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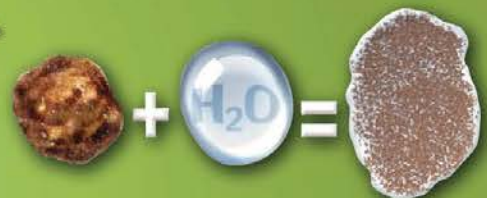


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THE LM DAILY

DID YOU CATCH THE LATEST FROM THE BLOG?

» I try to avoid looking at it. Because every time I see it I am racked by guilt. Every day when I arrive to work, there it is — looking forlorn and woefully neglected: My plant.

» A lot of us are in the midst of working on our "Training Programs." This is an area that, as I have talked to different people around the industry is a continuing source of angst. We live in an information rich environment. There are literally hundreds of places to get technical and business information.

Visit landscapemanagement.blogspot.com/ to get the latest from the LM staff and from a few top Green Industry contractors.



FROM THE

TWITTERVERSE... Not following *Landscape Management* on Twitter (@landscapemgmt)? Here are a few tweets you might have missed:

 **Landscape Management** @LandscapeMgmt 3 Feb
A future Add-On Biz for landscapers? MIT creates solar cell from grass clippings extremetech.com/extreme/116689... via @extremetech

 **PLANET** @PLANET2005 3 Feb
PLANET's CEO shares accomplishments from 2011. fb.me/18fr7tqUR
Retweeted by Landscape Management

 **Landscape Management** @LandscapeMgmt 3 Feb
LM Blog: Plant in need: I try to avoid looking at it. Because every time I see it I am racked by guilt. Every da... bit.ly/wkOMRc

 **Project EverGreen** @PE 3 Feb
Help us win a Challenge from the White House! Vote for GreenCare for Troops here: ow.ly/8Mx4Q #green #military
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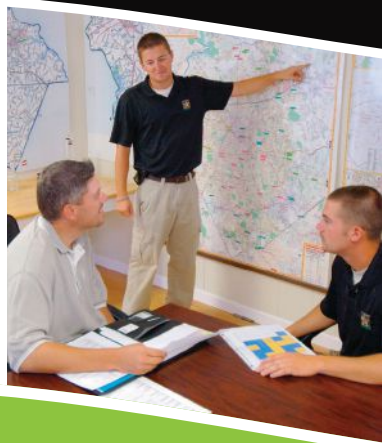
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Meet the LM Team



DAN JACOBS
Editor-in-Chief

Jacobs is a veteran of the Green Industry and an award-winning journalist. During his 20-year career, he has written for a variety of newspapers and magazines. He is a past president of the Press Club of Cleveland and a graduate of the University of Cincinnati and John Carroll University. He joined *Landscape Management* in 2006 as Managing Editor and was promoted to Editor-in-Chief in April 2011.



BETH GERACI
Senior Editor

Geraci has worked as a professional journalist for more than 15 years, including six years as a writer for the Chicago Tribune. A graduate of Allegheny College and Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Geraci is an award-winning reporter who has expertise in both print and online media.



MARTY WHITFORD
Editorial Director

Whitford is an award-winning journalist and editorial leader at Questex Media. He has served Questex's Green Group for four years, including two years at the helm of *LM*. He steered *LM*'s reader-driven print and website redesigns that helped the brand win a record number of awards from the Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA). Whitford brings 18 years of experience in business-to-business integrated media.

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Surviving on the M&A home front

I was 15 years old when I experienced my first merger. Three years earlier my division had been spun off from the whole company.

I was 12 when my parents divorced in 1978. Our “company CEO,” my dad, moved about an hour and a half away, so I essentially had one remote boss, while our division president, mom, ran the day-to-day operations.

Dad remarried three years later and suddenly I had a stepmom and a younger stepsister to deal with. It was a relatively easy merger, for me, though. The management team was at a remote location and pretty much left our spinoff alone. Periodic visits to the “company headquarters” were quick and generally painless.

Families are much like businesses. Divorces (divestitures) and remarriages (mergers and acquisitions) can create extraordinary synergies when the right people are brought together. But if the proper due diligence is lacking, any union suffers.

A couple years later, our smaller division merged as well. Mom remarried and I experienced a second, more-turbulent union.

My stepfather’s children were older and mostly removed from the house, though his eldest would come back for visits, and he and I were about as compatible as a Snickers Bar and a kid with a peanut allergy. Ironically, we get along pretty well now, but back then it was rather unpleasant.

There were plenty of positives to this merger.

Mom was certainly happier. But I guess by then I’d grown accustomed to the way we did things under the previous regime. Having a new manager imposing his own rules occasionally created conflict, but we generally stayed out of each other’s way, so life wasn’t too bad. Shortly after, I headed off to college where I experienced an entirely new level of boss-free responsibility (but that’s another column).

As an employee, I didn’t have much control over these mergers. I had to learn to adapt and accept. It made for some difficult times early on.

Although the economy might have dampened Green Industry merger-and-acquisition activity during the past few years, there are still quite a few companies on the hunt.

This month, our cover story (beginning on page 18) explores how the M&A market has changed, what companies are — and should be — looking for in acquisition targets and why business owners might be surprised to find out what their companies are really worth. But no matter how well the financials fit, no matter what service or market the acquired company brings, the deal is doomed to fail if the culture of the two organizations don’t mesh.

Mergers, much like marriages, go through ups and downs. You have got to know and accept a lot about your “spouse” for the union to survive and thrive. Without hard work up front, you’re likely to end up with a stereotypical Hollywood marriage — a couple of beautiful single people who come together for a brief and brilliant flash, before burning out quickly.

Mom’s merger ended when my stepfather passed away many years ago. Dad’s is still going strong after 30 years. I’ve been married to my beautiful bride for more than 20 years. It takes time, effort and persistence to make a marriage work — whether it’s wedded bliss or an acquisition.

For business owners, mergers and acquisitions are among the fastest ways for companies to extend their reach and generate additional profits.

It takes time, effort and persistence to make a marriage work — whether it’s **wedded bliss** or an **acquisition**.

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PLANET announces new partnership with NJLCA

HERNDON, VA — The Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) is pleased to announce a new partnership with the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association (NJLCA). Recognizing the importance of unifying the Green Industry at both the local and national levels, PLANET and NJLCA recently entered into this agreement that will use the strengths of both organizations to enhance the value delivered to both membership groups through education and networking, legislative advocacy, and consumer awareness programs.

“By formalizing our relationship into this agreement, we look forward to continuing to build a mutually beneficial and collaborative relationship over the coming years,” said PLANET’s Chief Executive Officer Sabeena Hickman, CAE, CMP.

This partnership will offer

PLANET members in New Jersey the opportunity to become part of a community of like-minded landscape professionals in their home state, while offering NJLCA members the chance to participate in and grow their businesses through the opportunities provided by PLANET. To promote and support the importance of membership, both organizations have agreed to extend significant discounts on membership dues to the members of the other organization.

“The New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association is very excited to be the first statewide landscape association to be partnering with PLANET in a joint venture to develop and grow both organizations,” stated NJLCA President Jody Shilan. “We are confident that this relationship will provide additional

value to the members of the NJLCA and its 45-year history, as we continuously strive to help educate our members, provide business opportunities, and help advance professionalism in the Green Industry.”

PLANET and NJLCA will officially kick off the partnership at NJLCA’s

35th annual Trade Show and Conference to be held February 29, 2012. For more information or to register, visit NJLCA.org.

For more information about this partnership, email PLANET’s Vice President of Membership and Services, Shaine Anderson, CAE, or call the PLANET office at 800/395-2522.



PLANET President
Sabeena Hickman

PLANET is the association of members who create and maintain the quality of life in communities across America. With approximately 3,800 members and affiliates, these firms and their employees represent more than 100,000 Green Industry professionals. Some of these professionals have taken the extra step of becoming certified through PLANET and bear the distinction of being known as Landscape Industry Certified.

A vote for Project EverGreen and GreenCare for Troops

In April 2011, First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden launched Joining Forces, a national initiative to support and honor America’s service members and their families. The initiative aims to educate, challenge, and spark action from all sectors of our society to ensure military families have the support they have earned.

In an effort to recognize those citizens and organizations with a demonstrated, genuine, and deep desire to be of service to military families, the First Lady and Dr. Biden established the Joining Forces Community Challenge.

Project Evergreen’s GreenCare for Troops was named a finalist last month in the Joining Forces Community Challenge and has a chance to win several national prizes that rec-

ognize citizens, communities, schools, non-profits, faith-based institutions, philanthropic organizations, and local governments for their efforts in supporting military families.

GreenCare for Troops along with other finalists are being profiled on Challenge.gov, where the public will have the opportunity to vote for their favorite — the People’s Choice winner. Vote for GreenCare for Troops here: <http://joining-forces.challenge.gov/>

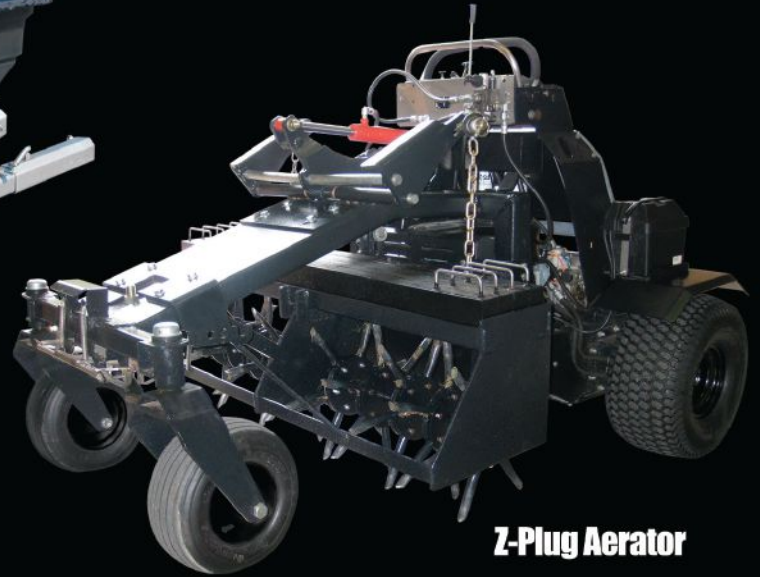
Winners will be announced at the White House on March 16, 2012, and be featured at Champions of Change, (www.whitehouse.gov/champions), the Administration’s website where community efforts in the areas of innovation and education are celebrated.

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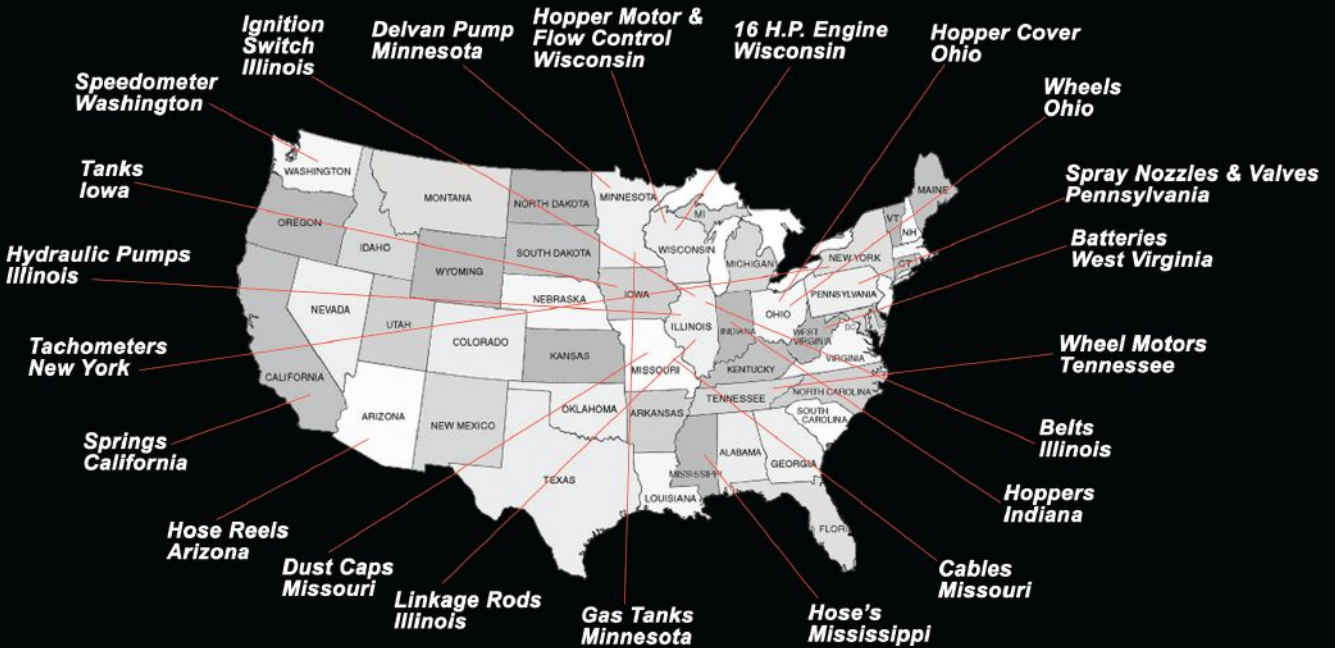
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Ewing employees compete and win in Arizona marathon

The Green Industry and marathon running have at least one thing in common — Ewing Irrigation.

Ewing employees finished the 2012 P.F. Chang's Rock 'n' Roll Arizona Marathon and Half Marathon on Jan. 15. Team Ewing had 169 participants from 17 states — earning the team first place in the GET FIT Challenge — a friendly competition that encourages companies and groups to train and run in the half or full marathon.

“The race tests our bodies, and is a testament to Ewing employees,” said Ewing President Doug York.

At Team Ewing's pre-race dinner on Jan. 14, Ewing employees shared why they participated in the 13.1- or 26.2-mile race.

Bill Snider, manager of Ewing's

Santa Barbara location, decided to run his first half marathon with the team in 2005 because he hadn't been exercising. At first he was only able to run for a few minutes, but after months of building up his endurance, he finished his first half marathon.

“It was the longest 2 hours, 21 minutes and 3 seconds of my life, but I'd done something I never thought I'd be able to do,” Snider said.

Warren Gorowitz, Ewing's vice president of sustainability and conservation, ran his first half marathon with Ewing in 2006 and discovered his love for running as well.

“It's an individual sport. You get to challenge yourself every time you're out



Team Ewing had 169 participants from 17 states compete in the Get Fit marathon.

there,” he said.

Team Ewing also reached its goal this year of raising \$25,000 for Autism Speaks. Team Ewing runners collected more than \$7,500; Phillips Hadco made a \$10,000 donation to the cause; and \$8,000 was donated by Ewing.

Team Ewing has been committed to the cause of Autism Speaks and has raised a total of \$125,000 since 2008.

In addition to participating in the marathon, Ewing's wellness programs this past year included the Just Walk 10,000 Steps-a-Day, Biggest Loser and Active for Life programs, and sponsoring employees for the Tempe International Triathlon.

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What is the future of the ANLA Clinic?

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The conclusion of ANLA's successful 2012 Clinic has been surrounded by industry buzz asking, "What's next?" Rumors ranging from a new location to the end of the Clinic's four decade-long run as the industry's premier education event have circulated at tradeshow and in the trade press. According to Skip Shorb, ANLA Treasurer, and Chairman of the Board of American Plant garden centers, "Clinic was, by most measures, a resounding success. It remains the top event where our industry's owners, top managers and future leaders gather to learn, strategize and share the ideas that make our businesses successful. Clinic remains relevant and important to the future of our company and those of my peers."

Shorb clarifies that Clinic cannot move forward exactly the way it is today. "The Clinic we know and love, at the Galt House in Kentucky, is built for 750-1100 attendees. Our industry is not supporting that right now and the meeting has to change, just as we have changed our garden center to reflect the current economy."



ANLA President, Bob Lyons, owner of Sunleaf Nursery, adds, "ANLA also has a new partner in OFA — The Association of Horticulture Professionals. Clinic 2013 needs to reflect that partnership and serve the educational needs of our joint memberships."

During Clinic's closing general session in Louisville, ANLA executive vice president Bob Dolibois stated, "Clinic today looks very different from Clinic two years ago. We have radically changed the format to meet the rapidly changing needs of our attendees. Clinic 2013 will again differ from Clinic 2012. What will not change is the creativity, innovative education and community — the strong sense of family — that makes Clinic so unique, and so special to our industry."

What is next for ANLA's Clinic? ANLA and OFA's boards of directors are meeting jointly, later this month. Their goal is to come out of that meeting with a framework for a new meeting that allows the organizations to engage their memberships in building a new event for 2013. Stay tuned.

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ValleyCrest makes changes to top executives

CALABASAS, CA — ValleyCrest Landscape Cos., the largest integrated landscape services company in the U.S., announced the promotions of two senior-level executives, and the addition of another executive to its leadership team. Effective May 1, 2012, Richard A. Sperber will be promoted to Chairman of the Board of ValleyCrest Landscape Cos. This change will allow Sperber to focus on charting the vision and direction of the family of companies, while remaining involved with client and employee growth and development strategies. As part of this transition, Roger J. Zino will be promoted to Chief Executive Officer of ValleyCrest Landscape Cos., and will remain President of ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance. Additionally, Andrew J. Brennan will re-join the company as Chief Operating Officer of ValleyCrest Landscape Cos. effective January 16, 2012, a newly created position reporting to Zino.

“The driver behind these changes is to keep ValleyCrest strong and on course for the next 62 years,” said Sperber of the family of companies



From left: Richard Sperber, Roger Zino, and Andrew Brennan.

founded by his father, Burton S. Sperber, in 1949.

“I am truly excited about what’s ahead for ValleyCrest in 2012 and beyond. These are smart changes because they put in place solid underpinnings and structure to support our long-term goals. I’m confident these changes will fuel and sustain ValleyCrest’s continued growth and position the company strongly for the future.”

In promoting Zino to CEO, ValleyCrest is drawing a strong and respected leader from within its deep management team to continue moving the company forward. Zino joined the company in 2001 and oversees more than 120 maintenance branch offices across the United States.

“I am deeply honored to lead a world-class organization whose mission today is to build on the vision established by our founder, Burt Sperber, more than 62 years ago,” said Zino. “For him, it started and ended with an intense focus on our customers and our people, and that dual focus will never change.”

Zino joined ValleyCrest following 10 years in the Los Angeles office of McKinsey & Co., where he served as a principal and one of the leaders of the firm’s Service Operations Practice.

Brennan’s focus will be to continue to improve the basics of the business by aligning corporate and divisional resources with customer and branch needs.

PHOTOS COURTESY: VALLEYCREST COS. (LEFT); YELLOWSTONE LANDSCAPE GROUP

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Austin Outdoor continues to grow

BUNNELL, FL — Austin Outdoor, a commercial landscape services firm, has acquired the landscape management division of Cornerstone Solutions Group.

The merger of Cornerstone's operations with Austin Outdoor's already substantial Florida presence has created a diverse organization capable of serving commercial clients with statewide operations. Edward Schatz, Jr., Austin's founder and current president of the Southeast region for Yellowstone Landscape Group, which acquired Austin in 2008, explains: "The merger of Cornerstone with Austin Outdoor is a natural fit. Between the values they share and reputation they both have for high quality, these two organizations complement each other perfectly. The result for our clients will be even more resources and seamless service across Florida."

Cornerstone Solutions Group steadily developed since 1984 under the value-based leadership of John Faulkner. He built a substantial landscape business in Tampa, Sarasota, Orlando and Jacksonville on a foundation of superior quality and dedicated service that mirrors Austin Outdoor's approach. About the merger, Faulkner says: "This a great move for Cornerstone because it allows us to reach our goals of building a great, nationally-recognized company founded on principals of quality, integrity and culture. For the past several years the economy has been increasingly dictating the options available to us. We feel that there are still tremendous opportunities in markets that we couldn't fill quickly enough. With this merger, we'll be poised to jump to the next level in the landscape industry."

Ed Schatz Jr., Austin Outdoor's founder and current president of the Southeast region for Yellowstone Landscape Group.



For Cornerstone, the focus has always been on building strong relationships with customers. Faulkner explained that "We have always felt that our clients are our partners. With this merger, they will instantly have access to the vast resources that a large regional company offers, bringing more value and depth to the services that we provide."

Austin Outdoor maintains many premier commercial properties in the markets it serves. William Dellecker is Austin Outdoor's president and has guided its operations since 2002.



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PROGRESS



At a fast clip

With the focus now on speed and productivity, bare-bones mowers are a thing of the past.

When it comes to advances in mower technology, “I don’t even know where to start,” says Brian Anundsen, product marketing manager for Ariens. From the first cast-iron mowers and engine-less reel mowers to the high-tech zero-turns of today, mowers have evolved dramatically, and the trend will continue.

Mowers have come a long way since their early days, but older models continue to inspire. “There were a lot of good ideas that have come and gone,” says Steve Brinkman, Husqvarna’s global director of ride R&D. “There’s a lot to be learned from looking backward. It becomes interesting, just like cross mowers of the past are back in vogue again.”

In the past, the way a deck was mounted to the machine was a relatively complex process, says Exmark Marketing Manager Daryn Walters.

“It took time, a lot of parts, and you had to make a lot of adjustments in the deck.”

Today, the focus is on combining pieces and parts and simplifying the design, he says, thereby creating easier machine maintenance.

Customers seeking speed and performance

“Most of the time you have two people working, and they don’t want to come home and sit on the tractor for three

or four hours at a time,” Anundsen says. “Now the zero-turn saves them a lot of time.”

Sean Dwyer, Husqvarna’s global product manager for zero-turn mowers, says the zero-turn “opened the door for increased productivity and it started a revolution.”

That “revolution” brought much improved maneuverability, faster speed, better performance and better durability. The combination enables contractors to finish their work in far less time than they used to, Dwyer says. And for contractors, his Husqvarna counterpart Brinkman says, “it’s all about ‘how fast can I get the job done?’”

Anundsen bought his first zero-turn in 2006. He was torn between that and a riding tractor. “I’m definitely glad I went with the zero-turn,” he says. “I cut an acre and half in an hour and 20 minutes. Prior to that it was three or four hours on a riding tractor.”

It’s true that zero-turn tractors cut faster than traditional lawn tractors, and that has changed the whole shape of the industry, Exmark’s Walters says. “But it’s not just about speed now. It’s about the quality of the cut, operator comfort, safety, discharge, all of those things are at the forefront of landscape contractors’ buying decisions.”

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Walk-behinds to stand-ons

Walk-behind mowers aren’t as popular as they once were, Walters says, but Exmark has noticed that the company’s wide-area walks, big commercial mowers, are selling well. “They can go up to deck sizes of 60 inches,” he says. “They’re big machines, but they allow contractors to cut in places that are difficult,” such as steep hills.

“Over the years the market has flattened in this category, but it’s still popular because of its safety performance and quality of cut,” he says.

Dwyer says stand-on commercial mowers are beginning to make some movement in the market.

They’re much shorter than a typical rider, so contractors can fit more in their trailers and finish jobs more quickly.

Stand-ons have many advantages, says Anundsen. “If you can stand on the mower, you can go faster than you could with the walk-behind. You can access smaller areas and wetter areas.”

What the future holds

Going forward, mower manufacturers will continue to focus on making machines even more productive, safer and more durable. “And you would not have to look very far to see that environmental manufacturing is going to be at the forefront,” Walters says.





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Who knew? Winning is fun!

It finally happened! It took two decades, but I eventually won the outlaws' (in-laws') McNamara Fantasy Football League this year! Strike that. Actually, *we* won it — “we” being our oldest son, Mickey (17), me (the clueless Old Man helping run the front office) and the talented team we drafted, refined and fielded on a weekly basis.

A perennial bench warmer for the voracious St. Mark Lions in grade school, this nerd is obsessed with fantasy football.

Admittedly, part of my love of this fantasy game stems from unfulfilled childhood dreams. But the main reason I can't wait for fantasy football to begin each summer is it enables me to hone and measure my leadership skills without having to bear the risks and sleepless nights that typically accompany such a role.

Fantasy football teaches me “The Big 5” building blocks most winning business leaders excel at:

1 Recruiting — Only the best make the cut. If you don't want to watch the competition take home the prize, then hire and develop the best and brightest.

I've been playing fantasy football for 20 years. The first year, we picked our players out of a hat because so few of us knew how to separate the wheat from the chaff. Some in our league would argue that's still the case for me.

How is your recruiting? Is it hit or miss, or are you consistently attracting today's top talent?

A few notes to keep in mind:

▶ Unlike fantasy football, in the real world rarely do we get a clean hiring slate every year.

▶ No staff is set for life. Players move from team to team, up and down depth charts and on and off the waiver wire.

▶ Attracting all stars is a great start, but it's just Step 1.

2 Uniting — If you assemble the best players available and they don't gel into a true team, it means nothing. Case in point: Last year's Miami Heat. “The Dream Team” of Dwyane Wade, LeBron James and Chris Bosh were the talk of the NBA, but when the final shot clock registered 0, the trio had earned the same number of championships together.

3 Coaching — Spin gold from straw: Develop and direct each individual within your organization in such a way that he or she consistently performs to his/her full potential. And then do the same for your team as a whole.

4 Planning — No coach was ever criticized for being too prepared. Know your team's and your competitor's strengths and weaknesses — and devise plans to capitalize on them.

5 Execution — As the first head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, John McKay suffered through a 26-game losing streak — an NFL record that still stands 35 years later! After one of those losses, when a reporter asked McKay how he felt about his team's execution, he quipped, “I'm in favor of it.”



ILLUSTRATION BY: STOCK INTERNATIONAL, INC.

Talkin'



Tech

with Jerry Corbett

Quali-Pro Technical Services Manager

Thanks to the diligent research and development efforts of the tech team, Quali-Pro has received EPA registration for T/I 2.5G herbicide — a proven combination of Isoxaben and Trifluralin.

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Comments or questions? Feel free to email JerryC@Quali-Pro.com.



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QUALI-PRO

Quality Turf & Ornamental Products

JIM CAMPANELLA HAS a simple goal. He wants to be the dominant lawn care provider in his region.

“The Northeast, that’s our footprint right now,” says Campanella, owner of Nashua, NH-based Lawn Dawg.

Lawn Dawg, which operates in four states, has made four acquisitions since 2009 — the most recent one just last month. And Campanella is certainly not alone in the merger and acquisition market.

“2011 was a pretty good year for mergers and acquisitions in the industry in a lot of ways and kind of off in other ways,” says Ron Edmonds, president of The Principium Group.

It was good because of the deal that led to the sale of TruGreen Landcare.

“That was sort of a cloud over the industry in a sense,” Edmonds says. “Nobody knew what was going to happen. Having some resolution there really helped.”

While some of the larger Green

Industry players sat on the sidelines during 2011, many deals were completed. And while there are always more buyers than sellers, the gap narrowed.

“There are a lot of contractors kicking the tires on ‘what is my business worth?’ I’ve had more contractors ask me that question in the last year or two than in the previous five years,” says Jason Cupp, a Kolbe Certified Growth Consultant, former landscape business owner and a past president of the Professional Land-care Network (PLANET).

Whether it’s the economy pushing owners toward seeking the next stage in life or simply time to retire, many contractors are looking at ways to exit their enterprises. And plenty of people are interested in what they have to offer.

“The larger independents have become more active buying,” says Jim Mello, owner of Massachusetts-based Professional Business Consultants. “One of the reasons is some of the offers from the larger companies have

been a little bit less.”

Campanella and his equity partners have been quite active on the acquisition front, but the organization has been strategic about its candidates.

Campanella could meet his goal of becoming the Northeast’s most dominant lawn care company through time and organic growth, growing the customer base, slowly expanding into new areas or opening branches in new territories. But that’s not as easy as it once was.

“With the implementation of the federal Do Not Call Registry, it really rendered telemarketing ineffective. And it makes it much more expensive to start up from scratch,” Campanella says. “If we can acquire our way into a new market area, that gets you past that initial growth curve and gets us into a market with some stability.”

Growth is one reason to acquire a company. Providing new services or entering a new market are others.

continued on page 20

TAILOR-MADE GROWTH

“Any financial benefits a company hopes to gain will be eroded if there isn’t cultural compatibility.”

— JASON CUPP

Mergers and acquisitions provide business owners a way to strengthen their operations by stitching together complementary companies. BY **DAN JACOBS** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

THE PERFECT FIT

(From left to right) Dan Cisz Jr. and Mark Kelbacher, 50/50 partners in Lush Lawn Service, sold their business to Jim Campanella earlier this year.



continued from page 18

Brickman entered the Southern California market in a big way, snapping up the Dworsky companies during the summer of 2010.

“We were in a number of different locations in California that they weren’t in yet,” says Dave Dworsky, owner of Dworsky Facilities Services. “It was an opportunity to take the company one step further in its market share. Divided we were somewhat conquerable, but together in a collected effort we were stronger.”

Financing

One of the challenges to sealing any deal is figuring out how to pay for it. A company without pristine financials is going to have a difficult time getting money from a bank.

“It’s a sign of the times. Everybody is more cautious,” says Mello. “Banks are not lending to people to buy anything. They never did much of that in this business anyway.”

But not all is doom and gloom for contractors seeking assistance. While

most small businesses aren’t singing the praises of the current administration, one thing the government did do as part of its stimulus program was to prop up Small Business Administration loans.

Campanella tapped a pair of equity partners in 2009 to help with his expansion plans.

“They’re very active in the process,” Campanella says. “It’s a team effort, and a team collaboration on making the decisions and reviewing the documents. They look at everything that I gather during the process.”

According to Mello, the buying price is pretty wide, anywhere from 50% to 110% of gross sales. Many variables go in to deciding what that purchase price will be.

“To get the high end, that would be an unbelievable company with good pricing in a prime market,” Mello says. “It also could be somebody who’s not in a particular market as opposed to a (larger company) looking to buy it as a tuck in.”

Other factors that affect the sale price include profitability, the manage-



Dave Dworsky (left) worked with Brickman’s Mike Bogan to complete the sale of Dworsky’s \$15 million-plus landscaping business, which gave Brickman entry into the Southern California marketplace.

The right time to sell

According to Ron Edmonds, president of The Principium Group, there are four factors to consider when deciding if it's the right time to sell a business:

1 You have to be mentally ready to sell your business and understand where your head is.

2 You've got to be financially ready, meaning you know what's going to happen next (if that's retirement, you have an understanding of what your requirements are moving forward).

3 Your business needs to be ready to sell (running on all cylinders). The last thing you want to do is sell a business that's on a down stroke.

4 The market has to be right.

"We encourage people to focus on the first three so that when the market is right, they can make a move," Edmonds says. "We encourage people not to think in terms of 'waiting 'til next year.' We encourage people to think in terms of getting their business in order and themselves in order, now so that when there's an opportunity to maximize that they can make a move."

— DJ

ment team, potential for upsell, services offered, taxes, liens on the business, receivables, how long they've been in business and how long their customers have been with them.

"When you're coming out of a recession you have a built-up supply of deals," Edmonds said. "There are people that really need to do deals out there. One of the things that has always surprised me was how slow people were to show their

business. A lot of people have a natural instinct to hold on until things get better."

That hesitancy, along with caution on the part of the buyer, meant fewer deals than in years past.

"What that tells me is that there was considerable concern about the economic climate during the year," Edmonds says. "People weren't convinced we were really out of the recession. At the same time, there was tremendous focus on financial discipline with buyers."

Another trend has excited many folks in the industry.

"The other positive thing coming out of 2011 is a lot of interest from the private equity community," Edmonds says. "We've talked about that for a long time, and there have been bits and pieces of it, but there was a fair amount of real evidence of it in 2011."

Culture

Financing is integral to completing the deal. Just as important is making sure the two companies will mesh.

"The biggest mistake people make is not putting enough focus on integration after the deal is done," Edmonds says. "And related to that is looking only at numbers and not understanding the culture of the companies."

The results can be catastrophic.

"The quickest way to destroy the value you're trying to create with an acquisition is to have a large defection of people from either side," Edmonds says.

To avoid that, buyers need to meet with as many people as they can from the company they hope to acquire.

"There has to be an analysis of culture and what the meshing of that culture is going to be," Cupp says. "I've made some mistakes in mergers and acquisitions in my career as a contractor where I didn't adequately analyze differences between the teams and the clientele and ended up paying for that. If the culture is a mismatch, the deal needs to be taken off the table immediately, even if the financing is in place."

Campanella says he walked away from a deal because he was concerned about how he and the acquired executive would mesh.

"When I meet the owners, I talk to them," Campanella says. "We get to know each other a little bit. It's got to be somebody I want to work with and that I think can work well within our structure. So far we've been lucky with all the deals that we've done."

Such was the case with Campanella's first acquisition, Weed and Feed Professional Services. Campanella sent an email to his friend Bob Mann, the owner.

"It didn't bother me at all," says Mann of losing his position as top executive. "I'm happier now than I was at the time I made the decision. As time has gone on, I'm more satisfied with the decision that I made. I'm not hung up on titles. For me it's never been about what's written below your name on your business card."

Mann is now director of training for Lawn Dawg and a branch manager.

Dworsky has no regrets, either. "I never had one second of seller's remorse," he says. "Nor do my partners."

Buyer

For business owners, an acquisition can be like a dog at dinnertime. It's very easy to get so excited, they don't stop to think about what they're taking in — or they're willing to overlook red flags in their haste to get the deal done.

"It's easy to become very, very focused on wanting to get a deal done as a buyer and to lose sight of the discipline you need to have," Edmonds says. "Do you have financing sources looking over your shoulder? Yes, that helps keep it all in check."

But there are factors to consider before you even get to that stage in the process.

"The first thing that I always ask is, 'why do you want to make the acquisition?' Cupp says. "Once I hear that reason, I determine whether or not the value of the acquisition is truly there.

"What are you getting for your



PHOTOS COURTESY: LAWN DAWG (TOP); THE BRICKMAN GROUP

THE PERFECT FIT

purchase price? Are you getting equipment? Are you getting culture? Are you getting some marketability... You have to understand the reason for the acquisition. It has to make great sense in a lot of different areas.”

The first step is to have a strategic vision, Edmonds says.

Doing proper due diligence is key to the success of any deal.

There are a couple of numbers that a seller has to be aware of, Cupp says. The first is obviously the selling price. But owners often forget about the second number, which is what they'll walk away from the deal with.

“We went through all the due diligence and came up with a price,” Cupp says of one deal he worked on. “(The owner) was very pleased with the price. When he took it to his accountant, he was very discouraged by the amount of taxes he was going to have to pay and what the options were to try to reduce taxes from a capital gains standpoint. He chose not to pursue selling for that reason alone. He would have to give a lot of the proceeds back to Uncle Sam.”

The process typically takes anywhere from three to six months to complete.

“The Lawn Dawg team in the course of their due diligence was very diligent, very, very diligent,” Mann says. “They were able to rummage around and take the numbers that I gave them and look under the hood of my business and see how I was doing. When every-

“The financing market is better than a lot of people think. The SBA enhancements pushed through by the administration (allowed) more loans to get made.



— RON EDMONDS



thing was all said and done, since they had done their due diligence and I had done mine, there weren't any surprises left for either one of us.”

Seller

The seller, just like the buyer, must be prepared for when the right opportunity comes along.

People ask Edmonds when the right time is to sell their businesses.

“There's not a magic answer,” Edmonds says.

Mello suggests having your business appraised at least every two years.

“Keep abreast of what's happening with the industry,” he says. “You learn something from it. Every time you go through that due diligence process, you learn something about the business.”

It's something every business owner can benefit from, even if they don't plan to sell their operations anytime soon.

“You want to figure out the value of

the business and where you can make adjustments to make your business more valuable,” Mello says. “If you get an appraisal like that and you know what your business is worth, if something ever happened to you, at least your heirs would know what the value of it was and where to go to sell it if they had to. It's good estate planning.”

It helps keep business owners from being surprised.

“Everybody thinks their company is worth more than it is,” Campanella says. “I'm guilty of that as well. I understand that because I've been on both sides of the table. You work so hard — you put your blood, sweat and tears into your company. You want to get the most for it. I show why it's worth what we're offering and why we're offering what we're offering, with good hard numbers, hard facts and what the industry average is. It's only worth what people will pay for it.”

As we slowly emerge from this recession, Edmonds expects merger and acquisition activity to pick up.

“There's probably more energy toward deals right now than I've seen in three years,” Edmonds said. “The phone's rung a lot, both from buyers and sellers. That's mostly a good thing.”

And if yours is one of the companies that creates interest in a buyer, Mann has some advice.

“If someone comes to you with an offer, it's well worth your time to listen to them and give them your ear for a little while,” Mann says. “It's worked out for me. In challenging economic times like this there is safety in numbers. It might be an excellent opportunity.” **LMM**



Bob Mann (left) joined Lawn Dawg when Jim Campanella purchased his company in 2009.

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P R O V E N S O L U T I O N S



THE BENCHMARK

JEFF HARKNESS

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 15-year industry veteran. Reach him at jharkness@questex.com.

Value...How does it all add up?

Growing a company's enterprise value requires planning, people and perseverance. Great deals don't just fall into an owner's lap. It takes planning and execution.

So where do you start?

Let's start with some basics.

Consider a checklist of value drivers and value detractors. Buyers will rate these and other factors that will impact "your multiple" on Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation and Amortization (EBITDA). While there are several ways to value a company, consider the information below as a "practical" start to evaluating your company's tangibles and intangibles.

1. Amount and stability of historical earnings over the last two fiscal years (Adjusted EBITDA)

- 12%-15%: Puts you well in the game
- 15%-20%: Separates you from the pack
- 20%-25%: Puts you at the head of the class, and there aren't many out there.

2. Revenue growth and stability in top line

- 10% or more: You are a professional sales organization.
- Single digits: Acceptable but your pipeline and sales channel velocity need improvement.
- Flat or down: This will cost you dearly over the next two years.

3. Revenue mix/business model

- Contract maintenance/turf care: Still leads the pack
- Plant healthcare/snow/residential maintenance: Getting more interesting
- Design/build or Bid build: Pass

4. Customer concentration/retention

- Diversity is key. 80/20 rule
- 85% retention is solid.
- Credit risk can't be ignored.

5. Location and market

- Appetite for new market
- Add market share.
- Seasonality could be a make or break.
- Secondary markets are gaining in popularity.

6. Stability and depth of employees/management

- Licensed and certified.
- Defined org. — sales, production, account management, administration
- Tenured, E-verify, H-2B

7. Condition of fleet and equipment

- Good working order/new/well maintained
- Large capital expenditures needs will drive down value

8. Technology and information systems

- Real time data/integrated systems equals premium
- Budget vs. actual accounting and job cost data are required.
- CRM, GPS and satellite imaging a plus

9. Strength of company's balance sheet

- Strong working capital
- Low debt load
- Retained earnings: Equity: Does it exist?

10. Current and possible future role of owner

- Does he/she drive sales: If so, how much?
- Who manages customer relationships?
- How involved are they in production?
- Management style, flow of data.
- Fire in belly: What motivating factors exist?

The key to evaluating the items above is to know the benchmarks and take action during your budget process to discuss and quantify the impact of these items. Remember, if you build it, they will come.



SOCIAL MEDIA IS ALL ABOUT TIMING . . . OR IS IT?

Dedication and focus are important, but don't forget to have some fun, too.

BY CHRIS HEILER

Provided you've been paying attention for the past couple of years, you know the marketing landscape has changed pretty drastically — and continues to change by the day. If you haven't been paying attention, prepare to have the rug pulled out from under you very, very soon.

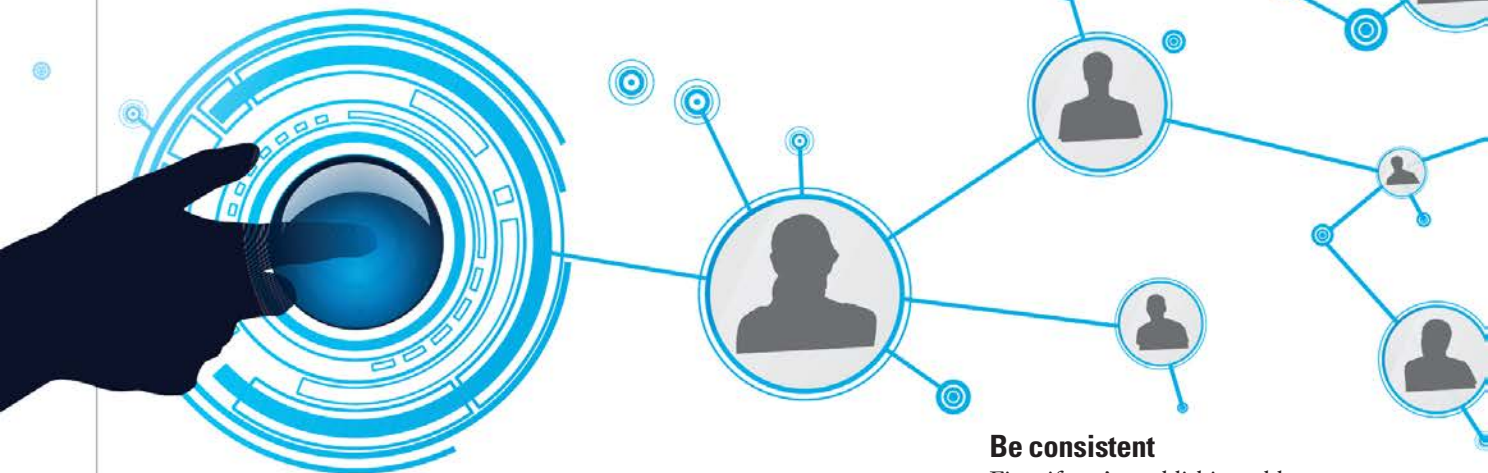
Social media has turned the focus of marketing away from the hard sell, and centers instead on building relationships

between you and your customers. So when you're planning your strategy, you should be thinking of yourself less as a business selling your service and more of an expert (or even a friend) sharing information. To be successful with social media now, people must trust you enough to invite you into their networks and their lives — and that means being a consistent, constant presence in their lives.

That presence doesn't have to be huge, and it shouldn't be disruptive. But

it should be noticeable and enriching.

Because you're not just pushing advertising and marketing copy to customers now, there's a different set of rules that apply to timing your social media, too. Before, your strategy was likely dictated by newspaper deadlines, advertising rate cards and seasonal selling. But relationships don't have a hard and fast timeline, so your strategy probably won't, either. Here are a few tips for timing your social media.

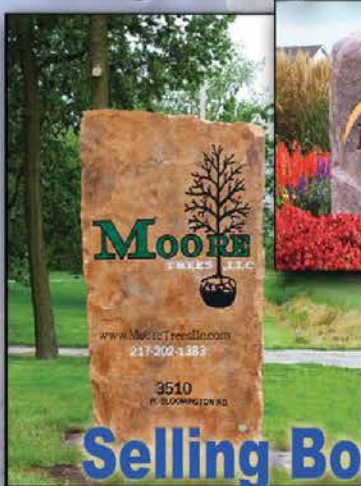


TO BE SUCCESSFUL WITH SOCIAL MEDIA NOW, PEOPLE MUST TRUST YOU ENOUGH TO INVITE YOU INTO THEIR NETWORKS AND THEIR LIVES – AND THAT MEANS BEING A CONSISTENT, CONSTANT PRESENCE IN THEIR LIVES.

Be consistent

First, if you're publishing a blog or newsletter, remember that it's not about frequency so much as it's about consistency: Clients are not going to be angry with you for not updating your blog every day ... unless they look forward and have become accustomed to reading your posts every day before breakfast and the content suddenly stops arriving. Your brand might start slipping out of people's good graces

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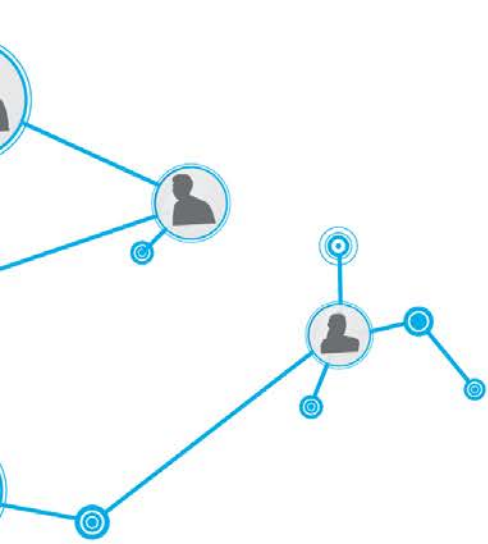
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without them even knowing it.

Set reasonable expectations for yourself, whether you've committed to writing a monthly newsletter, weekly blogs or daily tips. Then, stick to them.

Be constant

Many businesses in our industry are highly seasonal, and in the past, it was commonplace for owners to take the winter off. But in the 24/7 world of social media marketing, you'll lose momentum and credibility if you disappear for any prolonged amount of time.

There are ways to stay engaged, even if you can't be at your computer every day. Several services allow you to schedule tweets and Facebook posts, and most blogging platforms have features that publish pre-authored posts on dates you've specified. Be transparent about scheduling your posts in advance, and make sure your friends know you'll be responding personally to their messages when you return.

Be in the moment

There has been much debate over the science of timing — on how to strike at the very moment people are getting bored at their desks mid-morning, checking their e-mail before going home at the end of the day, or looking at their phones as they wait for their kids to finish at soccer practice.

But there are always people online, and if you have something to say, you should just say it. If you've got a great tip, share it. If you took a fantastic picture that could brighten someone's day, post it. Comment on your customers' Facebook pages, and encourage

them to interact with you. Retweet with abandon, as long as it has a purpose.

As long as you're consistent with your formal posting timeline and consistent in the levels at which you're engaging with people online, the rest can fall in line however you'd like.

Think about your strategy, follow through with your plans and above all,

enjoy it. If you're patient and take time to establish your network of friends and followers, you'll be rewarded with loyal customers who trust you more than ever — both online and off. **LM**

Heiler is a social media consultant for the Green Industry. Get his e-newsletter at www.LandscapeLeadership.com.



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AT A GLANCE

NAME: Robert Maffei

TITLE: President

COMPANY: Maffei Landscape Contractors

YEAR FOUNDED: 1991

STARTED IN THE INDUSTRY: 1987

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: PLANET; Cape Cod Landscape Association; Cape Cod Young Professionals

EDUCATION: Classes at Merrimack College and U. Mass.

HOBBIES: Fitness, mini-triathalons, bow hunting and fishing

FAMILY: Not married

WEBSITE: www.maffei-landscape.com

Robert Maffei, president of Maffei Landscape Contractors, remembers the day he went from a contractor running a small operation that would make him enough money to put himself through school to a full-time Green Industry business owner.

“We were working on the street corner at this nice insurance company that was having us put a new lawn in,” Maffei recalls. “We made a big deal about waving to everybody that drove down the road. And if a Willowbend (Country Club) truck drove down the road, ‘Drop your rake and wave.’ I’ve got to tell you, it was as corny as that.” Maffei was offered work at the new country club and went from about 10 employees to nearly 40 within a month. And he hasn’t looked back since.

Really? It was as simple as waving to passersby? My guys were almost to the point of making fun of me. I said, ‘We’ve got to be friendly. They’ve got to notice that we are here.’ Sure as hell, after about the fourth day of working on that property, a Willowbend pickup truck pulled over and out gets this guy who says, ‘I know who you guys are around town.’ That’s where our shot came from.

Any regrets about the decision? It became the smartest move. I knew I had this great, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I thought of it as an upside down pyramid. I had the opportunity to grab all of this revenue through these big golf course communities that were being built. I worked 100 hours a week for years. I knew if I could grab the revenue then, I had to build the infrastructure underneath

me or I’d die. Slowly but surely, the pyramid flipped the other way. It was a foundation and a base. It wasn’t just all that revenue pointed down on my shoulders.

How does your apprenticeship program help your organization? We want to bring a group of master craftsmen to the site and not jacks-of-all-trades. We absolutely explain to customers that in most landscape companies the guy cutting your lawn is the guy pulling your weeds. In my company we don’t mix it up like that. If there’s a bad job being done or a good job being done, I know exactly who did it and when. It makes my people more efficient.

If you’re more efficient, you can charge less and still

make money. If you’re more efficient at it, you’re probably better than everybody else. If that is the case you can charge more. Imagine if you can charge more and do it faster than everybody. That’s why we’re so into the philosophy of creating master craftsmen. We do it all the way through management.

How do you get employee buy-in? They all listen to the same radio station — WIFM What’s in It For Me? If you can’t bring “what’s in it for me” to them, don’t even bother wasting your breath. It’s going to be a waste of energy and time. Somebody’s going to be extremely passionate about the company, use all that passion until they’ve burned it out and

become frustrated, and you’ll have achieved nothing. You have to begin with the end in mind. And the end has to benefit each individual stakeholder.

What are you most proud of? I’m really proud of the team we’ve built and the hard work they’ve done in these tough times. A lot of people won’t be gritty in these times and they just flake out. It takes a lot to be successful in this climate.

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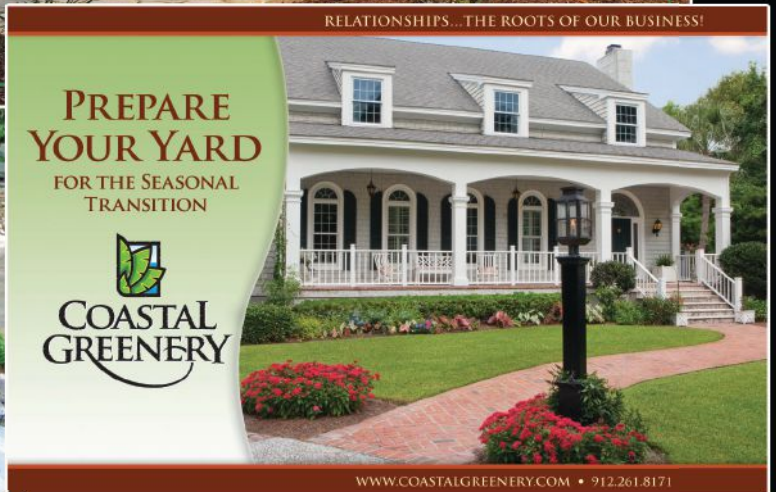
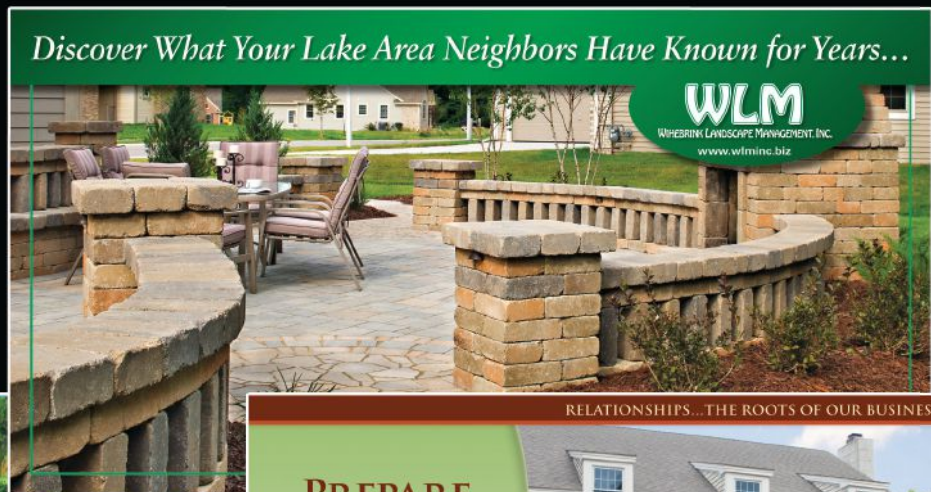
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Making the case for products liability insurance

It's not just the obvious products contractors need to worry about.

IF YOU'RE SELLING product to your landscape clients — whether it be fertilizer, mulch, or even lawn décor — and you're not protected by products liability insurance, that's a huge exposure. If any product you've sold causes physical harm or property damages, you might be faced with a lawsuit. That's why products liability coverage is critical.

Products with a danger factor, like fertilizer, pesticides, weed control and outdoor power equipment, are the obvious concerns because of their potential for causing harm or damage. But in reality, *any* products contractors sell to clients need to be considered potentially harmful. Landscape professionals might be held liable if a product they sell or use on a job harms a person or damages property.

"Say a home and garden center sells a pre-lit Christmas tree, and those lights are defective and cause a fire," John Hodapp, senior vice president, Agency Operations, Hortica Insurance, offers as an example. "If a person is injured or property is damaged, that would be covered by products liability."

While the manufacturer of the product would be responsible for a defective product claim, actually collecting from the manufacturer can be difficult.

"If the manufacturer of those defective Christmas lights is based in China, it's going to be very hard to seek recovery from them," Hodapp explains. "Therefore, the responsibility might fall on the importer, the wholesaler or the retailer — the last of which might be the landscaper who sold the product."

Landscapers should know, however, that products liability insurance does not cover

their work. If the work is faulty and must be redone, that is not covered under products liability, says Hodapp.

"But if the faulty work leads to a product causing bodily injury or property damage, then the coverage would kick in," he explains. "It wouldn't pay for the work to be redone, but it would pay for any medical bills or damage that result for your client."

Completed operations claims

Products liability coverage falls under general liability coverage, as does completed operations coverage, which is the second key piece to the puzzle. In addition to the products a landscaper has sold, potential liability exposures are also created as the result of work performed. The work might be completed and the contractor has moved on, but something about that work causes bodily injury or property damage.

"For example, say something about the landscape design is flawed and it results in mud coming through the property," Hodapp says. "If that mud damages the property or causes someone to fall and get hurt, it would be a completed operations claim."

Fortunately, these are typical facets of liability insurance for the landscape contractor. Still, it always makes sense to review your policy and ensure you're not only covered for any potential scenario, but that you have the appropriate amount of coverage.

"It's definitely an area where landscapers want to make sure they're fully covered," Hodapp concludes.

Payton is a writer with six years in the Green Industry. Contact her at info@landscapemanagement.net.

LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONALS NEED TO REALIZE THEY COULD BE HELD LIABLE IF A PRODUCT THEY SELL OR USE ON A JOB HARMS A PERSON OR DAMAGES PROPERTY.

WORK INJURY CLAIM FORM

Be sure to complete this form in its entirety may result in a delay in processing.

OR (check all that apply):

Injury With Disability

Injury With Hospitalization

Short-Term Disability

Hospital Indemnity

Hospital Intensive Care

Policy Number

Policy Number

Policy Number

Member/Patient Information

Physician's Statement. If you are filing for disability, please include and sign Section D: Employer's Statement.

Signature

Signature

SUBBED OUT

Subcontractors are often needed and frequently used in the landscape industry, but landscape business owners need to remember that they create potential liability as well. A sub could install a product that causes bodily harm or property damage, putting the company at risk. Here are a few ways to protect your business.

- Obtain a "Certificate of Insurance" from the subcontractor and make sure the subcontractor names the primary company as an "Additional Insured."
- Require subs to have Workers Compensation insurance so you are not responsible for injuries caused to the subcontractor or any of his or her employees while on the job.
- Verify Workers Compensation insurance by asking to see your subs' Certificate of Insurance. Don't make any exceptions. Liability for an injury could cost you thousands.

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LAWN BURWEED

Soliva sessilis

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This low-growing, freely branched, winter annual germinates when temperatures begin to cool.
- ▶ This weed reproduces by seed. In early spring, it begins to grow rapidly, forming spine-tipped burs in the leaf axis.
- ▶ It has opposite, sparsely hairy leaves, twice divided into narrow segments, or lobes. Small flowers bloom in the spring.
- ▶ Its burs are often hard to see, but easily felt.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Maintain a healthy lawn by fertilizing and mowing at the proper height and frequency. Healthy grass can outcompete burweed for light, water and nutrients to reduce the level of infestation.
- ▶ Once this weed develops its burs, it is difficult to control and may need multiple applications of a post-emergent herbicide.
- ▶ Apply a labeled pre-emergence herbicide in the fall, before burweed germinates. Activate with 0.5 in. of rainfall or irrigation.

Recommended
Dow AgroSciences
solution

Snapshot® specialty
herbicide*



HORSEWEED

Conyza canadensis

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ Also known as mares-tail, this winter or summer annual can reach 6 ft. tall.
- ▶ Seedlings develop a basal rosette; young leaves are egg-shaped with toothed margins.
- ▶ Mature plants' leaves are entirely without petioles. They are alternate with entirely or slightly toothed margins.
- ▶ White, pink or yellow inconspicuous flower heads occur at the top central stem of this prolific seed producer.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Glyphosate- and ALS-resistant biotypes of this species have been confirmed in the United States, and are spreading across the country.
- ▶ As an annual weed that can produce more than 200,000 seeds per plant, pre-emergence herbicides may provide the best option — and will limit the spread of the resistant biotypes.
- ▶ Make a fall and early spring application of an appropriately labeled pre-emergent herbicide.

* State restrictions on the sale and use of Snapshot apply.

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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YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH

MAINTENANCE: SPREADERS AND SPRAYERS

Grasshopper Mower

Apply pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers more effectively and efficiently with the Grasshopper Shielded Sprayer. The patented design contains the spray pattern for on-target application, even in windy conditions. The independent suspension and dolly wheels follow ground contours for precise and even spray application. Each spray chamber features four spray nozzles, which provide uniform coverage by applying finer spray droplets that coat vegetation instead of dousing it. Combined with True ZeroTurn maneuverability to avoid wasted motion, the result is up to 5.5 acres per tank — with fewer chemicals, faster application times and faster drying times. GrasshopperMower.com/sprayer



Turfco

The new T3000i series of spreader sprayers is still small enough to fit through a 36-in. gate, yet productive enough for large commercial

properties. New features include a patent-pending, hands-free speed control system, trim-speed lock and Santoprene pump. A speed-control pedal allows the operator to keep one hand free at all times to run the unit. Combined with the steering wheel, pivoting front axle and floating ride-on platform, the new feature enhances operator control and overall ease-of-use. Training time is also decreased, because the hands-free speed system is intuitive and easy to understand. Additionally, the positioning of saddle tanks, the low center of gravity and hydrostatic transaxle braking system deliver dynamic braking and easy control and stability on uneven ground and hills. TurfcoDirect.com



L.T. Rich Products

The Z-Spray line of spreader/sprayers provides a wide variety of applications. Spray capacities range from 18 to 75 gallons; fertilizer capacities are from 200 to 300 lbs. All units offer a hydraulic hopper system, varying spray and spread widths, stainless steel chassis, 50-ft. hose reel, GPS speedometer, and a 16-hp Vanguard Commercial engine. New for 2009 is a locking caster system, adding to hill capabilities. Z-Spray.com

R&K Pump & Equipment

Located in Pompano Beach, FL, since 1980, R&K is proud to be an American manufacturer. All welding, fabrication and assembly is completed in-house to ensure quality control and on-time deliveries. The company manufactures for some of the largest fleets in the Green Industry, and provides maintenance for more than 1,500 commercial spray units. RandKpump.com



Reddick Equipment

Since 1965, Reddick Equipment has been manufacturing sprayers for the lawn care, turf, deicing and agricultural industries, and provides parts for all major brands of spray equipment. Its lawn care skids are available as aluminum skid frames with poly tanks or as seamless fiberglass tanks with safety cross baffles, with capacity from 30 to 500 gal. Reddick.cc





SnowEx

The new SP-65 walk-behind broadcast spreader offers a professional option for ice management at an entry-level price. With its 100-lb. capacity, the unit is ideal for use on sidewalks, driveways and other tight applications. Capable of handling bagged rock salt and pelletized material, the spreader includes a non-corrosive polyethylene hopper with a single-slot port design and extra-wide throat opening to ensure a smooth, consistent flow of material. A handle-mounted adjustment lever allows accurate control of the feed rate. Featuring a 10-in. plastic spinner and heavy-duty Nylatron gear drive, the unit spreads up to 12 ft. wide. *TrynexFactory.com*



Hiniker Co.

Hiniker's dual-motor electric salt and sand spreaders allow users to tailor material application rates accurately and conveniently. Powered by the truck's 12-volt electrical system, these units provide individual variable speed control for both the conveyor and the spinner. The two electric motors offer quiet operation for residential and office applications. Hiniker dual-motor electric spreaders also feature blast control for quick, extra dense applications, and a reverse switch to clear jams quickly and easily. Standard hopper capacities are 1.50 cu. yd. for the 6.5-ft. model 635 and 1.80 cu. yd. for the 8-ft. model 835. *Hiniker.com*

TurfEx

The new RS7200 Spread-N-Spray is powered by a 200cc Honda GX200 engine with a 2:1 ratio gear reducer. Its heavy-duty transmission includes two forward gears, plus neutral and reverse. The unit comes with a hand-operated transmission disc brake, as well as a foot-controlled sulky band brake. The large-capacity hopper accommodates 150 lbs. of material that can be spread as wide as 11 ft. The balanced tank system holds 17 gal. of liquid and contains one fill port for quick, convenient refilling. The sprayer is powered by a 2-gpm pump, and the low-pressure nozzles offer multiple spray patterns. A spot sprayer is provided for weed-spraying applications. Designed for smooth, safe operation, the machine has a low center of gravity and easily handles rough or uneven terrain because of the sulky's sealed bearing pivot. *TrynexFactory.com*



continued on page 37



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RAIN  BIRD®

continued from page 35



Broyhill

AccuPro 210 is Broyhill's answer to your dedicated sprayer needs. The new 27-hp Kohler version provides plenty of power, with a 5-speed manual GM transmission. Loaded with options that include spray controllers, foam marker, spray gun kits, motorized ball valve kits (to control flow) and more. Fifteen- or 21-ft. booms are available. Broyhill.com



PermaGreen

The 2012 PermaGreen Triumph Spreader Sprayer features a fuel-efficient 5.5-hp Honda horizontal shaft engine and wet clutch, a 150-lb. hopper and a 12-gal. spray tank. Its laser-cut and precision-stamped 100% stainless steel frame features custom-molded protective panels for both safety and style. Other features of the 1-acre-capacity unit include a patented spray system, drop-down handlebars and a patented articulated sulky for smooth ride on rough terrain. Permagreen.com/triumph

OPERATIONS: ENGINE OPTIONS

Kohler Engines

The Command PRO EFI Propane Engine (similar to the FlexFuel E85 above), which combines closed-loop EFI (electronic fuel injection) technology with the benefits of propane, is an efficient, environmentally friendly option that provides increased productivity and a lower overall operating cost. EFI engines integrate an oxygen sensor that analyzes the air/fuel mixture in the unit's muffler. If the oxygen level strays from the ideal mixture, the sensor triggers adjustments to the amount of fuel injected into the system. EFI technology then closes the loop between the air/fuel intake and the exhaust output to provide a constant stream of critical feedback, which helps deliver optimal fuel efficiency, provides easier starting, improves power and increases life span. KohlerEngines.com



Briggs & Stratton

The Vanguard power code is a square barcode on the engine that directs the user to important information for that engine model after being scanned with a smartphone's barcode reader. The code will provide the equipment operator with troubleshooting information suited for in-field support. Other highlights are: a dealer locator via GPS or zip code search; FAQs that include answers to operation and maintenance questions; a common replacement parts list for the specific engine; recommended maintenance instructions and schedules, including oil recommendations; advanced troubleshooting information for more technical engine repairs at the shop; owner's manuals by request or PDF download to the user's phone; and language preference, English or Spanish. BriggsAndStratton.com



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RAIN BIRD

DESIGN: LIGHTING

Kichler

The Design Pro LED Hardscape, Deck, Step & Bench accent lights are available in three new finishes to complement popular stone and decking colors. Ideal for illuminating retaining walls, columns, steps and other outdoor areas, the sand,

gray and textured white options join textured architectural bronze, bronzed brass, and copper finishes. Available in three sizes (6.9, 12.9 and 18.9 in.) and with or without brackets, these energy-efficient



fixtures feature a slim, 2/3-in. profile and low heat output. Because they hard-mount with just two screws in non-hard-scape applications, they also offer easy installation and expanded versatility. With a 40,000-hour lifespan, Kichler's hardscape lights illuminate outdoor areas with a pure, warm, white light, using 75% less energy than traditional incandescent or halogen lighting. Kichler.com



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Acuity Brands

New American Electric Lighting AVPL is a LED post top lighting choice for local roads, commercial streetscapes, campuses and green spaces. The diecast aluminum unit offers the same approximate size and weight as its HID counterpart, and includes the same installation-friendly features. With its Valiant Colonial-style look, the AVPL combines traditional styling with cutting-edge technology and glare control. Acuity-Brands.com/outdoor



OPERATIONS: UTILITY VEHICLES



Kubota

The RTV900XT from Kubota is the newest version of its popular RTV900 workhorse utility vehicle model. Building on the strengths of Kubota's exclusive diesel-powered RTV900, the new model features a newly improved Kubota exclusive Variable Hydro Transmission (VHT) Plus2, which boasts substantial torque to maximize towing and hauling performance. The new transmission, coupled with smooth dynamic-braking and easier shifting, makes the Kubota RTV900XT ideal for the toughest residential and professional jobs. Kubota.com



Bobcat

Bobcat's new line of utility vehicles includes the 3200, 3400, 3400XL and 3450. Options and accessories are available to customize the vehicles to fit customers' unique needs. Improvements include performance enhancements such as more responsive acceleration, better payload capacities (up 33% from previous models), increased horsepower and top speeds, and electronic fuel-injected gas 4x4 models that start easier and run more reliably in higher altitudes. Other improvements include: high and low gears, a top speed of 30 mph, electronic fuel-injected gas 4x4 models, four-wheel independent suspension that improves agility over rough terrain, sealed CVT guard, skid plate, CV shield, radiator guard, composite cargo bed and RapidLink attachment mounting system on the 3450 model.

Bobcat.com



Deere

Gator Mid-Duty XUV 550 and 550 S4 crossover utility vehicles provide off-road performance, improved comfort, cargo versatility and the ability to transport as many as four people across all types of terrain. With independent, double-wishbone suspension, the vehicles provide 9 in. of wheel travel and as high as 10.5 in. of ground clearance to smooth out the ride. For the 550 model, users can choose from standard, high-back bucket seats or bench seats. The 550 S4 (pictured) comes standard with two rows of bench seats. Both vehicles have a top speed of 28 mph and 4-wheel drive. The 16-hp, 570 cc, air-cooled, v-twin gas engine provides greater speed and horsepower than most vehicles in its class, and the cargo box can carry as much as 400 lbs. of gear. The 550 model is small enough to fit in the bed of a standard pick-up truck. JohnDeere.com

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*If we are all running faster and faster,
just where is it we are all headed?*

It's easy to be swallowed up by the constant flow of information — the pings, clicks, beeps, alarms and various reminders from people and electronic devices that demand our attention. How many times have you heard people say they couldn't finish one thing or another because they "ran out of time?" In reality, they were seduced by the call of the urgent.

Companies with urgency-driven cultures have employees who are out of sync with the audiences they serve. They've formed a reactive culture built on service recovery, creating an anxious work environment where burnout is common. In the landscape industry in particular, customers demand proactive service and responsiveness. But when unexpected problems, emergencies and interruptions dictate your relationship with customers or employees, it is called crisis management. And it erodes profits.

Stephen Covey wrote about the "Urgency of Addiction" back in 1996 in "First Things First" — before smart phones, social media and email made time management even more challenging. Sometimes, the tone is set by a management whose members live in a zone of urgency and enjoy the whirlwind and attention that atmosphere creates. They like being hero managers, always coming to the rescue and fixing things.

Companies that fail to address the issue lose business and jeopardize profitability, thanks to service recovery spending, overtime costs, and a general lack of efficiency. Often, in diagnosing the profit shortfall, they fail to identify the true problem.

Solution strategies

Correcting the problem is not hard, but it is nearly impossible, unless, that is, the company commits to making fundamental changes.

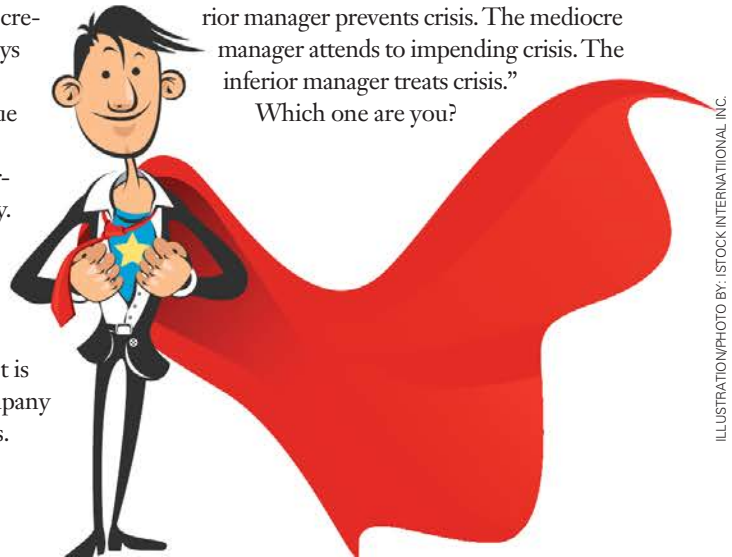
That involves several things:

- ▶ You need a plan that addresses how the company should do things in a proactive manner.
- ▶ You need to establish a culture of accountability, where people must follow the plan and work proactively.
- ▶ You must discipline people when their lack of planning, discipline and organization sets them back on the road to firefighting.
- ▶ You must be willing to invest time in fixing the causes of the problem, not just the symptoms.
- ▶ Leadership must be aligned in recognizing that a culture of constant crisis is a serious obstacle to success... and align in fixing it.
- ▶ Finally, you must not personally fall prey to the addiction.

The benefits of instilling best practices in crisis management are enormous. A proactive culture has motivated employees. They take pride in their work and serve your customers better. In fact, they are happier because they are not distracted by chaos. As a result, customers are satisfied with the service they receive and continue to invest in the relationship. It is a win-win for the customer, the company and the employee. The company grows, and profits improve. If it sounds too good to be true, try it and see.

Effective crisis management is a critical skill. My version of an old Chinese proverb says, "The superior manager prevents crisis. The mediocre manager attends to impending crisis. The inferior manager treats crisis."

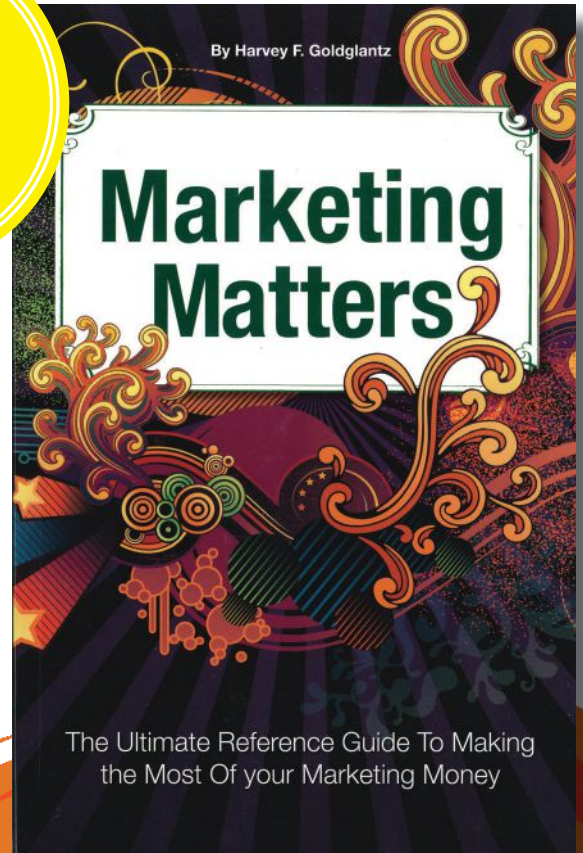
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PROJECT PORTFOLIO

A SCRAPBOOK OF DESIGN/BUILD OVERHAULS

Grounds control

THE MISSION

Update a country club's grounds to complement its refreshed facilities.

For more than a century, the Wisconsin Club has been revered as one of the finest private social and business clubs in the country. The architecture of the former Alexander Mitchell residence and its surroundings is a magnificent setting for indoor and outdoor weddings and parties, and yet it is quietly located on Wisconsin Avenue, the busiest street in downtown Milwaukee.

A 10-year project for the club was to renovate and redecorate the main building and the circa-1873 gazebo known as The Belvedere, their interiors, and then finally, the surrounding grounds to reflect the “new face” of this historical property.

Perhaps the biggest challenge that Milwaukee-based Stano Landscaping faced was time: The team had less than 120 days to complete the project — and all the while, the facility was open daily for lunch, dinner and weekend events.

“During the day, the installation of the large circular driveway had to be sequenced to allow access to the building for other trades and construction traffic,” notes Randy Hill, landscape construction project manager for Stano. “Each night, the construction site had to be cleaned and presentable for the public, with the jobsite hazards removed or minimized.”

The hardscaping used Brussels block pavers for the driveway, a new bluestone entry to the front of the clubhouse, and thermal finish patterned flagstone and paver walkways to and around the gazebo.

The landscaping, notes Hill, was continuously modified to work within existing grades, requiring the installation of small retaining walls as well as other, on-site adjustments. Special care was taken to preserve the root systems of the established trees remaining on-site.

“The effect was to keep the property feeling secluded and private,” Hill says.



1



2

THE WORK

- 1 | Curb appeal.** The view of the Wisconsin Club from the south side shows the new paver drive and natural stone entryway.
- 2 | Round of applause.** The new drive provides an elegant focal point to the club's main entrance.
- 3 | Access with style.** The finished entryway incorporates a wheelchair-accessible ramp, softened with the use of plant material on both sides.
- 4 | Color in bloom.** A bright array of plantings welcomes guests to the Wisconsin Club.
- 5 | Focal point.** The restored Belvedere gazebo, which now boasts a walkway that integrates it with the rest of the grounds, is also surrounded by garden delights.

Founded in 1963, Stano Landscaping specializes in residential and commercial landscape design, construction and management. It's also a snow and ice control contractor, servicing more than 200 commercial accounts in the greater Milwaukee area. This particular project garnered a 41st Annual Environmental Improvement Grand Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). For more information, visit StanoLandscaping.com.



PHOTOS COURTESY: STANO LANDSCAPING

Appliance repair

A company drops some services to capitalize on others.

RGS OPENED SHOP in 1983, providing services in commercial and apartment landscape maintenance, renovation and tree work in Southern California. Half of the company's revenues are derived from the apartment sector, with the remaining coming from commercial, residential, retail, homeowners association, resort and hospital work.

"When the company first started back in the 1980s, the owner's idea was initially to try to be able to create a captive client group, and recognizing in the apartment industry there is a lot of different needs apartments have," says Vice President Spencer Arnold. "If they can go to one company rather than having to go to a lot of different companies, there's an economy there for them."

While one strategy in making it through a recession is seeking revenue streams, another is to drop services no longer producing income. At one time, RGS was renting appliances to apartment dwellers.

"Because of the downturn, a lot of the apartment own-

ers started offering appliances as a perk to get people to lease apartments," says Arnold.

RGS maintains an appliance repair business, and also has a laundry facility management business in which the company takes care of the laundry equipment in their laundry rooms — including collection, processing, appliance repair and maintenance.

"Our goal is to focus on what we do best; that was largely why we got out of the rental business," Arnold says. "We decided to focus all of our attention and resources on landscape maintenance, arbor care and landscape construction."

A new revenue stream is plant health care.

"It saves money," he points out. "Apartment owners are looking for ways to reduce their liability. People defer maintenance on their tree business, and



Half of RGS's revenue stems from its apartment sector.

usually when we go out pruning, they say they have only so many dollars to spend, and do a certain amount of trees and defer maintenance.

"If they continue to defer and there's a big wind event, it generally leads to car and building damage and someone gets injured. The goal is to get people to take an approach that's proactive rather than reactive, so instead of having to go out and cut down a bunch of trees, if we can fertilize them, we can treat them — then they're not deforesting their urban forest."

Because the biggest investment in debt and capital is tied up in the company's fleet, RGS is focused on maintaining it to get the most mileage out of the vehicles.

The company also focuses on a safety program for its employee base, which averages 180.

"We've spent a lot of time reinventing our safety program," Arnold says. "We're focusing hard on trying to keep our employees safe and healthy, and focusing on the areas that can have some long-term impact on the business."

Training is another strategy RGS employs to stay successful in a competitive market. Basic training in safety practices, the company's doctrine and philosophy is followed by more specialized training in one of the service sectors of trees, appliance repair, landscape maintenance or enhancement department. Employees also are cross-trained.

"Coupling training with benefits that are slightly better than in the market is the key to reducing our turnover," says Arnold. "When the guys start to understand we're offering a career, and it's not something they move to another place for 25 cents for, then we've got a better employee for the RGS family."

The author is a freelance journalist with 20 years' experience writing for the Green Industry. Contact her at brzowski.carol@gmail.com.



» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY: RGS Services

HEADQUARTERS: Anaheim, CA

YEAR FOUNDED: 1983

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 200-plus

2010 REVENUE: \$12,500,000

CLIENTELE: 85% commercial; 10% residential; 5% government

SERVICES: Landscape maintenance, tree care, laundry, appliance/HVAC

“There is something about receiving a homemade meal that feels good,” says Native Land Design President **Stan Johnson**. “There’s a certain satisfaction gleaned from preparing and serving those you appreciate.”

The people helming Native Land Design appreciate their team members as well as their customers. After all, the company’s executive team cooks for them, serving up everything from brisket to jambalaya.

Johnson has worked in the industry for four decades. He stops to talk to *LM* about his observations of the field today.



Stan Johnson,
president, Native
Land Design

TOP TRENDS

› **Smart irrigation technology.** In Texas, water is as valuable as gold. We are seeing our large HOA/professional sites moving toward an ability to put out as much water as they can during the restrictions imposed by local municipalities.

It is imperative the systems function as perfectly as possible. The capabilities these new systems bring not only benefit the client but also the contractor. Our ability to manage the site from afar, diagnosing problems and making modifications eliminate wasted trips to the site.

› **Drought-loving landscapes.** Many clients ask us to modify landscapes that were installed when water and weather were plentiful. We have been charged with addressing the deficiencies of the plants on these sites and introducing plant material that will perform in the “new normal.” This includes native and desert plant material. It also means introducing plant material into new areas.

TOP OBSTACLES

› **Low bidders.** We are still seeing low-bidding companies coming in and promising results on a shoestring budget. While we have done a great job with our current stable of clients to produce and add value, it is difficult, especially in these tough economic times, to fault a customer for making a change and trying someone else out.

› **Water restrictions/price of water.** Through legislative and economic restrictions, municipalities and customers alike have put severe limitations on our ability to apply the proper amount of water. Our ability to apply the proper amount of water is key to providing a top-notch product for our customers. Recent weather reports are showing that Texas is staged to be in extreme drought conditions for the next eight years.

INSIDE INFO

Company: Native Land Design

Headquarters: Cedar Park, TX

Employees: 49 full-time, 165 part-time

2010 revenue: \$8.7 million

Key to being a maintenance leader: Do what you say, say what you do. Unlike a construction company, you will interact with your customers weekly for long periods of time, hopefully years. This dynamic creates a very special relationship, one that has to be built on trust. In many ways you are the key to their success and prosperity. Like any relationship you need to ensure that the lines of communication are open and flowing. Silence is never golden with a customer.

› **Price of fuel.** Our costs continue to rise with no end in sight. Unfortunately, much of our fleet is incapable of being retrofitted to take advantage of natural gas and propane advances. As we invest in new equipment and trucks, we are investigating the viability of the new platforms and how we can integrate them into our fleet.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

› **Old-fashioned customer service.** Face-to-face communication is still the preferred form of communication. Our customers are busy, but in most cases the landscape is the single most important asset in their ability to sell/rent space.

Our ability to meet with customers and address concerns in person puts us far ahead of more technologically savvy competitors. Our ability to determine whether or not we are meeting a customer’s needs can only be addressed by evaluating them in a one-on-one setting. Simply providing services equal to or even exceeding contract scope won’t keep the business.

› **Long-term thinking.** Many contractors are short-sighted. With a long-term outlook on our pricing/service model, we can gain loyal customers who will ride the good and bad times with us. Short-term profits should never be the solution. We are here to provide services for decades, not contract periods. What can we do for a particular customer today that will result in new business 3-4 years down the line? What can we do to maintain a relationship now, and build our long-term trust?

› **Water management.** Much of what landscape contractors have done traditionally is to monitor and repair systems. With new smart systems coming on line we are being forced to be educated on their complexities and how they operate. This requires a specific skill set that not all can handle. This allows for a level of professionalism to be portrayed that goes above and beyond what many think of when they think of landscapers.

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[Coming in March]

MARKETING TO THE AFFLUENT

There is one segment of the Green Industry that remains unaffected by current economic challenges. The truly affluent continue to seek the best maintenance, irrigation, design/build and chemical lawn care services. But reaching this customer takes a different set of skills. *LM's* editors, along with author and consultant Jeffrey Scott, put together a special 8-page section explaining how contractors can understand, tap into, build trust with and properly service this clientele. Also, Scott will conduct a series of webinars on reaching the affluent markets. Look for announcements on upcoming dates.

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MY BIGGEST MISTAKE

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



A business owner shares key lessons on handling collections.



Geoff Simpson says it's important to talk about money with customers upfront.

FULL COMPANY NAME:

Bucks Country Gardens Ltd

HEADQUARTERS:

Doylestown, PA

2011 REVENUE:

Landscape Design/Build: \$1.3 million; retail garden center: \$4.3 million

SERVICE BREAKDOWN:

20% maintenance; 80% design/build

CLIENTELE BREAKDOWN:

10% commercial; 90% residential

TALKING ABOUT MONEY can easily make any relationship uncomfortable.

That's why Geoff Simpson, landscape manager for Bucks Country Gardens in Doylestown, PA, has learned that it's best, whenever possible, to keep the landscaper and designer far removed from those tough conversations. He says having a separate accounts receivable (AR) department handle collections is best.

"It's easy for it to feel personal when the designer and homeowner have worked closely together," he points out, "so it's best for AR to handle collection."

The strong relationships that Simpson says his company builds with customers can also make money talk a bit awkward for the designers. It's like talking money with friends.

"We build really long-term relationships, and do have a personal connection with most of our clients — but in the end, you can't forget that it's still business," says Simpson.

Simpson has also learned that even though talking about money can be uncomfortable, it's always best to have a conversation about it at the start of the project.

"It's always tough to talk money — even in the beginning — but that's the most important time to talk about budget," he says. "If you talk money upfront,

it sets the right tone and helps ensure the client is clear on what they're expected to pay. It also ensures that money has been part of the conversation all along, and when it comes time to pay up, it's not like it's a big surprise."

Still, Simpson has found that there will always be customers who are difficult about paying. He says it's part of the industry, not just because of the economic climate — though that hasn't made things any easier.

"In this economy, you have people negotiating a lot more," Simpson says. "They'll ask for payment plans. If someone is trying to find a way to pay us, we'll work with that as long as they're showing good faith by paying each month."

In addition, the company also has contract terms that include paying a finance charge if the customer doesn't work out an arrangement or agree to pay what's owed. But Simpson says he's found customers rarely take such charges seriously.

"With a credit card, people worry about it affecting their credit score, so those finance charges and penalties are taken seriously," he says. "With us, I think people look at us like the little guy and feel no threat of that finance charge. It's very rare we actually get someone that pays it, but nine times out of 10, we're ready to waive it anyway,

as long as they're willing to pay. The whole point of it is just getting the customer to pay on time anyhow."

Future strategies

Looking ahead, Simpson says the company is considering reworking its contract terms.

"We've thought about trying to collect more money upfront and then really enforcing that we collect on the job the day it's finished," he says. "The longer time goes by, the less likely customers are to pay.... Time is really a killer. It's so important you focus on collections as soon as possible."

And the company continues to plan to let AR hold the reigns on collections. "The design and sales staff is just too connected with clients to handle collections — particularly on tough accounts," says Simpson. "They're too likely to let their emotions be attached to it. But we live up to our end of the deal, and we need our customers to live up to theirs. With the economy, some of today's customers are just waiting for you to bat an eyelash and are ready to jump at the opportunity to ask you to knock some money off. But when you have a separate department handling collection, the customer isn't going to try to get away with that."

"In the end," he concludes, "it's not personal, it's business. And that's how it should be handled."

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

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