



## BEST PRACTICES

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# It's good if your head's in the clouds

**Y**ou cannot do today's business with yesterday's tools or yesterday's thinking.

If the last few years have not convinced you that landscape maintenance services are a commodity and differentiated primarily by price, you are in the minority. If, in that same period of time, you have not reconsidered the tools you use to do business, you also are in the minority and it's time to catch up.

One way the business of our industry can reinvent itself is to embrace new technologies that are changing the way we work.

As mobile computing and Internet-based technology knock down walls, the cloud has replaced the cubicle. The dynamics of working, meeting, selling and interacting online have created new behaviors and job descriptions as well as new business models and expectations for performance and success.

The problem is there is a staggering amount of new tools, gadgets, applications, programs and downloadable must-haves available every day; trying to figure out which ones are best and how they work in unison can be overwhelming.

Do not do it yourself. Bring in the skill to make it happen. Even if you are cutting overhead, hire a professional who can tie it together and assist you and your team with identifying and integrating the right technologies to run your business and ensure they work together seamlessly.

In my consulting practice, I see some companies making up rules as they go along. They are experimenting with various applications for paperless time entry, property measurement, real-time proposals, plant ID, remote-controlled irrigation, vehicle tracking, and, in general, adopting and testing different solutions to see which ones fit.

This ad hoc effort — combined with strategies for interactive marketing and communication platforms, virtual meeting and conferencing programs, and asset management solutions — sets in motion a frustrating end-user dynamic where it often seems

as if nothing is working the way it should.

A recent study by IBM reported that over the next three years, the number of businesses that will adopt cloud technologies is expected to more than double as business leaders look to capitalize on the rapid availability of data and the growing popularity of social media. The study's co-author said the cloud "isn't just about gaining efficiencies and cost savings; it's about driving and providing lasting market advantage."

I agree. The ability to identify and leverage technology resources is becoming critical to running a business. Here are five best practices to leverage technology to drive your business value:

**1. Invest:** Make technology management a critical component of your operational infrastructure and planning process. Consider hiring an on-site/in-house integration specialist or other tech specialist(s) who can provide expertise, security and troubleshooting and collaborate with staff to ensure best practices are applied.

**2. Learn:** Become informed. What are your competitors, customers and vendors doing today to improve their operational efficiency and services? Get insight from peer groups and growth-minded organizations.

**3. Train:** Increase the challenge level and get employees involved in learning. Offer regular technology training as part of your commitment to professional development. Require skill in using specific technologies as a measurable performance review metric.

**4. Budget:** Fund technology training, upgrades and relevant support every year. The more adept your team is at understanding and adopting new technologies, and the more nimble your systems, the faster you will increase the speed and agility of doing business.

**5. Integrate:** Have the right technology for the right task and ensure they work together. Introduce technology into all of your business operations to gain productivity and make doing business easier.