industry M&A and exit planning firm.

Buyers may raise eyebrows at companies named for their owners, he says. It's a bigger problem when the company is being sold to a similar entity or owner. It's less of a concern when the company is being sold to a much larger business.

"A buyer will be very interested in understanding how dependent on the owner the selling business really is, whatever it's named," he says. "It's certainly possible that a business whose name is based on its owner's name is not dependent on its owner, but it raises a question."

All other things being equal, Edmonds would recommend against naming the business after the owner, but he acknowledges that it's logical for companies built on their owners' reputations to have their owners' names.

"The challenge is to bridge from the reputation of the owner to the

"IT'S CERTAINLY POSSIBLE THAT A BUSINESS WHOSE NAME IS BASED ON ITS OWNER'S NAME IS NOT DEPENDENT ON ITS OWNER, BUT IT RAISES A QUESTION."

—RON EDMONDS,
THE PRINCIPIUM GROUP

reputation of the business and its team," he says. "Using the owner's name for its 'rock star' quality often makes a lot of sense, until it becomes time to sell or transition the business." —M.P.

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Green Industry company names run the gamut from those based on their owners' names (The Brickman Group) to ones that evoke the pristine turf their clients seek (TruGreen). Here are a few names we like and why they work. —M.P.

OFF THE WALL

YARDAPES | New Milford, Conn.



Origin: When President Shayne Newman and a friend were mowing lawns in college in the late 1980s, Newman's friend referred to the duo as "yard apes," and it stuck. Newman incorporated the business a few years later, adding a logo created by another friend who's a graphic artist.

Why it works: "The main thing is it's easy to remember," Newman says. "What I feel works is people can remember the name, go to the website and let the website do a lot of our marketing.

"It's also part of our company culture. The employees take pride in being called a YardApe, and it's about being a part of the family and the team."



continued from page 20

for some of the industry's biggest players, including convincing ServiceMaster to drop ChemLawn from the TruGreen LandCare name in 1999 (it was going to be TruGreen ChemLawn LandCare), and also with ValleyCrest Cos. in 2002 to rebrand all of its divisions under the founding name of the company. For 30 years the parent company had operated as Environmental Industries Inc., and the landscape maintenance division was known as Environmental Care.

Rolling out the change

With a seasonal business, timing is an important part of the name change game.

Because of the time commitment required, Gray says her company had to do it in the winter off season. "This wouldn't be something you wanted to do during the spring and summer months," she says.

Dennis Garland, co-owner of The Grounds Guys of Elizabethtown, Ky., found that the best time to rebrand his company from G-N-S Lawn Care when he joined The Grounds Guys franchise system was in the fall, around the time many commercial maintenance contracts were being renewed. He says he benefitted from rebranding right before those proposals went out, selling \$175,000 worth of commercial maintenance work right off the bat. In some cases, explaining the brand change was a talking point that helped get him in the door and close the sale.

After about six months of preparation, Vander Slik's goal was to complete the rebranding activities in one month, so there weren't materials or equipment with the old logo floating around, but it was challenging.

"We wanted to bring it all out for the start of the new green season," he says of his decision to

continued on page 24

PROFESSIONAL TOUCH

BARRINGER & BARRINGER | Charlotte, N.C.

Origin: President John Barringer, a former banker with an MBA, started his company as Barringer & Assoc. in 1985. That name was taken when he incorporated, so he decided on Barringer & Barringer.



Why it works: "This name does two things for us: It's professional sounding, which we believe is part of our value proposition, and it has the integrity of the person who stands behind the product," Barringer says.

Barringer & Barringer, Inc.
Landscape Services

STRAIGHTFORWARD

OUTSIDE SOLUTIONS | Sykesville, Md.



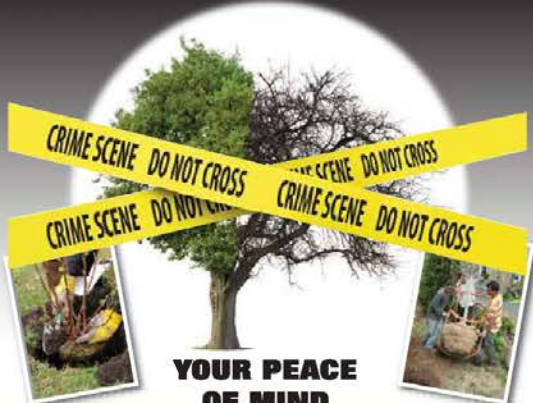
Origin: President Chad Beidel came up with his company's name with simplicity in mind. "I wanted something simple that communicated that we are in the business of helping," he says. Plus, he wanted a name he could expand on one day, if necessary, to provide services other than landscaping, such as siding, windows, doors, gutters, roofing, decking, pools and more.

Why it works: "It's simple, communicates what we do, tells people we can help them with their needs, and gives us a broad scope of services to provide," Beidel says. "It also rings to the tune of being a solution from an outside source, someone other than yourself."



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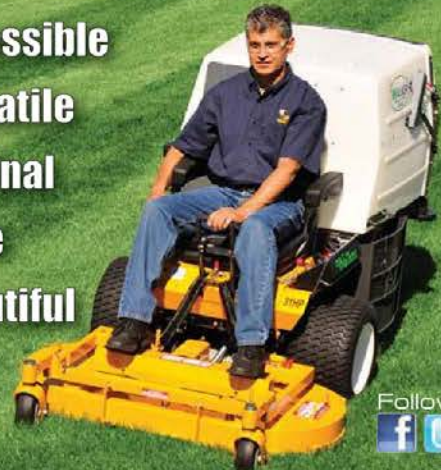
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continued from page 22

make the change in January 2011. “But we were still plowing snow so we couldn’t take all of the vehicles out of circulation.”

Getting the word out

To promote his rebranding effort, Garland sent a letter to all of his clients sharing the news about joining the franchise system and explaining the benefits.

“All of my bigger commercial accounts, I visited them in person to show them The Grounds Guys corporate binder,” he says. “It was right when we were renewing our contracts with them, so it worked in our benefit as a way to explain ‘Look what more we have to offer.’”

Phil Klemme, owner of The Grounds Guys of Union, Mo., used public relations tactics to get the word out about his company’s rebranding effort. He joined The Grounds Guys franchise system last fall, after operating for seven years as Platt Landscaping, a business he purchased from his former employer in 2004. With the help of the franchise’s parent company, The Dwyer Group, he sent press releases to the local newspaper and invited a reporter to a party he held at the chamber of commerce for

Landscape company owners who have rebranded, including those who’ve switched to franchise systems like The Grounds Guys, agree that relettering trucks is the greatest expense. Rebranding enclosed trailers, like the one pictured above, can cost more than \$1,000.

employees and other business associates.

“It was a great photo opp for the paper,” Klemme says. “We got great exposure. It’s something worth contemplating for others who are rebranding.”

Adding up the costs

Changing the trucks over was the most painful part of the process because it was the biggest expense, Vander Slik says.

“The hardest thing, ultimately, was taking those old labels and vinyl lettering off the trucks and trailers,” he says. “You’re talking about taking vehicles that have been in service for five to seven years and putting new logos on them.”

Vander Slik estimates he spent about \$20,000 on the vehicles alone (about 75 trucks, plus trailers, a hydroseeder, bark blower and other equipment). Vinyl lettering on a typical pick-up

continued on page 26



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[NIMBLEWILL]

[BENTGRASS]

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MAKING IT OFFICIAL

Legally changing the name of a business can be both surprisingly simple yet quite complicated, says Michael Duffy, a business attorney with Duffy Law in Philadelphia.

There are two types of business names: those on legal documents and those used when interacting with the public. Changing the legal name of the business involves completing a form with the state's secretary of state, and often businesses won't actually change their names. They obtain a fictitious entity (aka a "DBA"), which links the new name to the old entity without having to lose either.



"As long as no one else has that exact combination of letters, you are allowed to use it for legal documents and the like," he says.

It can get complicated when using the name in the course of business. The primary concerns are trademark issues.

"Even if a name is available for registration, if it's confusingly similar to another existing business' name or trademark, you might be liable for trademark infringement," Duffy says. "You have to make sure there is no risk to using that name in your market to avoid a big hassle down the road. Also, you want to take steps to protect the new name, such as trademark

registration, to avoid the same."

Duffy cautions companies to consider the implications of entering a new market.

"For example, Green Lawn might have been in business for 50 years in Texas, but when it wants to expand into Florida it finds there's already another Green Lawn business there," he says. "Either company might be forced to change its name, or both might be allowed to keep it based on a variety of factors. Green Lawn Texas might be even allowed to keep its name in the home market but go by a completely different name in Florida."

A good attorney is essential in such situations, Duffy says. For more information on trademark registration, visit uspto.gov/trademarks/basics/. —M.P.



continued from page 24
truck costs about \$200; the enclosed trailers were \$1,000 to \$1,500 each.

All told, he says the rebrand cost about \$35,000 or more, including business cards, uniforms, stationery and the website.

Klemme agrees that rewrapping his trucks was the biggest expense when he rebranded. "I spent about \$11,500 on 10 trucks and the large equipment alone," he says. "Fortunately most of my trucks were white, which is a Grounds Guys requirement; the one that was maroon cost me \$2,000."

Companies that have rebranded say the paperwork aspect of changing their names was surprisingly simple and cheaper than they expected, as many of them opt to file as a fictitious entity or "DBA" (see "Making it official," above.)

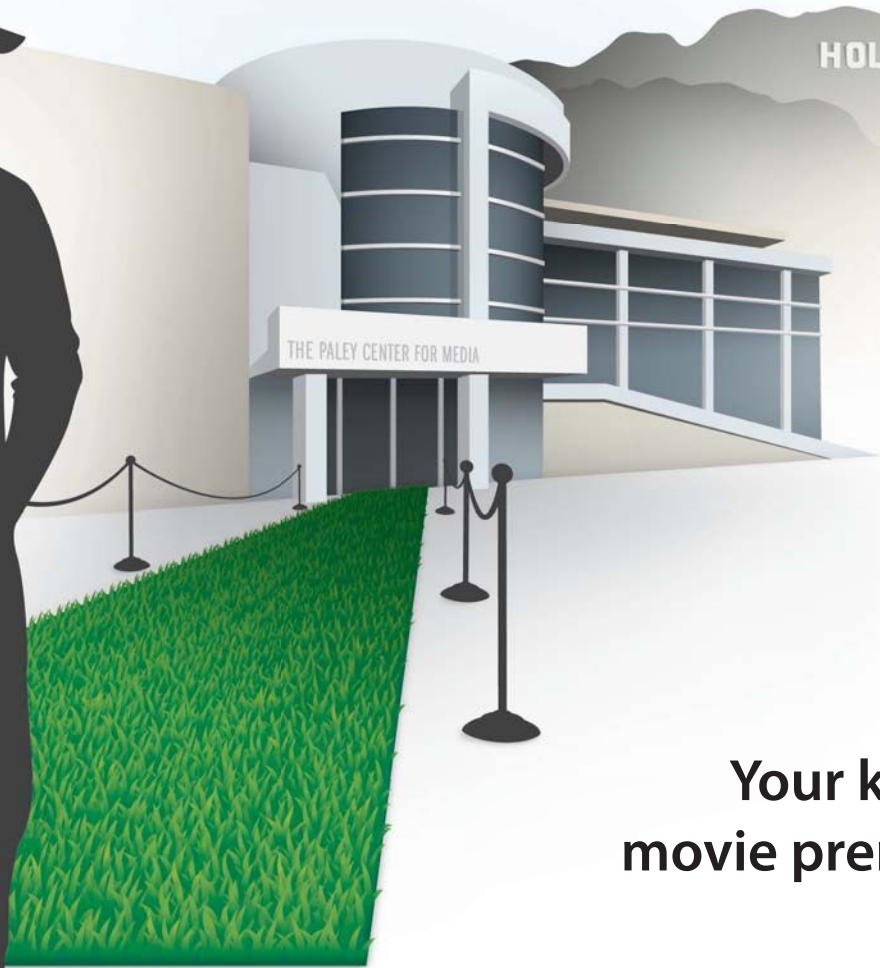
That was the case for Klemme. "I kept it simple," he says. "I'm registered with the state of Missouri as an LLC, so I went with the DBA so I didn't have to spend several thousands of dollars getting a new federal tax ID."

Going this route cost about \$350 including attorney fees vs. more than a thousand dollars if he set up a new business. Garland did the same thing; it cost him about \$250.

More than anything, contractors who have rebranded say the biggest cost was their time.

As Vander Slik says, "It was worth it, but it was a tremendous effort that I hopefully won't have to do again any time soon." LM

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OBAMACARE'S TAX HIKES

Businesses await rising taxes as a result of the Affordable Care Act, which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled as constitutional in June.

BY **MARK E. BATTERSBY**

Like it or not, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is now the law of the land and the tax code. By ruling that the ACA is constitutional, the court has approved more than 20 tax hikes, some of them already in play.

On the personal front, looming big is the 3.8 percent Medicare surtax on investment income, and the 0.9 percent Medicare payroll tax hike (from 1.45 percent to 2.35 percent). And then there are the tax hikes for everybody else, including the health savings account withdrawal penalty. Since Jan. 1, 2011, taxpayers who withdraw money from health savings accounts for non-medical expenses before age 65 face a 20 percent penalty, up from 10 percent before.

The employer mandate

The tax most likely to affect landscape contracting and lawn care businesses is the employer mandate tax that goes into effect in January 2014. The ACA requires businesses with more than 50 employees to provide health insurance or face an “assessable payment.” In other words, under ACA, employers are required to provide at least minimal benefits, via a health plan, to their employees.

If an employer does not offer health coverage, and at least one employee qualifies for a health tax credit or a cost-sharing reduction payment, the employer must pay an additional non-deductible tax of \$2,000 for all full-time employees.

Shared responsibility for small businesses

Since 2010, companies with fewer than 25 full-time equivalent employees have been eligible for a unique, under-utilized, tax credit if they provide at least half of the cost of health insurance. Remember, tax credits reduce the tax bill while deductions merely reduce the income upon which the tax bill is computed. And, full-time equivalent employees include both full-time employees plus the number of part-time employees when considered on a full-time basis.

Only companies with fewer than 10 full-time equivalent employees with average salaries of \$25,000 or less are eligible for the full credit. Today, that full credit is 35 percent of the operation's contribution toward an employee's insurance premium. As the size of the business and average wages go up, the amount of the tax credit goes down. And once the business hits 25 full-time equivalent employees, or \$50,000 in average salaries, the credit is completely phased out.

The high-cost health coverage excise tax

Any business that rewards its owners, shareholders or employees with health insurance coverage that exceeds a threshold amount established by lawmakers will face a whopping 40 percent excise tax beginning in 2018. Although the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has yet to weigh in, the dollar limit for determining the tax thresholds are \$10,200 (for 2018) multiplied by the health cost adjustment percentage for an employee with self-only coverage and \$27,500 (for 2018) for employees with coverage other than self-only coverage.

In addition to a hike in the Medicare payroll

tax on self-employment income (from 2.9 percent to 3.8 percent), an “unearned income Medicare contribution” tax will impose the new 3.8 percent rate on “net investment income.” That includes interest, dividends, annuities, royalties, certain rents and other “passive” business income. Fortunately, only individuals with more than \$200,000 in income and married couples with income greater than \$250,000 will be subjected to the 3.8 percent tax.

Grandfathered plans

Certain plans or coverage existing as of March 23, 2010—when ACA was enacted—are subject to only some provisions. These plans are known as “grandfathered plans.”


The IRS, the Health and Human Services Department and the Department of Labor, which all are involved in ACA enforcement, say a group health plan or group or individual health insurance coverage is considered a grandfathered health plan even when it comes to new employees (just hired or newly enrolled) and their families.

Employers are allowed to maintain a grandfathered plan regardless of necessary administrative changes, even if an insurer stops offering coverage in a market or the business changes hands.


The individual mandate

The impact for sole proprietors will be much like the impact on individuals. For people in this group, the crux of the 2014 rollout is the individual mandate, which requires all U.S. citizens and legal residents to have health coverage or pay a penalty.

There are some exemptions, such as people from certain religious backgrounds or those who are eligible for the so-called “hardship exemption”, when the cost of the annual premium exceeds 8 percent of household income. There also are penalties intended to ensure compliance. The top penalty for individuals, once fully phased in, for not having insurance is \$695 or 2.5 percent of income, whichever is greater.



TO BE CONSIDERED AFFORDABLE UNDER ACA, THE INSURANCE MUST PAY FOR AT LEAST 60 PERCENT OF COVERED HEALTH CARE EXPENSES, AND EMPLOYEES MAY NOT BE FORCED TO PAY MORE THAN 9.5 PERCENT OF THEIR FAMILY INCOME FOR COVERAGE OFFERED BY THEIR EMPLOYERS.





Affordable insurance

There are many references to “affordable insurance” in the ACA. To be considered affordable under ACA, the insurance must pay for at least 60 percent of covered health care expenses, and employees may not be forced to pay more than 9.5 percent of their family income (before deductions and adjustments) for coverage offered by their employers.

And don't forget, companies with at least 50 full-time employees must start providing insurance to workers beginning in 2014. If they don't, and a single worker turns to the government for a health care tax credit or subsidy on the exchanges, then the company can be fined. And it won't be cheap. The employers will have to pay an additional non-deductible tax of \$2,000 for all full-time employees.

If any employee actually receives coverage through the exchange, the penalty on the employer for that employee rises to \$3,000. If the employer requires a waiting period of 30 to 60 days to enroll in coverage, there is a \$400 tax per employee (\$600 if the period is 60 days or longer).

It's a stiff rule that many fear, but it doesn't

affect the majority of the nation's nearly 6 million employers. Government statistics show 200,000 small businesses will face the new rule. The rest, however, have no obligation to cover employees.

The exchanges

The ACA requires each state to establish an American Health Benefit Exchange and Small Business Health Options Program (SHOP) exchange to provide qualified individuals and qualified small business employers access to health plans.

Starting in 2014, sole proprietors and other small businesses can shop for less expensive insurance through exchanges in each state. One-person businesses can turn to exchanges for individuals. Businesses with up to 100 workers may turn to SHOP. Both have a similar approach to

STATE-OPERATED EXCHANGES ARE EXPECTED TO OFFER SMALL BUSINESSES LOWER RATES THAN INSURANCE COMPANIES CHARGE.



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bringing down costs: Increasing the size of the insured pool spreads out risk.

No exchanges are up and running yet. In theory, they will give small businesses the long-awaited ability to buy insurance at rates that once belonged only to large companies. The federal law ordered states to create them, and a dozen already have begun establishing them.

Slimming side-stepping benefits

Many business owners have utilized one of the tax-deferred benefit plans, such as Health Savings Accounts (HSAs), Flexible Savings Accounts (FSAs) and Health Reimbursement Arrangements (HRAs), for themselves and in many cases for workers, thus avoiding the administrative and paperwork burden required of more formal benefit plans.

Last year, for the first time, sole proprietors and small business owners could no longer use the pretax dollars of these plans to purchase non-prescription, over-the-counter medicines (except insulin). What's more, an increased, additional tax on nonmedical early withdrawals from an HSA, from 10 percent to 20 percent, put them at a disadvantage with IRAs and other tax-advantaged accounts, which remained at 10 percent.

Beginning Jan. 1, employees will face a \$2,500 cap on the amount of pretax salary deferrals they can make into a health care flexible spending account. There is no cap under current law. In light of the new cap, employee benefits groups are lobbying Congress to modify the use-it-or-lose-it rule that means employees forfeit unused funds in their accounts at the end of the plan year.

Not all bad news

Fortunately, it's not all bad news. The ACA limits how much premiums can go up each year. Under the law, premiums for some landscape contractors may drop, if the law's proponents are to be believed. The law eliminates the surcharges that insurers impose on businesses that have employees with

serious medical conditions. Plus, the state-operated exchanges are expected to offer small businesses lower rates than insurance companies charge.

Because the law requires all individuals to have health insurance, the smallest businesses—those with fewer than 50 employees—will be able to compete for good workers with larger

companies. And while there is the possibility that lawmakers will completely or partially repeal the ACA, planning to cope with the many tax hikes already in place, as well as those scheduled in the years ahead, is strongly advised. **LM**

Battersby is a freelance writer based in Ardmore, Pa.



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Heaviland Enterprises planted 10 large-canopy magnolia grandiflora trees at an elementary school as part of the Spruce Up Your School sweepstakes.



A SEAT IN THE SHADE

Heaviland Enterprises joins OPEI and Discovery to give one school a gift for the ages.

BY **BETH GERACI** SENIOR EDITOR

Palomar Elementary School in Chula Vista, Calif., is in a rough part of town. Its 350 students have seen a lot, probably more than they should have at their young ages. As far as California public schools go, it's small—but mighty.

In the seven years Mary Anne Arabia has taught at Palomar, she's always been bothered by the lack of shade on the playground. It's most abrasive during the school's annual end-of-year Olympics, when parents and grandparents come to watch.

Palomar is a generational school; many of the students' parents and

grandparents graduated from there. So the annual Olympics is a big deal. Parents often take a day off work to attend. Like the students, they bake beneath the blazing sun.

"I thought, oh my goodness, our playground is basically this asphalt jungle. The kids don't have anywhere to go for shade," Arabia says.

So when the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) and Discovery

Education teamed up again this year for their annual Spruce Up Your School sweepstakes, Arabia flooded the ballot box with as many votes as she could.

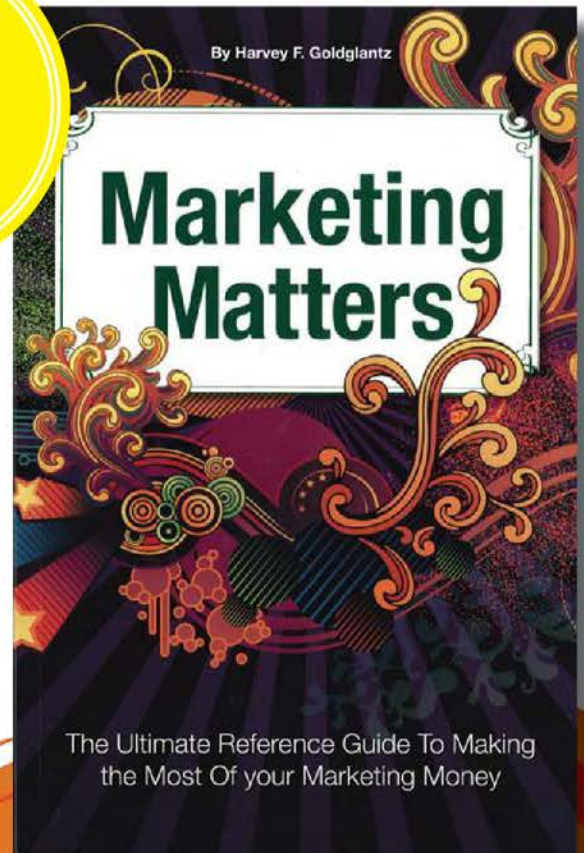
"I voted every day for a couple months, then I forgot about it," she says. Until, that is, mid-March, when Discovery Education called to tell her she'd won the grand prize. "I was so excited, I literally jumped around and called my

continued on page 34

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Author: Harvey Goldglantz

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Landscape
Management

A LESSON IN GIVING

continued from page 32
principal," Arabia says. "I was screaming."

The contest awards \$5,000 to an educator who wants to add green space to his or her school. Arabia was chosen at random from more than 15,000 entries from around the country.

Arabia thought about how much the green space would mean to her fifth-grade students. "Ours is a little school," Arabia says. "It's in a tough area. These are kids that don't have a lot."

Even so, Palomar Elementary is rising. It's the recipient of the 2012 California Distinguished School Award and the 2012 Title I Academic Achievement Award. It's also up for the National Blue Ribbon Award.

Helping hands

As excited as Arabia was about winning, she was at a loss for what greenery to buy. Then she got the call from the Professional Landcare Network



(PLANET). Member Tom Heaviland of San Diego-based Heaviland Enterprises had signed on to do the project for free.

"We said, 'This sounds like a great program and something we can certainly join forces with,'" says Heaviland of why his company got involved. "This was nice. It just felt good, you know. Great class, great school, great history. There was just a good vibe about it."

Since the project would be a surprise for the students, Heaviland's crew did the project on the weekend, planting 10 large-canopy magnolia grandiflora trees.

The Spruce Up Your School sweepstakes is part of OPEI's TurfMutt program, a curriculum designed to encourage youths to appreciate green space.

The trees were 36-inch box size, "fairly big," Heaviland says. "We wanted something that was well established, that was going to be attractive, that would provide some height and be relatively maintenance-free."

The Heaviland crew also obtained and installed four backless steel benches so spectators can face either the track or

continued on page 36

PHOTO: TOM HEAVILAND; ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK-INTERNATIONAL INC.

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A LESSON IN GIVING

continued from page 34

the soccer field during games.

"It looks like a park," Arabia says now. "There's been nothing like this in the 52 years the school's been open."

Heaviland Director of Field Operations Oscar Hernandez oversaw the project.

"You know what, at first, without knowing anything, I thought, I can take care of this no problem," says Hernandez. "But during the process, seeing the passion Mary Anne had and what she went through to win the prize from Discovery and OPEI, it was amazing, amazing to be part of it."

Arabia's passion energized the Heaviland crew, Hernandez says.

"She broke down in tears to see the trees going up," Hernandez recalls. "It gave us more motivation to make sure everything looked good."

"I absolutely got emotional, because I thought, these trees'll be here long after

"I absolutely got emotional, because I thought, these trees'll be here long after I am." —MARY ANNE ARABIA

I am," Arabia says. "I was telling my students, 'You can come back and say, these are my trees, this is my project.' To me, there's nothing that's as beautiful as a tree. It's going to live and grow for a long time, and that's how I feel about my teaching."

Grand unveiling

The trees and benches were unveiled to the students on May 15.

The trees are emblazoned with plaques for each grade, so every student will have some sort of ownership over them.

At the unveiling, Heaviland spoke to students about trees' benefits and their important role in the ecosystem.

Heaviland employees sponsor

families during the holidays and assist military families from time to time, but the Palomar project was unique.

"To be involved in the community and to educate people about the benefits of landscaping, it makes you feel good, and I hope to do more of it," Heaviland says. "Hopefully this has given us incentive to go seeking projects like this in the future."

When she sees the trees, Arabia always will be reminded of how far the school's come, and of all the people who made the renovation possible.

"We're like *The Little Engine That Could*," she says. "Palomar's always been a gem, but now other people are starting to see that, too." LM

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THE BENCHMARK

JEFF HARKNESS

The author is owner-manager of 3PG Consulting. Reach him at jeff@3PGconsulting.com.

Considering an exit?

Building profits and increasing the value of your company in the current environment is a challenge. Does it seem like today's economic climate and political agenda are working against you? Health care mandates, expiring tax cuts, immigration reform, high fuel costs and little change in the housing market—shall I go on? If you're considering an exit in the next six to 18 months, make sure you have a plan to quantify these fundamental deal points.

Enterprise value

The goal is to make money now. Earnings, not revenue, is the biggest driver behind valuation. Look at your "LTM" (last 12 months) of performance and "recast" or "adjust" the net income to normalize costs or reflect owner add-backs. While profits are recovering due to better and leaner management, they are not where they once were. Twelve percent to 15 percent adjusted EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization) is more the norm but not top of the table. Examine your value drivers and value detractors and get a professional to update your valuation each 6-month period on a rolling basis.

Impact of the balance sheet

A strong or weak balance sheet can affect your total purchase price consideration. While each

deal is unique, understand that retained assets or liabilities can be negotiated just like your multiple or adjusted EBITDA. Cash, timing of a closing date, working capital requirements or the payoff of long-term or short-term debt all contribute to your net purchase price.

Tax consequences

Most deals in the Green Industry typically involve purchasing assets rather than stock. Liability risk and tax treatment usually drive the deal structure. S corporations or LLCs have more favorable tax treatment when assets and goodwill are being sold, but C corporation shareholders can minimize the "double tax" impact of an asset deal through careful negotiating and the use of personal goodwill.

In practical terms, purchase price in an asset deal is allocated between Fixtures, Furniture & Equipment (FF&E), goodwill and non-competition agreements. (See IRS form 8594 and engage a tax advisor for more specifics.) The allocation or breakdown should be documented in the purchase agreement and negotiated and agreed to by each party. Dollars allocated to goodwill have the most favorable treatment for a seller because they are treated as capital gains at the federal and state levels. Buyers can amortize this expense at 15 years. Dollars allocated to FF&E should reflect the fair market value of the assets at the time of closing. This is negotiable but must be defensible. Buyers will look to drive this value up as they are allowed to depreciate these assets over five years to help pay for the transaction. Sellers must recapture depreciation as it relates to each asset and the amount of depreciation taken as of the sale. This means it costs the seller more in taxes on dollars allocated here.

Lastly, dollars allocated to non-competition agreements are taxed at ordinary income tax rates. This is bad news for the seller, but not great for the buyer, either, as a 15-year amortization applies. Get it right. It's not what you make, but what you keep. Be smart and creative.

Examine your value drivers and value detractors and get a professional to update your valuation each 6-month period.



AT A GLANCE

NAME: Steve Pattie

COMPANY: The Pattie Group

YEAR STARTED: 1968

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT:

Former president and current member of the Ohio Landscape Association; former PLANET board member; SIMA

EDUCATION: Attended Ohio University and graduated from Kent State University with a business degree. "But it's funny, I don't think my education's ever stopped."

HOBBIES: I love pruning my yard. I like traveling. I like coaching companies, too. I teach them how to restructure their companies to make them more profitable.

FAMILY: I have three kids and four grandkids. All three kids are at the company (Jonas, 35; Carla, 33; and Brian, 30).

WEBSITE:
www.pattiegroupp.com

At The Pattie Group, based in Novelty, Ohio, the focus not only is on customer service, but on mentoring and training employees. "We have very good coaching, very good mentoring, very good structuring," says The Pattie Group President **Steve Pattie**. About \$150,000 of the full-service company's \$7.5 million revenue is attributed to lawn care.

The company trains its staff continuously and tests them on their knowledge. It even has its own certification system in which employees can gain credentials in new skills.

Here Pattie talks with *Landscape Management* about the company's work-related initiatives, its values and more.

What is your business

philosophy? Honesty and integrity come first to mind. We train our staff to be proactive and helpful to our clients and to others. So if they see someone broken down on the side of the road, they have to stop to assist them. It's not just about landscaping. It's about life.

What special work-related initiatives do you have in

place? We require 45 hours a year of continuing education. Twenty-six hours are provided through the company; the rest is through recommended reading or classes or seminars. The average budget for that is between \$200 and \$300 per employee. It's been very effective. We can tell the staff's growth by the number of licenses our staff has. We have 30 or 40 certifications represented among our 88 employees.

What makes an exceptional

lawn care professional? Number one is teaching your staff to think holistically. It's analyzing plant needs, adjusting the water, talking to the client. It's about analyzing what looks right, what needs help, what needs to be enhanced.

When I was younger, I wanted to be the one-stop shop. I wanted to have all the expertise in one location, and we've done that.

How has that helped your

business? We have the expertise on staff to address all types of problems. When you have your own people involved, once they're trained, you have higher quality.

What do customers value? It's

mandatory that my staff gets back to the client within four hours. Four hours. It's hard, but speed sells. You can increase your sales by 30 percent by

speed. We sell by speed and we sell by experience.

On your website, it says the

The Pattie Group encourages Christian values. We are a Christian company. Our goal is to be ethical and moral. We want you to be a better person. It's not just about work. It's about goal setting. Then you can relate that to other things in your life, to your family. You can relate that to your business goals. It's about how to make you more valuable in the company.

You sometimes ask politicians to speak to your staff. Why?

I want our staff to be educated when they go vote, because this country could be headed in the totally wrong direction. I want my staff to know what candidates stand for.

What are your goals? I'm 61

and I've done everything I've ever wanted to do. I'm ready to take a step back. I want the succession plan to be instituted and my kids ready to take over by the end of this year. I want to start the second half of my life.

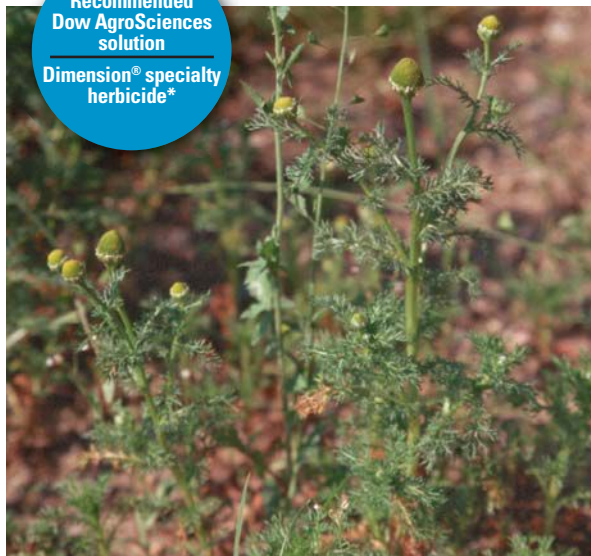
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IDENTIFICATION TIPS

▶ Also known as wild chamomile, this summer or winter annual is commonly found in landscapes and turf, as well as compacted areas like walkways.

▶ Its finely dissected leaves emit a pineapple-like scent when crushed.

▶ This low-growing plant has a bushy appearance, with smooth, branched stems and alternating, hairless leaves.

▶ Greenish-yellow, cone-shaped flowers grow at the ends of the stems on short flower stalks.

▶ Pineapple weed spreads by seed.

CONTROL TIPS

▶ Hoe or hand-pull any existing plants prior to bloom. This plant reproduces only by seeds that are released from the fruit at maturity. Apply a preemergent herbicide once the area has been cleared and soil has settled from rainfall or irrigation.

▶ In spring or late fall, apply a preemergent herbicide labeled for its control.

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AMERICAN BURNWEED

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IDENTIFICATION TIPS

▶ This rapid-growing, erect, summer annual is known for its alternate, sharp-pointed leaves with toothed margins.

▶ Common in cultivated areas, American burnweed tolerates moderate shade, but requires moist, well-drained soil.

▶ Small white or greenish flowers grow in open, terminal clusters. When plants mature, the flowers go to seed, resembling dandelion puffs.

▶ Seeds have parachutes attached that aid in wind dispersal and take root in a lawn's thatch layer.

CONTROL TIPS

▶ Its seeds have the ability to germinate in thatch, which makes the use of preemergent herbicides somewhat problematic. Lowering your mowing height below the growing point of the plant is one method of control.

▶ Apply a postemergent herbicide, labeled for your use site.

For more information regarding these and other turf weeds — and related control technologies and tips — please visit www.DowProvesIt.com or call 800/255-3726.

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SNOW+ICE

GUIDE

PHIL HARWOOD WASN'T buying into technology when he was a principal of a major Green Industry company 10 years ago, but he wouldn't go without it if he were in the business today. Harwood, president of Pro-Motion Consulting, has seen how far job-tracking system functionality has come.

Business technology has come so far, the way companies manage equipment and personnel looks completely different than it did a decade ago. And that's a good thing, contractors say.

From billing tools to route trackers, technology is helping snow management companies save and recover revenue, making them wonder how they managed without them.

Controlled chaos

There is enough chaos in day-to-day business. Add a snowstorm to the equation, and there are plenty of opportunities for reporting and billing errors on top of everything else.

"During a snow event, there's a lot of equipment, people and moving parts going 24 hours a day, especially with spreaders," says Andrew Jenkins, branch manager of ValleyCrest in Chantilly, Va. "We could be going a few days straight. We've got to keep the equipment going to keep clients happy."

ValleyCrest trucks are equipped with SnowEx's tracking devices, which document salt use and job times. In the past, employees wrote down the times they started and finished a job and how much salt they used. The method of manual recording can lead to human error if the truck operator forgets to



Job-tracking technology includes salt-use tracking devices, mobile time clocks and GPS systems.

USER *(and profit)* FRIENDLY

The latest snow market job-tracking technology helps companies run tighter ships by picking up where human capabilities end. **BY HEATHER TAYLOR**

record everything. But technology takes the error factor away, Jenkins says.

"When you get to the job site, you press 'start job,' then 'stop job' when you're done," he says. "Between starting and stopping, it counts your material usage quantity, and it's very accurate."

Accuracy is invaluable when a customer contests a bill, alleging the contractor never hit the property that day. "You can go back to them with all this data and say, 'Look, we're not guesstimating,' which was the old-school practice," Jenkins says.

The technology has to be used properly to get such accurate results, which

SNOW + ICE GUIDE

is why South Bend, Ind.-based Foegley Landscape has a three-method system to track jobs. In addition to time sheets, the company uses Exaktime's mobile time clock and FleetMatics' GPS system.

"Sometimes the crews get so wrapped up in it they forget to record their hours in Exaktime," company president John Foegley says. "If something is missed, we fall back to the GPS records. Someone in the office makes sure everything is balanced to the minute."

Tim Schrage, vice president of Signature Land Services in Anchorage, Alaska, says the Exaktime time clock system installed on employees' smartphones works instantly.

"If the crews are out working at night, by the time the administrative staff gets in the next morning, they can pull in the field notes from the previous night and answer any questions without having to track down the employee who



Foegley Landscape uses a three-pronged system for snow job tracking, including time sheets, mobile time clocks and GPS.

reported it," he says.

Some technologies uncover lost revenue.

"The amount of money that has been found on the GPS [that had previously been overlooked] is mind-blowing," says Foegley Vice President Brian Hominiuk. "We would have missed out on a lot without it."

Schrage adds that job-tracking

software's money-saving and analytical features make it indispensable.

"It's a huge time saver in the office," Schrage says. "You can report much more accurately and on time. It allows you to look at each shift and person and determine whether you made money or you didn't. To me, that's worth a million bucks."

Achieving efficiency

Snow contractors say job-tracking programs also help the bottom line by keeping employees and the trucks they drive more productive. One way it works is by cutting down on travel time between jobs.

Software helps Foegley's company cut down on "windshield time" by mapping more efficient routes. In addition, the software is set up so when a truck pulls into a gas station, Burger King or similar business, the office staff is alerted.

"We don't want to be Big Brother, but we need to account for the crews," Foegley says.

Like most companies, Foegley Landscape looks for every possible way to cut down on fuel consumption. Its GPS system gives the crews several ways to do that. It keeps track of mileage and sends alerts when service is needed, and it also monitors gas-wasting truck idle time.

The cost of saving money

Naturally, a system that can help a company with efficiency and saving money is going to require an initial investment. It can cost anywhere from \$200 to \$400 to buy each vehicle's

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unit, depending on the product and the size of the company. Installation requirements vary as well. While some companies have the vendors install the equipment in the vehicles for a fee, others use their own in-house mechanics to install it.

Ongoing costs vary by product. Some, like FleetMatics, have a rental fee but offer a seasonal option where companies make payments only during the busy season. Schrage pays a \$500 annual fee to use the tracking system.

For app-driven technology such as Exaktime's product, expenses include a smartphone and the data package from the cell phone provider.

Schrage's employees have the option of checking out an employee phone for use on the job. Or, they can access the job-tracking app the company uses on their own smartphones.

Powering up the crews

Contractors also like job-tracking technology because it's easy to use.

"The bulk of employees these days are under age 30. It's technology they've grown up with," Schrage says. "For the longer-term employees who aren't as familiar with technology, there's a big green button that says 'start.' The GPS



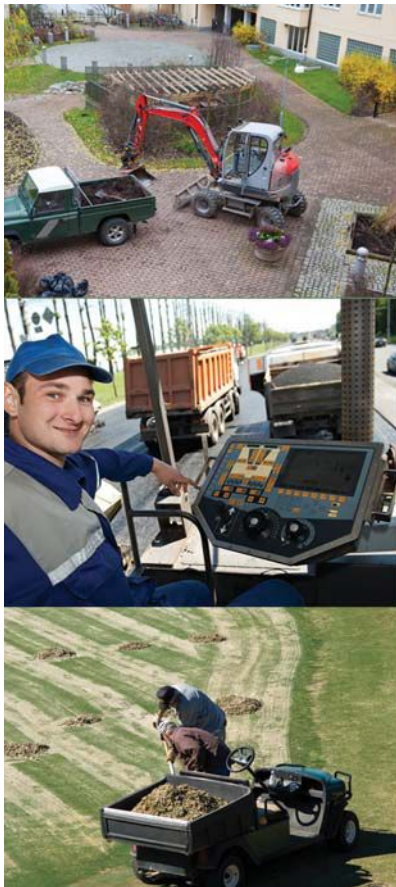
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shows you directions to the nearest account and you verify if that's your next job. It's pretty darn simple."

While the technical aspect might not be a problem, it can be challenging to get the crews to remember to use the systems or use them properly. The leadership at Foegley encourages

buy-in by recognizing crew members and foremen when they consistently use the technology correctly. Rewards include a \$3-per-hour bonus and gas cards or gift cards to their favorite restaurants or stores.

On the other hand, there are no repercussions for those who might be

slow to catch on. Sometimes language, culture or unfamiliarity are barriers to getting employees on board.

"We keep working with them and they eventually get it," Hominiuk says. "We don't punish them if they're not good with technology."

Choose wisely

As for price, Harwood advises potential adopters to do their due diligence.

"Technology changes so quickly, so there's a lot of work in knowing what's available," Harwood says. "A lot of contractors go to trade shows and pass by the booths with technology to go stare at a box blade for an hour. They assume technology is too complicated and expensive, so they don't do their homework."

Due diligence should go beyond listening to a salesperson, Harwood adds. He suggests finding peers who use the different systems and asking their opinions.

Harwood adds that the search doesn't have to be limited to suppliers in the landscape or snow management industries.

"I have clients who use GPS and data-tracking technology from the trucking industry because they have a background in trucking," Harwood says. "Every industry that has vehicles on the road has a tracking system, and that expands the possible solutions."

Smaller contractors may not think a tracking system is for them, but Harwood points out now might be the best time to get into it. The fewer the trucks in the fleet, he says, the fewer units you have to purchase initially. Then, he asserts, you can purchase additional units as the company grows and staff already will know how to use them.

"Small companies can still save on efficiency and productivity gains," he adds.

That type of savings is appealing to any size company.

"Without the technology, I don't know where we would be," Hominiuk says. "Losing money, I guarantee." **LMI**

Taylor is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

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Power play

New for 4X4, half-ton and 1-ton trucks and SUVs, **THE BOSS Snowplow** introduces a 7.5-ft. Power-V XT Plow featuring a high-performance cutting edge, built-in curb guards and a snow catcher. Flared blade wings with an enhanced curl throw snow higher and farther than straight-blade plows for improved efficiency and less time on the job, the company says. An enclosed hydraulics package protects against corrosion and hydraulic freeze-up. A two-year limited warranty covers parts and labor. BossPlow.com

Clean sweep

The LB540 Power Broom is designed for the **Ventrac** 3000 series tractor. It can sweep and remove snow, leaves, dirt, light gravel and other materials from parking lots, sidewalks and other surfaces. Heavy-duty nylon bristles make short



work of any clean-up job without damaging the surface below. A hydraulic cylinder angles the broom left or right from the operator's seat. Adjustable gauge wheels set the height of work for precise adjustment. Optional outrigger wheels allow for controlled adjustment when de-thatching turf. An optional front debris curtain is available for less overthrow of material. Ventrac.com

Ice management

SnowEx presents its new, electric-powered push sprayers for sidewalks and other small areas. Available with a powder-coated steel frame (SL-80) or stainless steel frame (SL-80SS), both sprayers have a 13-gal., corrosion-resistant polyethylene tank. Each model includes an adjustable-height boomless nozzle, which sprays most salt brine and liquid ice melters up to 48 in. wide. The units also come with an adjustable spray wand for spot-spraying applications. A 12-volt electric pump and rechargeable battery powers the units. The pump is rated at 2 gpm at 60 psi.

TrynexFactory.com

continued on page 49



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continued from page 47



Versatile performer

The FFC V-Blade attaches to skid-steers and compact wheel loaders up to operating weights of 13,200 lbs. It easily adjusts to achieve straight, left/right, scoop or V-position, providing the versatility needed to efficiently remove snow from walks, driveways and parking lots. It comes in blade widths ranging from 60 in. to 120 in., and is available with a Hydraulic Sequencing Valve or **Paladin Construction Group's** electro-hydraulic system, which improves blade control and independent blade function. Other features include a reversible cutting edge, fully adjustable skid shoes, and top and side pinch guards. The FFC V-Blade is engineered with fewer components and less hardware than other adjustable snow blades, making it up to 200 lbs. lighter than other models and easier to maneuver. In addition, the design incorporates a robust central ball joint that allows for improved multi-axial movement. *PaladinConstruction Group.com*



Heavy-duty construction

Loftness' line of snow blowers accommodates many makes and models of skid-steers and tractors. Seven skid-steer models are available in 72- to 84-in. widths. Each features a universal coupler, a single motor design and an electric spout rotator. A total of 11 rear-mount, PTO-driven tractor models are also offered with one-, two- or three-auger configurations. Available in 60- to 108-in. widths, they accommodate tractors with 540- or 1,000-rpm PTO drives and 16- to 200-PTO horsepower. The units feature two-stage designs for efficient operation. *Loftness.com*

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LM REPORTS

YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH



Caterpillar

The Cat 259B Series 3 Compact Track Loader features a fully suspended, steel-embedded rubber track undercarriage for versatility, durability and comfort. Its high-performance powertrain, advanced hydraulic system and wide range

of available Cat Work Tools improve productivity, even in tough working conditions. The cab features a wide, spacious interior, uncluttered floor and ergonomic, low-effort joystick controls to keep the operator comfortable throughout the day.

CatResourceCenter.com/PR



Little Beaver

The new HYD-NTV11H UN-Towable Drill offers an easily transportable solution for one-person hole-digging projects. Incorporating heavy-duty construction and quality features, the unit offers an economical option, without sacrificing the power, efficiency and reliability of similar towable units. Easy to transport and maintain, the drill features an 11-hp Honda GX340V engine, resulting in a 10 percent power advantage over competitive models. Hydraulic pressure of 2,500 psi and an operating speed of 150 rpm further enhance power output. Because it's easy to maneuver, the drill can operate in places that are inaccessible to skid steers and tractors. LittleBeaver.com

Grouser Products

Grouser's new, V3 FlexPlane is designed to attach to any make and model of skid-steer, making it the universal tool for any landscaping job. Featuring an exclusive pivoting action, the heavy-duty attachment features a versatile self-adjusting blade that rotates to contour to the ground, continually adjusting for uneven ground and providing maximum efficiency in any terrain. It also can be locked in place and used as a standard, rigid plane. The plane features two double-beveled, hardened cutting edges to provide both aggressive cutting action and smooth leveling in both forward and reverse directions. A special cross



BOMAG

The BVP Series single-direction plate compactors are designed for a variety of jobs, including paver and patio installation. Powered by air-cooled Honda gasoline engines equipped with low oil alert, the compactors are built to withstand the rigors of daily use. An engine protection frame guards against incidental damage, while vibration isolation extends engine and overall equipment longevity. A bolt-on exciter is easy to remove, keeping maintenance time and costs low. The BVP10/36 weighs 183 lbs., covers a working width of 14.2 in., and produces 2,250 lbs. of centrifugal force. The BVP18/45 weighs 201 lbs. and delivers 4,050 lbs. of centrifugal force.

GoBOMAG.com/light-equipment



Bobcat Co.

Bobcat offers a new extendable arm option for the M-Series E55 compact excavator. The telescoping arm provides the best of both worlds: power and reach. The new option provides an additional 30 in. of reach, when fully extended. It also is the first extendable arm for compact excavators in this size class that allows the use of the hydraulic clamp and Hydraulic X-Change attachment mounting system. The clamp capability is a solution for contractors wanting to pick up and place items such as rocks, landscaping materials and debris in site-preparation applications. The extendable arm cylinder is operated through a rocker-style thumb switch located on the joystick. Bobcat.com



DeWitt Co.

The DeWitt Flexible Intermediate Bulk Container (FIBC) is a standardized container in

large dimension for storing and transporting up to 2,000 lbs. of dry, flowable products like sand, fertilizers, mulch or rock. The DeWitt FIBC container is manufactured from quality woven polypropylene and tested to meet tear and ultraviolet-resistance standards. They can be transported and loaded on pallets or by lifting it from the cross-corner support loops by forklift. The containers are unloaded or emptied by a special opening in the bottom with a discharge spout or star closure on the bottom of the bag. *DeWittCompany.com*



TurfEx

Commercial-duty spreader attachments are designed to mount on many service vehicles, such as utility tractors, riding mowers and ATVs. The spreaders provide consistent, even distribution of anything from seed to fertilizer. They also can spread ice melt for winter maintenance applications. The TurfEx mountable spreader line consists of six models available as electric or

PTO-driven, with capacities of 3, 7 or 12 cu. ft. of material. Weather-resistant variable speed controllers are standard for most of the line (optional on the TS300). The spreaders come with a 2-in. receiver hitch and spread as wide as 20 ft. The 7- and 12-cu.-ft. capacity units are equipped with a three-point mount and can spread as wide as 30 ft. Other standard equipment for all models includes clear, fitted hopper covers. All units are covered by a one-year limited warranty. *TrynexFactory.com*

Grasshopper

With a compact size for precision maneuvering in close quarters, a 48-in. cutting deck for optimal airflow and superior cut, and a powerful diesel engine that maintains blade tip speed in thick grass—while using less than 1 gal. of fuel every hour—Model 321D-48 increases operational efficiency and decreases costs for greater profitability, according to the company. *GrasshopperMower.com*



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Case Construction Equipment

The Case SR250 and SV300 (pictured) skid-steers and TR320 and TV380 compact track loaders now feature 90-hp, 3.4-liter Case diesel engines with the full high-pressure common rail (HPCR) design typically used in larger construction equipment. To meet Tier 4 Interim emission requirements, Case equipped the models with cooled exhaust gas recirculation (CEGR) technology, including diesel particulate filter and diesel oxidizing

catalyst. Operator visibility and comfort, climate management and operator controls define the Case Alpha Series machines. The skid-steer cabs, which Case says are the widest in the industry, feature ultra-narrow wire side screens that improve operator visibility. Extra glass surface gives the operator 360-degree visibility. CaseCE.com



Volvo Construction Equipment

The new wheeled and tracked skid-steer models available through the Volvo Construction Equipment dealer network are the radial lift MC60C (pictured) and MC70C, and the vertical lift MC85C, MC95C and MCT85C. Rated operating capacities for these models range from 1,350 to 1,900 lbs., and gross engine power from 48 to 59 hp. Featuring an exclusive single-loader arm design, Volvo skid steer loaders and compact track loaders deliver the performance and durability found in a traditional skid-steer design, along with the improved visibility, safety and enhanced cab access of a side-entry machine. The cab also features a large top window for improved visibility during truck loading. VolvoCE.com



New Holland Construction

The new C Series loader backhoes feature Tier 4 Interim engines, improved engine response, fuel efficiency and serviceability, and an optional auto ride control. The line-up includes the B95C (pictured), B95C TC, B95C LR and B110C. With backhoe bucket breakout forces of 12,933 ft.-lbs. and lift capacities at 12 ft. of 3,940 lb., the machines are ideal for tasks such as digging trenches or placing pipe. The new engines deliver faster response and increased fuel efficiency—up to 4 percent over previous models. In addition, a new tilt-forward hood, which replaces the flip-up hood on previous models, is easy to open, and provides wide access with low effort for routine maintenance needs. NewHolland.com



Steiner

Available in 32, 34 or 40 hp gas or 24.9 hp diesel engine models, the new Steiner 440 Tractor is designed to deliver with focused aggression. Features

include a non-permeable, all-steel fuel tank and oversized filler neck with an EPA-approved tethered fuel cap; 200-watt halogen quartz front headlights; 1,500 psi of lift pressure, Eaton Series hydraulic pump and transmission; Peerless 2600 dual range transaxles; 5-gal. capacity hydraulic oil reservoir; 7-in. seat slides for operator fit; a new operator panel design that puts control at your fingertips; and a folding rollover protection system (ROPS) that comes standard. SteinerTurf.com



Ditch Witch

Charles Machine Works (CMW), manufacturer of Ditch Witch underground construction equipment, offers a new line of compact and powerful walk-behind trenchers—the RT12, RT16, RT20 and RT24. The entire line incorporates a stacked, in-line hydraulic pump configuration that effectively eliminates vertical shafts and the use of belts and/or flywheel reduction systems, and ultimately reduces downtime. The line also has fully hydrostatic ground drives, with simple-to-use, hydraulic, skid-steer-style steering. Ditch Witch walk-behinds feature a solid, adjustable trail wheel that helps keep the unit stable and reduces breakover when loading, unloading and traveling over curbs and other uneven terrain. Also, to keep the trencher boom in the ground during operation or maintain down pressure when placing the boom in the ground, the trail wheel gives the machine another point of leverage besides the track undercarriage. DitchWitch.com

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BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at bwilson@wilson-oyler.com.

Everyone drives revenue

Everyone drives revenue. If you don't agree, it's time to change the way you think about marketing—not in the functional context of creating demand for your services, but in the sense of how you view your organization.

Let's look at Apple. Apple is a manufacturer. But most of us who buy or use Apple products think of the company as a marketing powerhouse. That's because everyone who is affiliated with the organization seems engaged in selling it. From its developers and engineers to its retail staff, everyone is committed to providing a world-class customer experience.

Becoming a market-driven organization requires every employee, regardless of function, to focus on creating value for the customer and growing revenue. Directly or indirectly, everyone needs to move the brand forward.

Here's the problem: Marketing as a strategic function is often the first budget to get cut, especially when times are tough. And because marketing and sales are interrelated, cutting marketing and its processes often can result in leaving salespeople on their own, caving in to the low-price bidding war. Looking at it another way, keeping sales and eliminating marketing is like keeping the tactic and eliminating the strategy.

Companies ask me, how do I grow sales? The answer is, not without strategy. And for that you need the strategic value marketing brings and you need all employees to engage in the spirit, if not the act, of promoting your company, understanding and knowing what their roles are in driving revenue and meeting profitability goals.

To be successful in a world where technology has given customers greater control and access to more data than ever before, coordinating interdepartmental resources to create customer value will help your company become an organization where everyone is connected to the customer and involved in profitable growth.

It used to be that you went out and found customers. Now customers are finding you.

Are you reorienting your company so they can?

Here are 10 ways to get started:

1. Link your marketing, sales and operations efforts to grow profitably. Align goals interdepartmentally.
2. Recognize that every employee drives revenue and reputation and participates in creating a first-class service experience. Tell your employees how they affect growth.
3. Hire employees with sales in mind. How will these people represent you to the public? How will they contribute to achieving positive results? Remember, the team on the loading dock is the face of your company to the vendor; the courtesy of the receptionist is the sound of your company to the caller.
4. Have employees participate on sales support teams or send representatives from different departments to sales meetings. Understanding sales and growth goals empowers everyone to pitch in.
5. Make sure employees understand the mission, vision and objectives of the company, its services and its target audience.
6. Communicate across disciplines. Make sure your employees understand how other departments work and encourage them to find ways they can work together.
7. Define jobs in the context of how the roles and responsibilities help the company grow. Measure the bottom-line consequences.
8. Train for growth. Encourage employees to grow their specific skills in a way that will enhance company growth.
9. Use your entire team as a bucket brigade. Don't delegate the responsibility for selling and branding to a bucket of one.
10. Information is the first step to engagement. Have town hall meetings to discuss how the company is doing. Don't leave anyone out. Inspiration comes from unexpected sources.

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THE MISSION

Maintain, in an environmentally sustainable way, a traditionally cultural open space for this restaurant's customers—and the public.

The Beach House Restaurant on Kauai, Hawaii, has faced many challenges over the past three decades, including restoring the entire property after two separate hurricanes (Iwa, in 1982, and Iniki 10 years later) wiped out the restaurant and covered the remaining ground in ocean sand. During both reconstructions, the owners chose to keep the space open and environmentally friendly.

Lawn maintenance in a high-traffic area has expected challenges, but the addition of regularly occurring Pacific Ocean saltwater spray, and the proximity to the ocean edge, create special conditions. The lawn area is planted with seashore paspalum grass, and the public has direct contact with the lawn.

With that in mind, No Ka Oi Landscape Services (NKO), Hannapepe, Hawaii, has implemented this environmentally sustainable lawn maintenance plan:

1. Seashore paspalum is the “right plant in the right place,” as it is a saltwater-tolerant species.
2. Weekly mowing with a reel mower keeps the lawn cropped and carpet-like.
3. Lawn clippings are left behind, providing natural nitrogen and acting as “sunscreen” for the lawn.
4. The irrigation system is closely monitored to minimize overwatering. Keeping the irrigation at optimal settings inhibits weed growth and fungus problems.
5. Slow-release fertilizers, dispensed with accurate calibration, minimize leeching nitrogen into the ocean.
6. Verticutting twice a year controls thatch, thus naturally reducing diseases.
7. Annual aeration and the application of 20 tons of sand create a healthy environment for grass.



PHOTOS: NO KA OI
LANDSCAPE SERVICES



THE WORK

- 1 | Ocean view.** The early morning salt mist settles on the property.
- 2 | Pretty as a picture.** Tourists and locals alike take advantage of the carpet-like texture of the lawn and the Pacific Ocean view. The constant traffic means regular lawn maintenance is crucial.
- 3 | Vertical integration.** The NKO crew verticuts the lawn twice a year.
- 4 | Two-step process.** Although weekly cuttings are left behind for mulch, the verticutting must be raked and cleaned up.
- 5 | Smart accessorizing.** The lawn is the star here, but planting beds are natural and full, adding to the beauty. It's worth noting that when small weeds are found in the lawn during regular inspections, they are immediately treated with salt.

"We're big. We're beautiful. And we're nice." That's the motto behind the family-owned No Ka Oi Landscaping Services, founded by Frank and Abby Santos in 1977. Focusing on commercial, resort and high-end residential development properties in Kauai, Hawaii, the company boasts three divisions, approximately 25 employees, and a full 13-acre private nursery, where it grows plants exclusively for clients. This project garnered a 41st Annual Environmental Improvement Grand Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). For more information, visit NKOlandscaping.com.

Special order

Chalet adds revenue in lawn renovations with a specialty application process.

ON CHICAGO'S NORTH SHORE, creeping bentgrass is a common infestation that's difficult to control. Because creeping bentgrass is thick, matty and chokes out other grasses, it's a nuisance that many customers feel spoils an otherwise beautiful lawn. It's also prone to disease. For customers with bentgrass- or nimblewill-infested lawns, Chalet in Chicago's northern suburbs is turning the problem into an opportunity. It has implemented a specialty application service for lawn renovations.

Tony Kacinas, assistant manager in Chalet's soil and turf department, began trialing Syngenta's Tenacity, an herbicide with the active ingredient mesotrione, and found that it was producing happy customers by killing creeping bentgrass and nimblewill yet retaining desirable grasses.

"The old school way of renovating a lawn meant killing everything off and starting from scratch," Kacinas says. "I hated killing off good grass that didn't really have to go. Now we're able to keep that grass, which makes the renovation much easier because we have a base to build from."

After completing some successful trials, last year Kacinas signed up 15 lawns for the specialty application. "The feedback was really good, so this year I have 40 lawns on the docket," he says. "We've actually hired a specialty applicator to handle this service, along with other specialty applications we are offering. It became too much for me to handle on my own."

Kacinas says that the specialty application market is growing as more clients begin to value customized services.

"We know that not everyone has bentgrass or nimblewill, but we can target this to those customers who do," he says. "Whether they're on our fertilization program or not, this is something that we can market to both existing and new customers."

Because the product creates white spots on the lawn as the bentgrass and nimblewill die, Kacinas says it's important to educate customers so they have realistic expectations. That's why Chalet informs clients that the white spots mean it's working.



Tony Kacinas enrolled 40 lawns this year.

The company also uses iPads to show clients before-and-after photos of other properties that have received the application. "We're able to show them what the lawn looks like throughout the process so they're prepared for the white spots and not calling us in a panic," Kacinas says. "It's always smart to set a client up with proper expectations. Once they understand that you don't have to kill all of the grass, people appreciate that they're just dealing with some white spots."

The initial process includes three applications, each two weeks apart. Then the entire lawn is slit seeded. Chalet charges per square foot for the chemical application and a separate fee for slit seeding, which includes the cost of the seed.

Once the lawn is in a healthy state, Kacinas signs up customers for an annual clean-up application for any root systems that may have survived or seeds that may remain in the soil. It offers an opportunity for recurring revenue and keeps the customer happy.

"You don't want to go through that three-step application process only to have the bentgrass come back two or three years later," says Kacinas. "A once-a-year clean-up spray ensures the customer is getting true quality and that their expectations are being met."

Because the repeat service adds to the workload, Kacinas says he'll pace the new service's growth.

"We already have the 15 lawns from last year that we need to go back and do a one-time clean-up on," says Kacinas. "Next year, we'll have 40 additional one-time clean-ups on top of all the new sprays we're doing. So each year we'll be seeing more work."

With the success, he says the service promotes itself by word of mouth. Customers happy that their bothersome bentgrass is being dealt with are telling their friends. Chalet also has started promoting the service through its retail garden center.

"Customers are really excited to hear that we have a new process to help them get rid of this pesky old problem."

The author is a freelance writer with seven years of experience covering landscaping.

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY: Chalet

HEADQUARTERS: Wilmette, Illinois

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 275

2011 REVENUE: \$25.5 million

PROJECTED 2012 REVENUE: \$25.5 million

ADD-ON SERVICE: Specialty application service for lawn renovations.

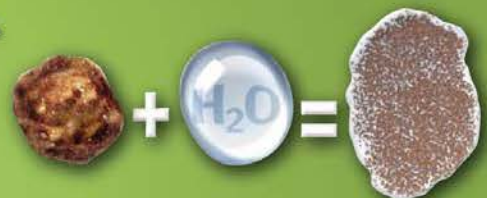
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ACUTABOVE

GREEN INDUSTRY MAINTENANCE LEADERS » BY MARISA PALMIERI

Zack Kline, 23, exudes enthusiasm when he speaks about his company, A.I.R. Lawn Care, based in Montgomery County, Md. His 1-year-old business is green in more ways than one: A.I.R. stands for “atmosphere improvement and renewal.” The company is living up to its name with its battery-powered handheld equipment, solar-paneled truck and an electric commercial-grade mower.

The idea for the company was born a few years ago when Kline was working on a landscape crew on a 95-degree, “code red” day, trimming a 2.5-acre property with traditional equipment. As an operator, the noise and emissions bothered him. He recalls thinking, “There has to be a better way.”

Last year Kline entered and won a business plan competition at Salisbury University, where he studied marketing and information systems. He took home the \$5,000 prize, which he used to get his business off the ground.

While growing his company (it’s still a part-time effort) and working a full-time job at a payroll company, Kline is researching organic fertilization and mosquito control services, and he’s networking as much as possible. He’s a member of Bethesda Green, a sustainable business incubator, and the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). He’s also busy forging partnerships and personal relationships with clients, peers and suppliers.

Take Stihl, for example. After looking into equipment options to fit his business plan, Kline decided on Stihl products. He did some research, learned that Stihl President Fred Whyte was a bagpipe player, and sent him a pair of bagpipe cuff links, along with a hand-written note introducing himself. Whyte called Kline to thank him for his gift and learn more about his company. Then he introduced him to Roger Phelps, Stihl’s promotional communications manager. After reviewing Kline’s business plan, Stihl decided to help him out by giving him several pieces of its Battery KombiSystem products. Phelps also introduced him to PLANET, which donated a one-year complimentary membership. Kline is taking advantage, having attended the association’s Renewal & Remembrance and Legislative Day on the Hill events in July; he’s also preparing to take the Landscape Industry Certified Manager exam in October.



Zack Kline’s firm is green in more ways than one.

INSIDE INFO

Company: A.I.R. Lawn Care

Headquarters: Montgomery County, Md.

Employees: 1

Key to being a maintenance leader: I’m pretty big on quotes, and one I’ve taken to heart that my fraternity brother shared with me is, “It’s not what you know and who you know, but who knows you.” Trying to do this at such a young age, I see things coming together with networking and building relationships. Another one is, “Just show up,” which is what Woody Allen said. “Ninety percent of success is showing up.” And the other 10 percent is being prepared.

TOP TREND

» **Sustainability.** Maybe I’m a little biased, but I’d say companies are trying to be more sustainable, and customers are, too. For example, in Montgomery County there are ordinances that prevent you from using certain equipment during certain hours for blowers and trimmers. With the green technology that’s available, as the battery life improves, that will be the new trend because it’s less fuel consumption, there are zero emissions and you get the same quality.

TOP OBSTACLE

» **Time is the biggest obstacle for me.** I’m devoting a lot of my time to my full-time job, but I’m

always hungry to be doing stuff for my business. I hope to go full time next season. I’m in the process of getting a loan set up for next season so I can purchase more capital and take on employees. That way I can focus on behind-the-scenes business development.

For the industry, it’s being able to convert over to green equipment. Everyone has a lot of time and infrastructure invested in gas-powered equipment. It’s tough for owners, managers and crew leaders to be convinced about converting over. It’s about accepting change. One quote I was taught is, “Change is inevitable, but growth is optional.”

TOP OPPORTUNITY

» **Education.** I have a great opportunity to provide an environmentally friendly service and educate people about the benefits. In lawn maintenance, many people just want their grass cut and for it to be green and pristine. They may not recognize the impact of everyone doing that. The EPA says that 5 percent to 10 percent of pollution comes from handheld power equipment.

The industry has the opportunity, too, to educate consumers and each other, and we all have the opportunity to learn about how we can be more sustainable with everything we do.

2012 Renewal & Remembrance Legislative Day on the Hill PLANET Leadership Meetings

Renewal & Remembrance, Legislative Day on the Hill, and Leadership Meetings are PLANET's annual Washington, D.C. events. PLANET members gathered for three days to renew the grounds of Arlington National Cemetery, speak with lawmakers about issues pertinent to the green industry, and plan PLANET's course of action for the next year.

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[Coming in September]

Our golden anniversary

Stay tuned for next month's special 50th anniversary special edition of *Landscape Management*. We'll recount our history—back when we were called *Weeds, Trees and Turf*—and share our list of 50 things that have changed the industry over the last five decades.

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Nathan Helder regrets not hiring a financial manager sooner.



Hiring a financial manager was expensive but worthwhile, says Nathan Helder.

COMPANY:

Gelderman Landscaping

HEADQUARTERS: Waterdown, Ontario, Canada

EMPLOYEES: 80

SERVICE BREAKDOWN:

Design/build: 35%; maintenance: 35%; snow: 23%; irrigation: 7%

CLIENT BREAKDOWN:

35% residential; 65% commercial

2011 REVENUE: \$6.2 million

PROJECTED 2012 REVENUE: \$7 million

OVER THE LAST 20 years Gelderman Landscaping has progressed in operational efficiencies. But when it came to the accounting side of business, including job costing and monthly reporting, that's where things fell short, President Nathan Helder says. There weren't appropriate systems in place, and the time it was taking to handle day-to-day finances was taking him away from other important jobs. He says hiring a financial manager has completely transformed the business.

Big changes

Since coming on board, the finance manager has cleaned up the balance sheet and made sure that financial reports for all divisions are in order. One of the biggest changes has been a profit-and-loss statement broken down by division and month, available in 15 days versus the 45 it used to take.

"From a management standpoint, that's closing a huge gap," says Helder. "Now, as the company moves forward, I can do projections much more easily and have the information I need at my fingertips."

Another critical change has been the introduction of a purchase-order system. Helder says the system saved the company \$50,000 in the first year because it was determined

some suppliers were double billing. It's also helped ensure the company doesn't order unnecessary supplies. "Now with the purchase-order system in place, we're only ordering exactly what we need."

Hiring the right person

Trying to hire a financial professional on their own is a mistake that many business owners likely make, Helder says. He knew he didn't have the right background to handle the interviewing process alone.

"I STARTED OFF WONDERING, 'HOW CAN I AFFORD THAT?' BUT ENDED UP THINKING, 'WHY DIDN'T I DO THIS SOONER?'"

"I used my accountant to find our financial manager because I didn't know the lingo," says Helder. "He interviewed 15 people and though he led the discussion and asked most of the questions, I sat in the room for every interview."

Finding someone who has some management training on top of accounting experience is a good fit for the Green Industry, Helder adds.

"I wouldn't advise a straight accountant—some-

one who is basically a bean counter," says Helder. "That person will nickel and dime every little thing, and running a landscape business does have some risk associated with it. Sometimes you have to go with your gut—you just need numbers to back it up."

Before you start looking, make sure you know what you're seeking, advises Helder.

"Put an organizational chart in place and figure out exactly what the position needs to cover," he says. "If it turns out it's a bookkeeper you need, that's not the same thing as an accounting or financial manager. You could find yourself a bookkeeper out of college or even a local student."

Worth the investment

At first, Helder was taken back by the financial manager's \$75,000 salary. But he says she easily paid for herself in the first year.

"I started off wondering, 'How can I afford that?' but ended up thinking, 'Why didn't I do this sooner?'"

He also says it's allowed him to get back to growing the business. "I didn't want to have to stress over cash flow and cash receivables and making sure that everything was being managed," Helder adds. "Now that I've hired someone to focus on those day-to-day functions, it's allowed me to focus my attention on other important areas of business."

Payton is a freelance writer with seven years of experience covering the landscape industry.

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