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# Landscape Management

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Jeffrey Scott's five steps for successful strategic planning in 2013:

1. Assess your financials.
2. Set goals that motivate.
3. Create a budget.
4. Make roles clear.
5. Refine incentives.



## WEB EXTRAS

» Don't miss NastyClient.com's free, one-year membership offer for LM readers (see page 6 for more details about the customer review site for businesses).

» Get an in-depth background about the tree-damaging Asian longhorned beetle and its introduction to North America (see story on page 23).



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@LandscapeMgmt AEF president Jim McCutcheon: declining enrollment in horticulture programs a chronic problem. 181 lost since 1997, a 41 percent decline.

@Inbound\_Agency Study: Green roofs, walls will soon be a \$7.7 billion market - buff.ly/SsUkth via @LandscapeMgmt

@PLANET2005 RT @LandscapeMgmt: PLANET launches peer groups with Wilson-Oyler and establishes an outdoor initiative with JP Horizons. #GIC2012

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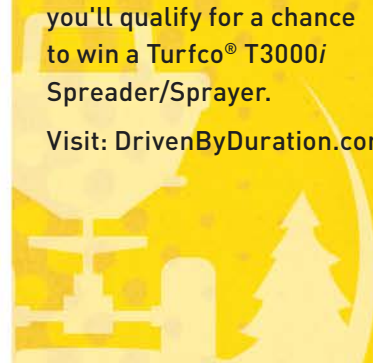
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## EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

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# On first impressions

**K**nowing full well that you get what you pay for, I occasionally dabble in Groupon-purchasing. Who doesn't like a good deal? Plus, as someone who writes about small businesses, I'm intrigued with the process.

The draw for most daily deal merchants is less about making money from the deal itself and more about exposure to new customers. After all, Groupon requires offers to be at least 50 percent off the sticker price and it keeps half of the sales, so you can assume the most sellers earn from their deals is a quarter of their product's or service's original price.

When I buy a daily deal I recognize I'm likely buying the merchant's "loss leader," so I maintain relatively low expectations and I expect a hard up-sell.

Recently I bought an offer from a heating, ventilation and air conditioning contractor for an air conditioner/furnace tune-up. I decided to take a chance on a deal of this nature, figuring the cheap tune-up was the contractor's strategy to gain access to many new customers, who he could sign on to his recurring maintenance plan or target in the future for new unit sales.

I was pleasantly surprised when I called the company, a person answered the phone and I had an appointment scheduled within a week. Next, I was happy when the technician arrived for the appointment promptly. He was friendly, did his work efficiently inside and out and was on his way.

---

When I buy a daily deal I recognize I'm likely buying the merchant's "loss leader," so I expect a hard up-sell.

Check marks all around.

I thought it was odd he didn't try to sell me anything else. That's when I went downstairs to inspect the furnace and uncovered the crux of the company's strategy. Slapped to the side of the unit was a sticker with its logo, phone number and website. The contractor's concept was to take a hit on the tune-up to plaster contact information to the place homeowners will look when something goes wrong: the furnace itself.

Although I would have preferred a magnet to a sticker, I was OK with the tactic. In fact, I thought it was clever. Then I went outside to see if the same sticker appeared on my air conditioning unit, but before I could get there I was stopped in my tracks. Stretching down the driveway, across the deck and half of the yard was my garden hose, which the technician used to spray down the unit's exterior. "C'mon!" I thought. I have no problem with him using the hose, but everyone knows rolling up a hose is one of life's least desirable tasks. Why would you leave that for your customer to deal with?

With that, the contractor confirmed my suspicions about the quality of service you get when you buy a daily deal. I know it sounds like a minor misstep, but the company had an opportunity to blow me away with great service. Instead, it blew its chance to earn a repeat customer. (By the way, I'd hope merchants know that only 22 percent of Groupon buyers turn into repeat customers, by the site's own estimates.)

But this column really isn't about my experience with the HVAC company. It's about you—all Green Industry professionals—and the opportunities you may be blowing with customers due to "little things," whether it's lack of training, a rude receptionist, shoddy-looking equipment or the like.

It's expensive to acquire customers, no matter how you do it. Don't blow your opportunity to make a good first impression on a client you invested to get in front of. You only get one chance.

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## GIE+Expo buzzes about E15

BY MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

**T**hough the official show attendance figures have yet to be released, exhibitors at the GIE+Expo, held in Louisville, Ky., Oct. 24-26, reported a busier event than in the past few years. Organizers and observers attribute the traffic to a few factors, including a new “dealer day” format on the show’s opening day, 80-degree temperatures on day two and cold, rainy weather on the last day, which drove everyone inside, making the aisles feel crowded. Plus, show partner the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) reported registration for its Green Industry Conference was up 20 percent over last year.

What was the buzz around the conference and show? You couldn’t avoid

talk of E15 fuel and the effects it will have on outdoor power equipment. E15 is fuel that’s 85 percent gasoline and 15 percent ethanol.

With the advent of E15, landscape companies fear their workers will inadvertently fuel their gas-powered equipment with fuel their engines aren’t designed to withstand, potentially causing damage and voiding their warranties.

“Until recently, E15 was a “hypothetical problem,” Kris Kiser, president and CEO of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI), told *Landscape Management*. Now, it’s a reality. E15 debuted in Kansas this summer and is expected to be offered in gas stations in other Midwest states this fall and winter.

One of the main problems, Kiser said, is the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency isn’t effectively communicating what he calls a “paradigm shift” in what Americans can put in the tank.

“It’s always been, whatever I put in my car, I can put in the can,” he said. “That’s no longer the case, and the warning label is a 3-in. by 3-in. square,

With E15 now on the market in some states, it’s no longer just a hypothetical problem, said OPEI CEO Kris Kiser.



only printed in English.”

Kiser said the agency isn’t doing a good job telling consumers what E15 can and can’t be used for—and that it cannot go in the gas can.

“A lot depends on how E15’s retailed, and it’s not consistent,” Kiser said.

While OPEI and several other groups appeal their rejected lawsuit against EPA, OPEI plans to ramp up industry education efforts.

Meanwhile, several GIE+Expo suppliers exhibited premixed fuel options in a variety of sizes to make it easy for contractors to know they’re getting the right fuel into their machines without having to rely on their operators to pay attention at the pump.

Another possibility is that E15 uncertainty will drive some companies to try equipment powered by alternative fuels.

“We see an expansion in the market for propane and natural gas products, where there is some certainty,” Kiser said.

## Site lets contractors review customers

A former contractor created NastyClient.com to give companies the same voice customers have with review sites. BY CASEY PAYTON

**T**he customer is always right—*right*? Well, yes, if you don’t want to risk bad press by not complying with what your client has asked. Today’s customers have a lot of leverage with business review sites like Angie’s List or Yelp, and most landscape

companies would rather keep their customers happy—even at a cost—than wind up with a negative review that could hurt future business. But what if the clients’ demands are outrageous? After a difficult experience with a customer, Matt Stachel, a former Philadelphia-based landscape contractor, decided to turn the tables and give businesses the voice that customers have long leveraged.

After completing a privacy line of trees for his customer, Stachel felt trapped when the homeowner insisted a tree needed to be moved and it ultimately died. The client had signed a contract



**» WEB EXTRA**

Visit the Web Extra section of [LandscapeManagement.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net) for a link to a free one-year membership to [NastyClient.com](http://NastyClient.com), a \$15.99 value.

that stated the health of a tree could no longer be guaranteed once it was moved, and Stachel had advised against the move. Still, the client insisted and he did the work. When the tree died, he wanted it replaced for free.

“He threatened me with bad reviews on three different sites and to go to court over the matter,” Stachel said. “So I replaced it and probably lost about \$500 in time and expenses. It made me realize that businesses don’t have a lot of power, even when they’re right. Going to court is expensive—even if you win—and most people would rather just fix the problem than have to go through all that. But it’s not fair for honest businesses out there.”

So Stachel decided to level the playing field a bit. In March 2010 he started working on a website where businesses could review clients. By October of that year, [NastyClient.com](http://NastyClient.com) was launched. It’s now his full-time venture. “No longer do you have to say, ‘They owe me \$400, but if I sue them I’ll be out \$800 in legal fees so I’ll just let it go.’ Now you can file a report through a website that other businesses use to review customers,” Stachel said. “The clients will realize that not only can they not get your service, but they can’t get the service of other businesses in your area, as well. Until now there were no repercussions for a bad customer—but that’s changing.”

Once users are registered, they can anonymously submit



A bad client experience led Matt Stachel to launch NastyClient.com.

reports documenting problems with their customers. “We do keep your business name in our own database so that if your customer contacts us and said they want to pay you, we can then reach out to you and let you know.

If a customer sees the review and wants it down all they have to do is follow through with paying you and the account gets marked ‘Paid.’ Our goal is to help protect businesses and resolve some of these problems that used to seem impossible.”

While the site is an opportunity to report difficult customers, it’s not an outlet for bad-mouthing and slander. “The simplest way to avoid committing slander is to just state the facts, plain and simple,” he said. “Our site is the same as any other business review site out there. If a customer did not pay you, you simply state that you completed the job and were not paid for your work. If you said the customer was ‘sneaky,’ that would be slanderous. Just stick to stating the facts and not your opinion.”

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# A tour to remember

Mariani Landscape gives its peer group a peek at two of its most special projects.

BY BETH GERACI SENIOR EDITOR

**W**e drove down scenic Green Bay Road in north suburban Chicago, passing one gated mansion after another.

Mariani Landscape was leading executives from five other landscaping companies on a tour of two exclusive residential properties it designed and maintains. On the bus were owners from Heads Up, Pacific Landscape Management, HighGrove Partners, Lambert's and Stay Green, all of whom were in town for the next day's Next Level University peer group meeting, facilitated by *LM* columnist Bruce Wilson.

After a short drive, we pulled alongside an estate Mariani had restored in Lake Forest, north of Chicago. In addition to restoring the mansion, the company designed the driveway, the patio, gate entrances, fencing, terraces, gardens—everything on the site.

The property was as functional as it was beautiful.

"We left a dump area for snow, because you have to think about that in this area," explained Mariani Design

Director John Mariani as the group came up the driveway. "We tried to use unusual materials here."

The bluestone in the home's walkway is chiseled to give it an antique feel, yet it's smooth enough to shovel on. Trees were strategically planted to provide shade on the patio. And the property has about 30 or 40 native plant species to foster indigenous wildlife.

Soon, it was time to head out to the second property, a home on a prairie in Lake Bluff, Ill., that once was part of a 200-acre farm. Mariani designed the 14-acre parcel in 1985. "A 14-acre prairie back in those days was a big deal," he said.

And it's still a big deal today. "Always having been somebody who loves nature, we saw this huge savannah that was being grazed by cattle and I thought, 'Let's restore this to a natural landscape to attract butterflies and birds, etc.,'" Mariani said.

So he designed the home in a way that would showcase the property surrounding it and make wandering the property an adventure. "The driveway was a big focal point," he said. "A good landscape architect is always going to take into consideration how to make the drive an experience in itself."

Larry Weil, who showed the group around the property, has overseen its care



(Clockwise from top left): A table and chairs a worker carved from fallen trees; Peer group event organizer Cheryl Nadelhoffer with John Mariani; the prairie in spring; and Mariani's Larry Weil discussing the prairie in November.

for more than 30 years. "When we first came on board, it was a grassy, wooded grazing field for the cows," he said.

Now, Weil said, the land features countless native plant species, three-fourths of a mile of paths, many 150-year-old oak trees, a maze, a rose garden and a 12,000-square-foot house and guest house.

As they explored, the group was met by surprising artistic elements around every corner, including a gorilla peeking from behind a tree, a huge decorative frog on a high branch and a table and chairs one Mariani worker carved after trees toppled in a storm.

Such elements add to the sense of adventure Mariani strove to create at the outset. The house itself is far more formal than the prairie surrounding it, Mariani said, and that's part of the fun.

"When you are in the interior and you're looking out, the contrast of the formal and the informal is almost shocking," he said. "But that creates excitement."

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## BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

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# Understanding social media

**C**ompanies are stretched thin, and everyone is looking for the one new tool that will bring them the greatest value. Unfortunately, there isn't only one. But if there were, it would be a commitment to shift your business communications strategy to social sites.

In 2011, when I decided to pursue a social media strategy, many people said, "Ask Scott." Scott Harris runs Mustang Marketing and is a go-to expert for social media and branding strategies.

Scott not only told me what to do, he also helped me understand why it would work. In six months, my social media initiative was up and running. Within a year, taking the online leap delivered on its promise: My business has grown faster than ever and many new clients said they found me through LinkedIn or Facebook. Others said they knew of me but social media reminded them to connect with me. Think about what it could do for your landscape business.

Looking to get started? Here are some basics, courtesy of Scott, guaranteed to give you a much better understanding of the three biggest sites for the landscape industry:

**FACEBOOK** — This social media giant gives you direct access to your audience—and gives your audience direct access to you.

**Quick steps to success:**

- › Set up a business page (Don't just put up your company name—flesh out the page with company history, details and pictures).
- › Post two to four updates per week.
- › Monitor all comments, likes and posts and respond as necessary (particularly to critical or negative posts).
- › Review weekly Facebook analytics (sent to you via email with statistics, such as the number of new fans and page visits versus the previous week).

**LINKEDIN** — It's the world's largest professional network and a potential lead generator.

**Quick steps to success:**

- › Set up a company page (Again, take the time to fully develop your company's profile and state its accomplishments.).
- › Reach out and invite connections into your network (people who will see your company page and can offer recommendations).
- › Ask your employees to follow your page and place a Follow button on your website or blog.
- › Make recommendations (the easiest way to get recommendations is to give them—these work as testimonials, offering positive reviews for both the company and its professionals).
- › Join and participate in relevant industry groups. There are hundreds of them.
- › Review profile metrics (how many have viewed your profile in the last 90 days, etc.—and make sure these numbers are going up).

**BLOG** — The best medium to demonstrate your leadership, subject matter expertise, experience and connection to your field.

**Quick steps to success:**

- › Establish a blog (make sure it's linked to your website and social media pages).
- › Have a strategy and editorial plan for high-value content. Balance original content with material from other sources. Search for relevant blogs to read, post, share, comment on, etc., to help build connections back to your own blog. Cross-promote on other social channels.
- › Review all comments and shares to your blog posts.

These social media avenues reach your audience where they live, work and play, allowing you to create and maintain unprecedented authenticity, immediacy, participation, connectedness and accountability with your audience. But it's not enough to just set up a page and wait for your audience to do the rest. Engage them, reply to their comments, keep them interested—and be sure to do so in a way that's relevant.

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## THE BENCHMARK

JEFF HARKNESS

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# Crossroads of a partnership

**E**very once in a while you need to take a step back and look at how far you've come in business. Smell the roses, as they say. Things have not been easy, but hopefully there has been some growth and success up to this point. The question is, where do you go next? What's the plan and which road map are you going to work for the next three years? Who's on the bus?

As you begin to reflect on your 2012 season, you might realize the same team and business model that got you this far can't or won't get you to the next level. Have you had any sleepless nights? The cause might be pending contracts, approaching payroll or operations issues, but what if it's simply you don't see eye to eye with your business partner? These symptoms are not those of a growing landscape contractor, but rather emotions felt by a business owner who realizes he or she must end the relationship with his or her partner.

I know the thought puts a sick feeling in your stomach, but a closer look will reveal you really are frustrated, a little angry and certainly not focused. Let's be clear. You can't and won't grow in that mindset. Here are some tips to help guide you.

**1 Seek council from an adviser.** The fact is most business partners are parents, siblings, in-laws or best friends. This means the process is an emotional ride and you need someone in your corner who's

not emotionally vested. Confide in an adviser, and let that adviser help you list what specific challenges you're facing in the business. Common challenges include differences in the business model, work habits, time contributions, compensation, personal issues, retirement or differing management styles.

**2 Review your corporate documents.** Take inventory of the specific language in any buy-sell agreements, employment contracts, operating agreements or articles of incorporation. There's often language in these documents that govern or outline a process or methodology. Disagreements, retirement and death are typically addressed.

**3 Value the company.** You don't need a full-blown appraisal, but get a qualified adviser to walk you through the mechanics and methodology of putting a number on the business. Be sure to include the impact of balance sheet items such as working capital and debt. Focus on the last 12 months of performance and include the two most recent fiscal periods. Take a defensible position.

**4 Create a cash-flow projection.** Create a five-year cash-flow projection, which includes the new debt associated with a buyout or separation. Operating profit should be one-and-a-half times the debt service requirements of the business at a minimum. Two times is more optimal. Include capital expenditure requirements and existing debt in the projection. Qualify and quantify the three "big Cs" prior to getting your banker involved: Cash flow, credit and collateral will determine whether the deal can get done.

**5 Take action.** Yes, this means confronting the issues head on with several meetings or interventions. Have your adviser help mediate the process. Expect your partner to be initially defensive, or maybe even angry. This situation will take time to navigate, but it will be worth it in the long run.

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As you begin to reflect on your 2012 season, you might realize **the same team and business model that got you this far** can't or won't get you to the next level.



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## ORCHARDGRASS

*Dactylis glomerata*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This grassy perennial weed grows in bunches. It develops early and grows quickly, reaching 10 in. in height.
- ▶ In its younger stages, there is a papery membrane where the leaf attaches to the main stem.
- ▶ Mature grass consists of a dense tuft of basal leaves that grows from low vegetative shoots, and slender culms with a few alternate leaves.
- ▶ Culms are light green and hairless; they later become straw colored.

### CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Orchardgrass grows best in the cool weather of spring and fall and can adapt to shady areas, as well as frequent mowing.
- ▶ For areas with extensive growth, apply an herbicide containing pronamide as a preemergent or early postemergent, depending on the time of year.
- ▶ When there are a few weedy patches, orchardgrass can be removed with a shovel. Be sure to cut down 3 in. to 4 in. into the soil to remove the stems.

\* Kerb is a federally restricted-use pesticide.



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## YELLOW FOXTAIL

*Setaria glauca*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This clump-forming summer annual has a seedhead resembling a fox's tail.
- ▶ Its leaves are rolled in the bud. Leaf sheaths are hairless, but the leaf blades have long silky hairs on the upper surface near the leaf base.
- ▶ Stems are erect, often flattened and without hairs, with a reddish tint at the base.
- ▶ Its seedhead is a cylindrical bristly panicle, which turns yellow at maturity.

- ▶ Yellow foxtail grows in moist, fertile soil during the mid- to late growing season.

### CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Maintain turf density and health through proper cultural control. Avoid close mowing and summer fertilization.
- ▶ Apply a preemergent herbicide containing di-thiopyr one to two weeks prior to germination in the late spring or summer. Consider a postemergent herbicide if the weeds are small and actively growing.

\*\* State restrictions on the sale and use of Dimension specialty herbicide products apply.

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ORNAMENTAL



BY **BETH GERACI**  
SENIOR EDITOR

# FIRED UP

It's been said time and again that there's more joy to be had in life's simple things than its big things. A mere smile, thank you or compliment can go a long way in making people feel valued and in generating positive results.

And if that's true in life, the same can be said for life on the job.

Through creative incentives that motivate employees, contractors are giving their businesses an added spark.

## FIRED UP ABOUT TEAMWORK



**Company:** *NaturaLawn of America*

**Headquarters:** Frederick, Md.

**2011 revenue:** \$38 million

Whether it's through targeted incentives or by creating fun work environments, some companies are finding that there are many ways to motivate employees—ways far more meaningful, creative and effective than the traditional Christmas bonus.

“Some of the more powerful rewards are not financial,” says Phil Harwood of Pro-Motion Consulting. “They affect your morale. People want to grow and have an opportunity, so you have to create an environment where people feel valued for what they're doing.”

Here's a look at four Green Industry employers who have taken creative measures to show their workers they're valued. And they're seeing results. ▶▶

“The whole staff dresses up as elves. It's goofy. It's funny as hell. We got on the front page of the newspaper last year.”

Such is life at NaturaLawn of America headquarters, where the focus is on teamwork and creating a positive work environment every day at the office.

Above, NaturaLawn founder, president and CEO Phil Catron was describing the company's annual holiday ice melt giveaway, when its staffers dole out free ice melt to local businesses downtown.

It's just one example of the efforts NaturaLawn



NaturaLawn of America hosts an annual pumpkin carving contest for its employees. Founder Phil Catron is below, right.



takes to make work fun and its employees feel like family. The activities and perks hardly stop there. The company gives its corporate staff an annual \$5,000 ownership credit toward the purchase of a NaturaLawn of America franchise and gives out turkeys at the holidays.

It closes the office early for pizza and movie parties, ponies up for soup on drab, dreary days and hosts monthly birthday parties. It takes trips to the theater, holds an annual pumpkin-carving contest and goes for carriage rides downtown.

The long-term impact of its incentives is hard

## COVER STORY

to estimate, Catron says, but the immediate impact is clear. “They motivate employees and keep them looking forward to the next time,” he says.

In offering its perks and activities, NaturaLawn has no goal other than to create a memorable work experience. But if generating profits isn’t the aim, that doesn’t mean the company doesn’t benefit.

“I suppose you could track the benefits somewhat by looking at the average length of employment here—eight to 10 years,” Catron says. “You could track it by looking at the number of people who come in even though they may not be feeling well. The way people come in early or stay late, even knowing they don’t have to.

“You could track it by the numerous comments we receive from vendors indicating that they are impressed by the way we all seem to actually enjoy working together,” he continues. “That’s what is important and meaningful.”

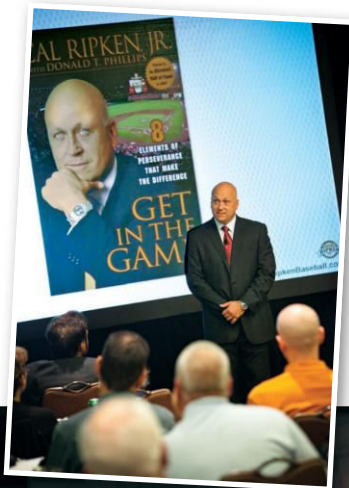
The pinnacle of NaturaLawn’s events is the company’s annual two-day awards banquet and conference. It takes place in downtown Frederick, and NaturaLawn puts both its local staff and employees from its three corporate-owned franchises up at a local hotel for the event.

Catron says he’s not sure which of its incentives generates the most positive results from a business standpoint, “but from a personal growth perspective, the motivational speakers at our conferences have the largest impact, especially the ones who can deliver a secular message with spiritual overtones,” Catron says. “These types of presentations speak to the heart and that is where life changes are made.”

The enthusiasm that results from treating its employees well trickles down to customers. “When you treat your staff like they’re No. 1, they’ll treat the customer that way, and the customer will reward you by giving you repeated business,” says Catron. “A lot of people don’t think of that as being part of your brand, but it’s a big part of it.”

NaturaLawn’s perks don’t come cheap. It spends about \$50,000 year on extracurriculars, including its annual meeting. Nevertheless, “it’s money well spent,” Catron says. “The staff works very, very hard, and they work together. Everybody here takes the mental tenant of ‘let’s solve the problem and get the job done.’”

NaturaLawn spouse Dave McFalls, left, performs at Howl at the Moon; Cal Ripken Jr. speaks at NaturaLawn’s annual conference.



## FIRED UP ABOUT PROFITABILITY

**Company:** Lakewood Landscape Group

**Headquarters:** Dothan, Ala.

**2011 revenue:** \$900,000

The guys behind Lakewood Landscape Group wanted to motivate their workers but weren’t sure how. So they turned to consultant Jason Cupp for help.

Cupp devised a plan that Lakewood implemented in April—a bonus incentive program based on gross margin. Every month 2012 shows a year-over-year increase in gross margin over 2011, Lakewood workers get a bonus check.

“Every employee plays a role in the accountability of gross margin, and we wanted to make sure everybody participated in the benefits of that,” says Grant Faulk, who owns the company with his twin brother, Kyle.

The Faulks distribute the incentive checks monthly “so they can feel it and taste it every month,” Faulk says.

The program has revitalized and invigorated Lakewood’s workers. “Our employees have more of a self evaluation of themselves and their own efficiency than they had in the past,” Faulk observes. “They’re seeing how they can really play a role in getting the work done for less.”

The company is showing results in virtually every aspect of the business. Workers are reducing the time they spend filling up at the gas station, they’re taking shorter routes to jobs to conserve time and fuel, and they’re not forgetting anything back at the office anymore.

Although Faulk can’t estimate dollar amounts just yet, he anticipates the end



Kyle Faulk, left, and his brother, Grant, say their new bonus program has motivated their workers.

of the year will show significant savings in fuel and labor costs. "If you can save one crew from having to drive over to this customer's yard 20 minutes away because you're right there, that saves money immediately," he says.

The monthly bonus checks average \$135 per worker, and Faulk estimates his workers have pocketed a total of \$10,000 in gross margin bonus checks since the program launched. It's indicative of the positive change in gross margin Lakewood has seen so far this year.

"We tell them upfront it's not guaranteed," Faulk says. "It all depends on the year-over-year comparison." That said, there's been only one month since April workers didn't get a bonus check.

That the bonus program's producing positive results is undeniable. Most notably, Lakewood's crews are thinking globally now, promoting the company's services across the board instead of focusing strictly on their own responsibilities.

"We've seen communication among different crew leaders, and the customer service is getting better. As a result, our customer retention is going to be higher," Faulk says. "I also feel like everybody has taken a little bit more ownership, a 'This is our company' mentality. They're thinking more about what everybody else is doing in relation to each other."

Another twist to the gross margin bonus program: Workers who are late more than three times in a month aren't eligible for that month's bonus. Since the program started, Lakewood's seen a 66 percent jump in on-time arrivals.

Not only are workers showing up on time, working more efficiently and problem solving on the job, they also feel valued.

Consequently, "I think we'll see when the whole season's behind us that customers' needs will be met more thoroughly," Faulk says. "We're starting to see a bump in customers, and

that's what it's all about. If we provide better customer service, that's the end goal, and to make our employees feel part of a team.

"No matter what," Faulk continues, "we'll always have something to incentivize them. Whether it's this way or another way, we won't go back, that's for sure."

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## COVER STORY

### FIRED UP ABOUT SAFETY



**Company:** ValleyCrest Cos.

**Headquarters:** Calabasas, Calif.

**2011 revenue:** \$850 million

Ten years ago, ValleyCrest Cos.' insurance and workers' comp claims rose to an uncomfortable level. Its annual insurance costs were approaching tens of millions of dollars. To stop the bleeding, ValleyCrest hired Senior Vice President Mike Dingman to establish loss control programs.

"I volunteered to come up with a plan to get our costs back under control," Dingman says. "All we did was get everybody focused and try some new things."

Those "new things" involved centralizing its safety programs in 2002-2003 and managing them all from its corporate offices. The move enabled

ValleyCrest to set up a much more focused department that handles safety standards uniformly for all its offices throughout the country.

As part of the initiative, ValleyCrest CFO Andy Mandell threw out the idea of having a truck giveaway to inspire field workers to ramp up their safety efforts on the job. The results were overwhelming.

"The first year, the results were dramatically greater than we ever expected," Dingman says. Claims dropped by more than 20 percent, and "not only did the safety message step up tenfold, the reaction of the employees that the company would actually do something like that for them was a morale booster," Dingman says. "It affected people's overall happiness about their jobs, and it



trickled down into the field."

In the 10 years since the truck giveaway program launched, ValleyCrest's insurance claims have plummeted by more than 50 percent and safety has become a major part of company cul-

### FIRED UP ABOUT WELLNESS

**Company:** Gachina Landscape Management

**Headquarters:** Menlo Park, Calif.

**2011 revenue:** \$20.3 million

At Gachina Landscape Management, motivation begins within. More specifically, it begins with the Viva Gachina wellness program.

"We advocate living a life that revolves around health, vitality and energy," says Gachina Director of Human Resources Denise Ritch. "If we're feeling that way while we're working, we're going to be more productive, more positive and make a greater contribution to our teams."

Gachina began making health-oriented changes around the office in 2007. Providing healthy dietary alternatives was a big part of the initiative in the beginning, and it still is. Instead of offering doughnuts at morning meetings, the company provides yogurt, fruit, bran muffins and granola bars. At lunch, the company offers salads and vegetarian options.

Gachina's wellness movement began with its health-conscious safety officer, Santiago Martinez, who in 2007 rallied Gachina staff to participate in a breast cancer walk. The following year, the company made a more formal commitment to health on the job when it partnered with the Santa Clara County Health Department to implement a walking club, a



Gachina Landscape Management safety workers are led in morning stretches.

stretching program and most instrumentally, a "soda-free summer," in which employees committed to abstaining from soda all season.

The initiative was so successful that Gachina has not

offered soda at a company event since, opting instead for juice and water. "It's important," Ritch says, "because when people are feeling good they're full of energy, they're more productive, they're more creative."

And Gachina has observed all of those things among its workers. Ritch says the growing number of employees partaking in the wellness offerings each year proves they're working.

Gachina also has a training room where in the winter employees hold weekly exercise classes. And every morning before work, field workers are led in 10 minutes of stretching as a safeguard against injury.

The workouts act as a de-stressor, Ritch says, and employees at Gachina's branches are catching on, too.

If energizing its workers and ensuring their well being are at the program's core, Gachina also advocates its wellness program for the impact it has outside its office walls.

"At Gachina, we're very much a family organization," Ritch says. "It has a family feel. We want to promote healthy lifestyles, because we want our people to be healthy at work and at home for their families."



ValleyCrest leaders congratulate truck giveaway winners Jose Carillo (left) and Amelia Lopez, the first woman to win the giveaway.

focusing on safety,” Dingman says.

For its field workers to be eligible for the truck giveaway, ValleyCrest branches must meet metrics, based on incidents per 100 employees. In 2012, more than 4,000 ValleyCrest field workers across the country had safety records stellar enough to make them eligible for the truck giveaway. That’s a lot of workers, especially considering the company raffles off five trucks—one for each of its safety regions.

But ValleyCrest hosts the truck giveaway at its National Safety Day celebration each July, and those who don’t win the grand prize are eligible to

win other prizes, such as TVs, barbecues and bikes.

The day celebrates the efforts of ValleyCrest’s field workers. “If they aren’t engaged and don’t want to help in the safety process, the program would never be successful,” Dingman says.

ValleyCrest spends between \$300,000 and \$400,000 on its National Safety Day. If that sounds like a lot, “the amount we spend on producing that day has paid off much more in literal savings—in terms of claim dollars,” Dingman says. “Over the past 10 years, it’s been in the millions that we’ve saved as a result our safety initiatives. And each year the number of claims has gone down.”

ValleyCrest’s ultimate goal is to have zero workers’ comp claims and a healthy workforce. “It’s our job to make sure the employees go home with the same number of toes and fingers that they came in with,” Dingman says. **LMM**

ture. In tracking the program’s results in annual surveys, employees routinely rank safety and the company’s concern for employees in the 98th or 99th percentile—giving it the No. 1 rating at the company.

“That means 99 percent of employees across the entire company say the company cares about them personally. And that’s a direct result of our



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# MARKET WATCH

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## LAWN/TREE CARE

# The killer in *black and white*

How to detect and manage Asian longhorned beetle infestations. *By* JOE BOGGS, AMY STONE *and* DAN HERMS

Unless you live where the Asian longhorned beetle (ALB) (*Anoplophora glabripennis*) has been found in North America, you may view this huge beetle as just another non-native pest on what seems to be an ever-lengthening list of alien invaders. However, this exotic import is very different from anything that's ever arrived on our shores. Unlike other devastating pests and diseases of foreign origins such as the emerald ash borer (EAB) (*Agrilus planipennis*), Dutch elm disease, and chestnut blight that kill trees in one genus, ALB kills trees belonging to 13 plant genera. This non-native tree killer has the potential to cause a catastrophic loss of trees in North America like nothing we've ever seen before. Infested trees do not recover and they are continually reinfested until dead.

Because ALB is confined to relatively small and distinct infestations that spread slowly, eradication remains a viable strategy. However, successful eradication of ALB depends upon early detection.

## DETECTION

Here are some of the key identification and diagnostic features for ALB:

► **The beetle:** ALB is a large, striking-looking beetle; adults measure 1 inch to 1.5 inches long. The beetle

belongs to the family Cerambycidae; beetles in this family are commonly called "longhorned" because of their extremely long antennae.

► **Oviposition pits:** Every ALB infestation starts with female beetles chewing circular to oblong-shaped pits, around 0.5 inch in diameter, through the bark and down to the white wood of host trees. The pits remain evident for about a year, until wound tissue seals the pits. They are often more obvious in the spring and fall, when sap oozes out of the wounds and runs down the bark. The beetles will only lay eggs on *living* stems; new pits will not appear on firewood. Beetles will lay eggs throughout the

tree, and pits are as likely to be seen at eye-level as they are to be found high in trees. Trees of all sizes are selected as long as stem size can support complete larval development.

► **The larva:** It's the larval stage of ALB that kills trees. The immature stages are found inside infested trees, which is why it's important not to move wood (e.g. firewood, logs, etc.) outside ALB quarantine zones. Cerambycid larvae are commonly referred to as "roundheaded borers," and ALB larvae look like typical cerambycid larvae. So, when roundheaded borers are found in the living stems and branches of a preferred ALB host such as maples, the find should trigger concern and further investigation. ALB larvae tunnel into the xylem (white wood) of the tree, which weakens stems, causing branch breakage.

► **Coarse frass and wood shavings:** The larval wood-boring activity produces coarse white frass that's exuded from the infested stems. The frass looks like "wood wool" or excelsior packing material. Adult female beetles also produce similar wood shavings as they chew their oviposition pits. Both the larval frass and beetle wood shavings collect in branch forks and on the ground beneath infested trees.

► **"Pencil test:"** Adult emergence holes are 3/8 inch to 1/2 inch in diameter and the holes extend deep into the xylem. The holes are large enough to easily insert a No. 2 pencil and this "pencil test" is effective in separating phloem-feeding borers from ALB; emergence holes of phloem feeders are much shallower. Of

*continued on page 24*



For more information on ALB, including its history in North America, visit [LandscapeManagement.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net) and click on Web Extras.

*continued from page 23*

course, ALB holes are on *living, healthy* branches and trunks; there are a number of native longhorned beetles that infest dead or dying stems.

► **Branch breakage:** ALB larval feeding activity in the white wood (xylem) causes substantial structural weakening of infested branches, leading to branch breakage. Always look at the ends of broken branches to see why the branch broke. Look for heavy tunneling across the rings of the white wood. In fact, an infestation in Worcester, Mass., was discovered by U.S. Department of Agriculture personnel examining the ends of branches broken after an ice storm.

► **Heavy woodpecker damage:** ALB larvae bore into the white wood (xylem); woodpeckers must excavate deeply to extract these larval meat morsels.

► **Tree dieback and death:** ALB infestations eventually kill trees, however, death comes very slowly. While infested trees will show canopy thinning, this symptom on maple sometimes does not occur until the main stem is riddled with emergence holes. Canopy decline is *not a reliable indicator* of an ALB infestation.

## MANAGEMENT

Managing ALB with insecticides alone can be problematic, because insecticides do not make trees “immune” to ALB. Once the larvae bore into the xylem, they



Clockwise from top left: It's the larval stage of ALB that kills trees; ALB larvae produce frass, and adult female beetles generate wood shavings; adult ALB emergence holes are large enough to easily insert a No. 2 pencil into; infestations lead to woodpecker damage.

are out of the reach of systemic insecticides that do not translocate effectively within the xylem. If a tree already has ALB larvae in the xylem, those larvae will successfully complete their development and new adults will emerge and disperse even if the tree is treated.

Adults are more susceptible to insecticides as they feed on twigs and leaf veins, however, insecticide efficacy is not 100 percent, which is required for eradication. Insecticide trials conducted on small (2-inch to 4-inch diameter) uniform trees in China found that ALB density was reduced by 71 percent to 90 percent. Achieving high adult mortality is challenged by the extended period of time that adults are active during the season (April through December, with peak activity from May to July), limitations associated with product label restrictions, and the fact that size matters (efficacy is uncertain on large trees). This is why insecticides always have been used in a supporting role with other eradication tools and primarily outside of the core infested zones. The most effective eradication approach has been

the removal and destruction of high-risk trees. Report suspected ALB infestations at <http://beetlebusters.info>.

Eradication can work if we all remain vigilant for new ALB infestations and remain informed and updated on new developments. Attend training programs on ALB and keep reading. Remember: Always ask yourself if your source is credible. Separate facts that are based on research from opinions that are based on speculation. Daniel Patrick Moynihan said it best: “Everyone is entitled to their own opinions, but not their own facts.”

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## THREATENED SPECIES

The beetle kills all species of *Acer* (all maple species); *Aesculus* (horsechestnuts and buckeyes); *Ulmus* (elms); *Salix* (willows); *Betula* (birches); *Platanus* (Sycamore / Planetrees); *Populus* (Poplars); *Albizia* (Mimosa); *Cercidiphyllum* (Katsura); *Fraxinus* (ashes); *Koelreuteria* (goldenraintree); *Sorbus* (mountainash); and *Celtis* (Hackberry). While the first six in this list of genera are generally considered the trees most commonly attacked by ALB, all of the trees in this list can be attacked and killed by ALB. All are food for ALB; all are considered hosts.

# A selective approach

Choosing maintenance clients carefully makes Cutting Edge Lawn Care a success.

By CASEY PAYTON

**T**odd Tindel, owner of Cutting Edge Lawn Care in Austin, Texas, says he takes an “old-fashioned” approach to business. He keeps things simple and focuses on customer service. As the owner of a \$1.6 million company that does almost all maintenance, Tindel is also selective about the customers he works with and the work he tackles.

“We get asked about other work such as design/build, but we’ve always primarily focused on the maintenance end,” says Tindel. “We only handle irrigated yards, and we screen for customers that want weekly service at a *minimum*. We want to make sure the yards stay alive, so if they can’t meet those criteria, then we pass on them as customers. That means we do turn down a lot of people. But we want to best service our clientele and in order to do that, we need to be on the property at least once a week, if not more.”

Tindel shares more about his selective approach to business and why it’s helped grow his customer base.



“We only handle irrigated yards, and we screen for customers that want weekly service at a *minimum* ... If they can’t meet those criteria, then we have to pass on them.”

—Todd Tindel, Cutting Edge Lawn Care  
Austin, Texas

all our work. We also own up on our mistakes. It’s just the right thing to do. If we ever break a window, we pay for that. I’ve run into other companies that tell the homeowner it’s “just the risk of hiring a business.” But we always pay for our mistakes. That’s how you keep customers for the long term and prevent negative talk.

## Q How about top obstacles?

The economic downturn. Like everyone else, we’ve definitely felt some of the impact of the economy. We lost more customers in the last year than we’ve ever lost. However, that being said, it wasn’t that many. We generally don’t lose a lot of customers, and that goes back to doing what we say we will. The economy also has introduced more competition. The guys that are looking to make a quick buck are always out there—as are the customers who are looking to save a buck. And that’s fine. We’ve learned to live with that. We’ve got an A rating on Angie’s List and customers see that. We’re insured, and we invest in our business. While we may lose customers to the guys that don’t charge as much, the bottom line is that in 10 years we’ll still be here and those other guys won’t.

Finding quality people is always a challenge. They’re out there, but you have to look hard. We try to pay more

than the industry average and that does help attract a higher quality pool. We also give vacation and pay vacation. We can’t afford to pay for health benefits, but we try to do other nice things for our employees to keep them happy. When we have good quality workers, we want to keep them.

## Q What top trends are you seeing in the maintenance business?

Communication is key. We’re old fashioned in many ways and we find that works. Customers just want a company they can rely on. One of the biggest complaints we hear is that landscape companies don’t show up on time or they don’t communicate. We try to be consistent and also maintain that communication with our customers. It sounds so simple, but it goes a long way. When you get busy, one of the first things you might do is ignore the phones or put a customer off for a few days, but that’s something that we never let happen.

The little things count. We do what we say we’re going to do, we have all our employees wear uniforms and we’re fully insured. These sound like little things, but they go such a far way. We also try to give people more than they pay for and we guarantee

## Q What opportunities are out there for you?

Adding a segment. We plan to make more of a move into landscaping, which will be a big growth opportunity for us. We’ve always just focused on maintenance, but I have an employee right now that loves the possibility of design/build work, so we’re going to expand into that. At some point we may consider getting into pest control, but we recognize that takes a larger base. If you’re only going on a property twice a year, you need a pretty big base for growth in that market.

Besides possibly expanding into some new services, we see the biggest opportunity for growth is to continue doing what we do. We really believe that the old-fashioned ways of just doing what you say you’re going to do is what helps grow a business. It’s definitely what has worked for us.

IRRIGATION

# Smart marketing

ValleyCrest offers a few tips for promoting your firm's Smart Irrigation Month efforts.

By MARISA PALMIERI

**A**s an industry, we need to step it up when it comes to using social media to get the message out about water conservation, says Richard Restuccia, ValleyCrest's director of water management solutions.

He can get away with such tough talk because he and his team are "walking the walk"—so much so that their efforts earned them the top prize in the contractor category for the Irrigation Association's 2012 Smart Marketing Contest. We spoke with him for advice other contractors can use when it comes to promoting July as Smart Irrigation Month in the future.



**Q What was the key to your Smart Irrigation Month promotional campaign this year?**

When J. Carl Ganter, founder of Circle of Blue, spoke at the Water Smart Innovations Conference, he said social media is going to change the way we manage water. He's right. Our blog and our Twitter #landscapechat are a really big part of the success of our program. It's a great way to get the message out.

We have over 5,000 Twitter followers for @ValleyCrest and 800 following me (@H2oTrends). Those are people who are interested in water management or sustainability and all of them have the potential to influence others to hire ValleyCrest as a water manager. Our landscape chats have up to 450,000 people



who've received the messages during one landscape chat. That's just in one hour.

**Q Do you know how many of those folks are customers?**

It's a significant amount. In fact, we have received requests for bids through Twitter.

**Q When do you recommend contractors begin promoting July as Smart Irrigation Month?**

At ValleyCrest we think every month should be Smart Irrigation Month. We start planning well ahead of the warm or dry season for Smart Irrigation Month. We'll start to plan what we're going to put in the blog, line up the guests for the Twitter #landscapechat and line up what email campaigns we're going to run. And we'll plan to have all the landscape techs add Smart Irrigation Month info to their email signatures. It starts about six months out.

**Q This year you focused on partnering with master-planned communities. Is choosing one area of focus the key to success?**

I think you can do it with a broad stroke, and we've had success with that in the past. We have a partnership with Associa, which manages over 7,000 homeowner associations (HOAs) across the U.S. Partnering with their Associa Green initiative was a great way for us to get our message out to some of biggest

water users in the U.S. A big part of the message wasn't just "conserve water." It was to contact us and we'll provide a free water analysis for your property. It was more than just promotion, it was creating action.

**Q So are you saying you have to include an offer?**

Creating awareness is great, but you can't manage what you can't measure. Analysis and audits start the process for proper water management. Having the offer is what's actually going to get the water savings done. It's the action part, not just the talking part.

**Q Small companies might say they don't have the same resources as ValleyCrest to devote to water conservation promotions. What advice do you have for a smaller company?**

Social media's the real key, especially for the small business. It's the great equalizer. It allows you to broaden your message at a lower expense than traditional advertising. People think they have to do social media in addition to everything else. Once you ramp up your social media effort, you can do less traditional marketing and more digital marketing and touch more people, save more water and bring on more customers.

*Disclosure: Marisa Palmieri is a member of the Irrigation Association's Smart Irrigation Month committee.*

**GETTING SMART**

Congrats to all the winners of the Irrigation Association's 2012 Smart Marketing Contest.

**Affiliate category:** The Municipal Water District of Orange County

**Contractor category:** ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance

**Distributor category:** CPS Distributors

**Manufacturer category:** The Toro Co.

*For more information about how to participate in next year's contest, visit [smartirrigation-month.org](http://smartirrigation-month.org).*



DESIGN/BUILD



Andrew Cole-Tyson runs his landscape design and project management business entirely from his van.

and he hopes to one day convert to a hybrid vehicle. When the van's not running, the studio is powered by solar panels.

### A MOBILE MODEL

The business model is focused on selling and collecting a design and project management fee. His target clients are middle-class households, many of which, he says, don't realize they can afford landscape design services. Cole-Tyson

says educating them about the importance of design has been a major part of the process, but that's where potential lies.

"Many people in our market simply build pieces and parts of landscapes, often in an uncoordinated manner," he says.

During design consultations Cole-Tyson parks his vehicle at his clients' homes and welcomes them into his 20-square-foot lobby and marketing space, featuring a papasan chair and flat screen (the remaining 30 square feet of space is for designing and storage). Here he goes over the clients' wants and needs and introduces them to his three design packages, which range from \$150 to \$2,000. Clients pay on the spot via a Square mobile credit card reader.

After they select a package, he stays on site in this studio until he completes the design.

"It's much easier to work with clients and schedule meetings this way, and they can typically meet during a lunch break, after work or all throughout the day, as we stay put and make ourselves available for clients to collaborate with us," he says. "It's all about the clients and being a better steward of their money. In terms of fuel costs, you don't have to drive around town if you forget a measurement. You stay focused and you stay inspired when you're on their property."

From a 10-inch tablet device and laptop, Cole-Tyson runs all of the necessary design and business management systems.

In addition to consolidating overhead, the vehicle's graphic wrap does heavy-duty marketing for the business.

"It's got tremendous marketing value," he says, adding that when he's designing, neighbors frequently stop by to see what's going on. "I also envision it becoming our booth at a farmer's market."

Though he didn't disclose revenue figures so far, Cole-Tyson says he's met the weekly billing goal he set for himself at the outset of pursuing the mobile design studio. As for the future? He'd like replicate the model in other markets, adding designers and project managers to duplicate the set-up and transfer the same systems to each new vehicle.

He's excited about where things are headed.

"It's really cool to be able to serve more of the middle class," Cole-Tyson says. "They really take pride in the fact that they're working with a landscape designer." **LM**

## On the road

Andrew Cole-Tyson designs landscapes for middle-class clients with his mobile design studio. *By* MARISA PALMIERI

**E**schewing the high overhead of bricks and mortar, entrepreneurs nationwide are hopping on the mobile business bandwagon, launching food trucks, beauty shops and retail stores on wheels. One landscape professional in Birmingham, Ala., has joined their ranks with his mobile landscape design studio.

"The business is founded on simplicity," says Andrew Cole-Tyson, owner of Cole-Tyson Land & Garden Studio.

In June, at the suggestion of several industry contacts, he visited with Tony Bass, Green Industry consultant and CEO and founder of the Super Lawn Truck system. He sought Bass' advice on how to begin consulting with other professionals about the best use of tablet devices for landscape design sales, but their discussion took another route. Bass challenged him to think more broadly about his business, namely why it was taking him several weeks to produce a design that should take less than a day. How could he work more efficiently?

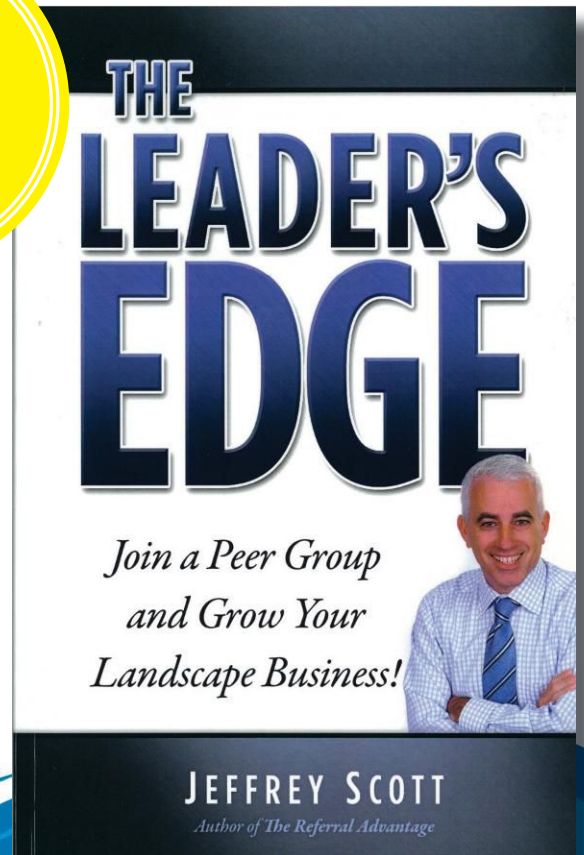
Borne of this brainstorming session was the mobile design studio and "designs in a day" concept. Over the next month, Cole-Tyson, who has a master's degree in landscape architecture from Auburn University, formulated a plan to bring his new business idea to life, including researching vehicle options. He chose a Nissan high-top van, and he built his studio in eight days.

It costs Cole-Tyson \$700 to \$800 per month to operate his studio, not including gas. He gets about 18 miles to the gallon,

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Author: Jeffrey Scott



# FOCUS *on your* SUPPLY CHAIN

**L**ANDSCAPE INDUSTRY managers typically focus on activities such as purchasing, delivery and construction. They spend little time trying to understand the interaction between all parts of the production process. That's where Supply Chain Management (SCM) comes into play.

SCM is a system designed to promote organization between the various areas of production and teamwork among those involved. Applying SCM to landscape management is critical in tough economic times to "contain the hemorrhage" of excess use of materials, loss from dead plant material and idle production team members who are waiting for materials to arrive.

You're not properly managing your supply chain if your production managers and crew leaders, the highest paid members of your production staff, stop at Lowe's, Menards or Home Depot on a daily basis to pick up supplies for their crews.

At this point, you may be thinking SCM is for big manufacturing facilities and not for the typical landscape business, since we're individualized and

**THE PAYOFF WILL BE REDUCED WASTE AND IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY.**

BY **BRYAN MOURS**

service oriented, but that's not the case. Companies that practice SCM find savings by looking at the four key strategic operational areas: supplier evaluation, information technology (IT), delivery services and inventory management, plus other important factors such as site location. With SCM a typical landscape business could save thousands and in some cases tens of thousands of dollars to support bottom line needs, including new equipment and improved IT, to better manage the supply chain.

### **Start with suppliers**

What are some ways we can immediately manage our supply chains better? Suppliers are a great place to start. Evaluate your vendors to be sure they're the right fit for your organization and develop strong, lasting partnerships. Ensure your suppliers provide quality products that meet the expectations of your clients. Don't compromise.

For example, growers are a great

resource for quality plant material. Wholesalers and big-box stores typically have product that's been handled three to four times before being displayed at their location. This multiple handling of plants, combined with less care, significantly lowers plant material quality. As a rule, nobody cares for plant material better than the grower.

The best way to identify material quality is to visit vendor locations in person and observe the quality of the plants and hardscape materials. Discuss your concerns with them and ask questions about product handling and care. While the visits may take a few days during your busy schedule (I recommend going two or three times annually), the time spent could save thousands of dollars in extra labor hours required to replace low-quality material at a job site. If you discover the vendor doesn't provide the quality products you and your customers require, it's time to look for one that does.

*continued on page 31*

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*continued from page 29*

When evaluating suppliers, identify offerings that will help you improve management of product use and inventory levels. Ask for special services such as “just in time” delivery—where the vendor holds your product until it’s needed at the job site. In the past, I personally worked to understand inventory levels on a monthly basis and changed systems so vendors held plant material until the product was needed. The results of the change in our procedure and recording and measuring data showed we were losing more than \$20,000 a year in dead plants and excess material usage.

Many companies balk at paying delivery fees, but the savings in lower inventory levels and production efficiency will more than make up for them. In one case, a supplier charged \$27 per direct job site delivery regardless of load size, including single items. Consider the savings from a commonplace practice: sending a \$19-per-hour crew foreman in a company truck about 20 miles round trip to pick up the part. Using delivery, savings is evident almost immediately, especially when you can combine loads.

Use of vendor-managed inventory (VMI) outsources the responsibility of your inventory levels to your suppliers. VMI entails suppliers visiting your site to take counts and place orders for you or by using a software program. With a

site-visit supplier, avoid giving them free rein of ordering inventory. Oversight is important and includes checking orders ready to be placed and comparing them to sold work, considering the season. Software-based systems remove this double check because they allow the supplier access to your sold orders and material need dates. VMI services are not widely offered, but it doesn’t hurt to ask, and it’s important to develop processes and procedures that best fit your company. Ask your vendors to provide the special services you need as partners who are concerned with your growth and bottom line. If suppliers are not open to partnering with you to help with your requirements, it’s time to move on.

### Improving processes

Improve internal processes to identify material needs specified by your estimating and sales staff. Work with the production staff to understand how and when materials will get to the job site so production workers aren’t idle. Weekly meetings between the production scheduling staff and purchasing department are critical for accurate timing and sequencing of a large project. Timing is important so suppliers can understand well in advance when best to schedule timed deliveries. Courtesy goes a long way with suppliers. Ensure the production staff understands each piece of the project so work isn’t duplicated. Con-



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## SUPPLY CHAIN

ducting a job walkthrough with designers/estimators can remove guesswork from making plans a reality. Sometimes plans don't tell the whole story. In one example, a blue stone sidewalk was changed twice because it wasn't laid out per the designer's mindset. The rework added an extra \$3,000 for labor and additional material.

Start measuring the performance of your supply chain, including responsiveness and reliability of orders placed with your vendors; inventory levels and inventory turnover; costs of material waste or theft; and customer satisfaction with the project's timeliness and quality. Having the proper software in place for your size company is important to simplify data collection and reporting. There are many great products available specifically for our industry.

In today's economy, better managing your supply chain is essential. Be aware of where you're spending your money and work to get costs under control. You will be surprised at what you can find in the process. **LM**

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*Mours, principal of Mour Growth Consulting, is a former vice president of finance and operations for a landscape firm. Reach him at [bmours@mourgrowthconsulting.com](mailto:bmours@mourgrowthconsulting.com).*

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# LM REPORTS

YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH

## TRUCKS, TRAILERS & ACCESSORIES



### VIA Motors

VIA won the Work Truck Show 2012 Green Award for its full-size, extended-range electric vehicle (eREV) work

trucks. Work trucks equipped with VIA's proprietary eREV powertrain are able to drive a majority of their daily work routes emission-free and entirely on electric power. They have up to 40 miles of all-electric range using lithium ion batteries and can drive unlimited additional miles using VIA's onboard electric generator or "range extender." The vehicles can be charged from a typical 110V household outlet overnight. In independent testing, VIA reports that its eREV pickup trucks have demonstrated up to 100 mpg in typical fleet driving. [VIAMotors.com](http://VIAMotors.com)

### Buyers Products

Buyers Products' landscape trailer accessory line is designed to use trailer bed space efficiently and keep your trailer organized and clutter-free. Lockable trimmer racks are available in two sizes for open trailers and one size for enclosed trailers. Designed to hold three trimmers, the trimmer racks feature an easy, snap-in design that only requires one-hand operation. The multi-rack can be used on either open or enclosed trailers and protects a variety of tools, including hedge trimmers, chainsaws or handheld blowers. Designed for open trailers, the EZ Gate tailgate lift assist reduces lifting effort of trailer gates by 90 percent, dramatically reducing the opportunity for injuries and fatigue. The gate assist can be easily installed on gates that weigh up to 180 lbs. [BuyersProducts.com](http://BuyersProducts.com)



### Firestone Industrial Products Co.

Ride-Rite air helper spring kits are available for 2012 Dodge Ram 2500/3500 trucks, both 2WD and 4WD models. The kit is designed to use air pressure to help maximize the truck's safe load carrying capacity, vehicle stability, ride quality and brake effectiveness. The system features individual inflation valves that allow for separate side-to-side or front-to-rear adjustment, which helps keep the vehicle level when carrying off-center loads and maintains ride quality under differing load conditions. The no-drill kit is designed to use the truck's factory holes and mount between its frame and axle. All the necessary components are included for an easy installation, which typically takes less than one hour. [Ride-Rite.com](http://Ride-Rite.com)

### Mean Green

Fleet managers report that because it eliminates the scrubbing required of other cleaners, Mean Green Industrial Strength Cleaner & Degreaser cuts cleaning time in half. It removes dirt, tar and road grime from vehicles and trailers and cleans and degreases equipment like chippers, stump grinders, augers, wood splitters and skid steer loaders and their attachments. It is also effective on concrete floors and driveways and asphalt, making it ideal for spot removal in the shop or on worksites. Mean Green can be used with pressure washers, and it cleans with no environmentally harmful solvents, the company says. [MeanGreenDegreaser.com](http://MeanGreenDegreaser.com)



### Cequent Consumer Products

The Reese Carry Power TransRACK Cargo Truck Rack is a "one-size-fits-all" solution for transporting long items that may not fit in a truck bed. Made of aircraft grade aluminum, TransRACK quickly installs without tools. Eight double lock clamps with stainless steel hardware hold the rack to the bed of the truck. Easy On crossbar clamps make installing accessories fast and convenient. An 800-lb. capacity and four movable load stops make carrying ladders, lumber or other long items a simple task. Accessories using the same double-lock clamp system include the TransRACK Conduit Carrier, TransRACK Trimmer Rack and TransRACK Tool Rack. [CequentConsumerProducts.com](http://CequentConsumerProducts.com)





## Titan Fuel Tanks

Titan's new cross-linked polyethylene fuel tank is gaining favor among Ford dealers and end-users, who have been battling fuel line contamination in 1999-2010 diesel-powered Ford F-350,

F-450 and F-550 cab and chassis vehicles and diesel-powered E-Series Vans. Titan's replacement tank is constructed of military-grade cross-linked polyethylene (XLHDPE) and is compatible with most bio-diesel fuel blends. Ford's original equipment steel tanks are lined with a protective coating that can break down when exposed to certain agents and additives associated with diesel and bio-diesel fuels. Once the tanks are in use, some fuel compositions can cause the steel tank linings to delaminate and shed flakes into the contents of the tank. The introduction of particulate matter into the fuel source ultimately contaminates the entire fuel path, causing pumps, filters and injectors to fail. Because the tank delamination problem is considered to be fuel-related, it is not covered under Ford's warranty policy, and once lining contamination is detected in the fuel system, all affected components must be replaced to bring qualified vehicles back into warranty compliance. Each Titan fuel tank comes with a limited five-year warranty.

[TitanFuelTanks.com](http://TitanFuelTanks.com)



## Briggs & Stratton

Briggs & Stratton Advanced Formula Fuel Treatment & Stabilizer, which keeps ethanol-formulated gas fresh in the tank for as long as three years, provides an easy and inexpensive solution to protect small gas engines from ethanol's potentially damaging effects. The fuel preservative protects any gasoline against chemical breakdown but is targeted at ethanol-blended fuels. The stabilizer combines a triple antioxidant formula with additional ingredients to protect the entire fuel system, fighting the harmful effects of water separation. Corrosion inhibitors form a protective barrier on metal parts to prevent rust and corrosion, while detergent ingredients help prevent gum and varnish build-up on engine parts. A metal deactivator works to stop the aggressive chemical reactions caused by dissolved metal ions in the fuel. It's available in 4-, 8-, 16- and 32-oz. plastic bottles. [BriggsAndStratton.com](http://BriggsAndStratton.com)

## CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT



### Caterpillar

A Cat skid-steer loader delivers lower owning and operating costs, thanks to a standard foot throttle pedal and on-demand cooling fan. The new Cat D Series models are powerful machines for heavy-duty hardscape jobs. They feature the industry-leading Intelligent Leveling system, providing dual direction self-leveling, return-to-dig and work tool positioner.

[Catresourcecenter.com/landscaping](http://Catresourcecenter.com/landscaping)

### Takeuchi-US

The all-new TL10 (pictured) and TL12 track loaders feature EPA Tier 4i-compliant engines, along with an exclusive Eco Mode function designed to reduce fuel consumption. New selectable auxiliary work modes allow the operator to fine-tune the auxiliary hydraulic output to three specific attachment settings for reduced downtime on job sites. The TL10 has an operating weight of 10,318 lbs., a tip load of 6,867 lbs. (7,793 lbs., with optional counterweight), and an improved rated operating capacity of 2,403 lbs. (2,723 lbs. with optional counterweight). The TL12 has an operating weight of 11,618 lbs., tip load of 8,102 lbs. (9,315 lbs. with optional counterweight).

[Takeuchi-US.com](http://Takeuchi-US.com)



### Massey Ferguson

The new GC1700 Series sub-compact tractor includes four models that replace the previous GC range. The GC1705 and GC1710 TLB are rated 22.5 gross hp, and the GC1715 and GC1720 TLB are rated at 24.5 gross hp. All four models feature a low-rated engine rpm that reduces vibration and noise to improve engine life and decrease fuel consumption. A wide-open, clutter-free platform allows the operator to move on and off the tractor with ease, and offers plenty of space for natural leg movement. [MasseyFerguson.com](http://MasseyFerguson.com)

## Bobcat

Seven new 500 frame-sized skid-steer and compact track loaders feature extensive feature upgrades, including increased visibility, a more comfortable cab and easier serviceability to maximize job site efficiency. All seven models began limited production in September, with full availability at dealerships in January. The new machines



include the S510, S530, S550, S570 and S590 skid-steer loaders, and the T550 and T590 compact track loaders. The S510, S550 and T550 feature a radius lift path, giving operators the reach and visibility they require for dump-

ing over a wall, backfilling or loading flatbed trucks. The S530, S570, S590 and T590 models feature a vertical lift path, providing operators the ability to lift heavier loads higher, making it easier to clear high-sided truck boxes and hoppers, as well as placing pallets loaded with heavy material. The M-Series vertical lift path machines feature an increased lift height over the equivalent K-Series models. *Bobcat.com*

## Case Construction Equipment

The new 570N XT loader/tool carrier offers enhanced fuel economy and productivity, along with superior breakout force and reach. It achieves Tier 4 Interim certification through the use of cooled exhaust gas recirculation (CEGR) technology and a diesel particulate filter. The machine features a Case turbocharged engine rated at 78 net hp that delivers a minimum 5 percent increase in fuel efficiency and faster response times than previous models while meeting current emission standards. It

boosts productivity and efficiency by retaining more material during the dump cycle. To help reduce material spillage during roading, Case offers the 570N XT with optional Ride



Control. The three-point hitch with variable-flow hydraulics delivers greater precision and lift capacities. An optional hydraulic power takeoff and dual tilt on the box blade provide more versatility and ditching capabilities. Its operating weight is 12,898 lbs., bucket breakout force is 9,271 lbs. and hinge pin height is 11 ft., 3 in. The machine's front loader features an optional hydraulic quick coupler to easily connect and disengage buckets and other attachments. *CaseCE.com*

## JCB

JCB has upgraded its 1CX product—the



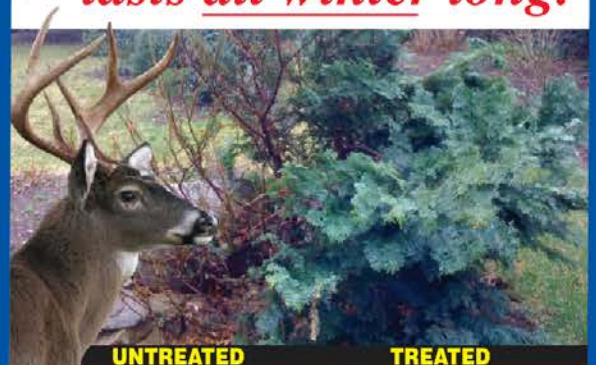
smallest member of its backhoe loader family—with a new appearance, longer loader arms, an extending dipper option, servo controls and a power management system. Features include a revised cab roof trim, improved working lights and sturdy electrical switchgear. The new optional loader arms are 4 in. longer to provide easier loading of site dump trucks. At the rear, an extending dipper option adds up to 20 in. to the digging envelope, taking maximum dig depth to 10 ft. A new Power Management System (PMS) improves performance, reducing engine lug down as the machine starts to dig and increasing power when driving into a pile with the front bucket. Optional Servo controls for the backhoe provide the operator with greater control and no need to lean forward when working the rear excavator. Not only is the system more productive, it removes the control lever post, creating more space for the operator, particularly around the feet. Customers can choose between SAE or ISO control pattern by using the optional changeover switch, to suit the individual operator and ensure rapid driver acceptance. *JCB.com*

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## PLANT VARIETIES & SUPPLIES



### Hortech

Hortech introduces LiveScreen, a two-sided, mobile version of LiveWall, the living wall system that transforms ordinary walls into vertical green landscapes. Four models in the series are constructed in a waterproof aluminum frame: LiveScreen XL is 6 ft. by 4 ft., with five tiers of planter boxes; LiveScreen 4S is the same size, with four tiers, and adds shelves on the bottom of each side for growing plants in containers. LiveScreen Patio is 65 in. by 32 in., with three tiers and bottom shelves for container plants. LiveScreen Access is 5.5 ft. by 4 ft., with three tiers, and facilitates wheelchair accessibility. Every model is available with optional automated irrigation components and a hose timer.

[LiveWall.com/products/livescreen](http://LiveWall.com/products/livescreen)



### Kieft Seed

Bred by Kieft Seed, 'Cheyenne Spirit' produces a mix of colors, from rich purple, pink, red and orange tones to lighter yellows, creams and white. This compact, flowering *Echinacea* hybrid features well-branched, durable plants. It does not require a lot of water and offers a wide range of uses from the perennial border, in a mass landscape planting, in a butterfly garden or as a cut flower. This 2013 All-America Selections Flower Award-winner won't topple in wind and

rain like many *Echinacea*, the judges found. No deadheading is needed, and the flowers bloom from mid-summer through fall. [KieftSeeds.com](http://KieftSeeds.com)

### Ball Horticultural

Extreme heat, humidity and drought are no match for Ball Horticultural's AngelMist Dark Rose Improved *Angelonia*, a new variety for 2013. Dark Rose Improved has outstanding true rose color and better habit to match this series of summer snapdragon. Hardy to 32 degrees F, it blooms in late spring and summer, with a height ranging from 4 in. to 10 in. and a spread of 10 in. to 20 in. Its upright habit is equally at home in groundcover, baskets or containers. [BallHort.com](http://BallHort.com)



### Syngenta Flowers

'Aideen Red Fire' from Syngenta Flowers is a decorative, easy-to-grow bushy perennial that prefers full sun but thrives with even a half-day of direct sunshine. Hardy in USDA Zones 4-8, this mum will grow between 18 in. and 24 in. tall and should be planted that distance apart. It offers vibrant red color from late summer through fall. [SyngentaFlowers.com](http://SyngentaFlowers.com)

### Dümmen

'Great Balls of Fire' exhibits all the favorable characteristics of ivy geraniums but is highly heat tolerant, according to the breeder. Dümmen has actively selected for this trait over a three-year period with trials in Florida, Texas and North Carolina. Because of this, oedema and foliar bleaching—common problems for ivy geraniums in warm climates—are not an issue. Ball-shaped, double flowers in a velvety texture are nestled in strong foliage, with good branching. Colors include deep rose, burgundy, dark red, merlot, pink, white, blue and lavender. [DummenUSA.com](http://DummenUSA.com)



### Takii & Co. Ltd.

'South Pacific,' a 2013 All-America Selections Flower Award winner, presents

showy, 4-in., scarlet flowers that bloom all summer long. This F1 hybrid canna grows up to 5 ft. tall, boasting about six stems per plant and delivering larger flowers than other seed cannas, according to Takii & Co. Ltd. Flowers appear early, bloom consistently all summer and withstand a light frost. As with other cannas, it tolerates wet conditions so it can be used as a pond border or in other similar growing conditions. This perennial can be treated as an annual by northern gardeners. [Takii.co.jp/english](http://Takii.co.jp/english)

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## Paint it green

Turf painting could be a solution for customers who want a quick fix.

**M**ANY HOMEOWNERS ACROSS the country this year saw their turf die or turn yellow thanks to scorching temperatures and unceasing drought. Some people looking for a solution turned to lawn painting as a quicker, cheaper fix than complete lawn overhauls.

Brian Howland, founder and president of Arizona Lawn Painting in Phoenix, runs this business as a part-time gig to supplement his full-time sales job for a digital printing firm.

"There's not a lot of repeat business with this type of work," he says, noting it makes a nice part-time service. "A lot of my clients are people who have rental properties and just don't want to deal with the hassle of renovating their yard or homeowners who are about to be fined by their HOA because of yellow grass. But I do have a few regular clients with larger properties who find this to be a convenient solution to their problems."

On average, Howland charges \$200 for up to 3,000 square feet of property and also may charge a travel fee, depending on the customer's location and travel time. A typical yard takes him about an hour to paint, but obstacles in the yard can involve more time and therefore drive up the fee. If there are a lot of items that have to be sprayed around, the job gets more complicated.

"The more things in their yard, the more the price goes up," he says. "The green paint is permanent, so you have to be very cognizant about where you're spraying it."

Howland says customers seem to appreciate that it's a relatively inexpensive service that offers a quick solution. "The truth is, it's not really something you need, and it only takes me an hour, so I think it's worth my while to make somewhere around \$200," Howland says. "It's a nice little side business."

There isn't a lot of equipment involved, so Howland says the investment in a lawn painting business is relatively low. Any company that has a lawn or pest control division may already have the appropriate spray equipment; lawn colorant is the only other material required.

Howland uses a product called Natural Green Grass Patch. He buys direct, but he



Brian Howland charges about \$200 for a 3,000-square-foot yard, which takes him about an hour to paint.

says paint can be sourced from landscape supply distributors or websites.

Howland went through some trial and error to find the best spray tank to lay the paint down evenly. He tried an orchard sprayer and some other equipment, but he was fortunate to have friends in the pest control business who gave him an old spray tank, which he says has been the best solution he's found.

"I've probably invested about \$500 of my own money for materials like hosing, fittings and wiring, so it's certainly not a big investment," Howland says. "The lawn paint is the biggest ongoing investment, and it's not that expensive."

Howland used to have his vehicle partially wrapped, which solicited a lot of calls, but he says most of his business now comes from Internet leads. He says many people don't know what lawn painting is, but they find him online when trying to find a quick solution for a dead lawn. Howland says he is the only professional lawn painter in his region.

There's nothing like making a customer happy, Howland says. "You can take a lawn that was completely yellow and turn it into this lush green turf in an hour," he says. "I just recently did a job where the customer walked out after I was done and all he could say was, 'Wow.' That definitely made me feel good about what I do."

Casey Payton is a freelance writer with seven years' experience covering landscaping.

### » SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**COMPANY:** Arizona Lawn Painting

**HEADQUARTERS:** Phoenix

**WHY LAWN PAINTING:** An article about a guy doing lawn painting in California caught Howland's attention. Having recently quit a job, he was looking for a way to make money, and the business idea made sense.

**INVESTMENT:** A spray tank system plus lawn paint



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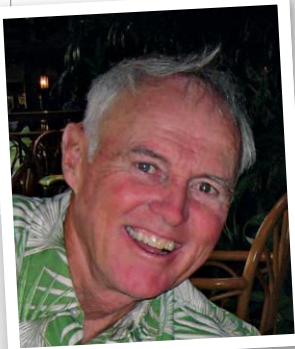


# MY BIGGEST MISTAKE

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



## Balancing old and new is challenging for a longstanding Montana firm.



Jerry Cashman

**COMPANY:**

Cashman Nursery & Landscaping

**HEADQUARTERS:**

Bozeman, Mont.

**SERVICES:** 50% nursery/garden center; 50% landscape design/build

**CLIENTELE:** 65% residential; 35% residential

**NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:** 50

**2011 REVENUE:** \$3.4 million

**PROJECTED REVENUE:** \$3.6 million

**W**ITH A LONG-STANDING history in Bozeman, Mont., the family-owned Cashman Nursery & Landscaping is well known for its industry experience. Jerry and Jan Cashman built the present nursery building and landscaping business in 1976, but the original Cashman Nursery dates back to 1898 in Owatonna, Minn. Being a long-established business has many benefits, but owner Jerry Cashman points out it also can pose some challenges. Keeping the business looking and feeling up to date has been the biggest challenge of all, he says.

Cashman has on staff some longtime workers. Though veteran employees can be great assets, challenges arise with an aging workforce. Some employees have been with Cashman for two decades or more, and as they've aged, their productivity levels have declined.

"Obviously, an older employee might not be able to lift heavy items or work 50 hours a week in the spring, when we really need everyone to work overtime," says Cashman. "That can be a business problem. You come to accept less productivity from employees at the highest pay levels simply because of their seniority."

Cashman says it's a problem that a lot of businesses probably face—not

just in the Green Industry but in many other industries as well. It's just a fact of life that age can naturally decrease productivity, and Cashman admits he's gotten complacent with longtime employees who may not be producing what they used to. It can lead to some tough conversations.

"One of the biggest challenges is at our year-end review when I have to talk about salary with an employee that's been with me a long time," he says. "I may have to tell them they're not getting a raise or may even have to be paid less. It's just one of those tough parts about business."

One solution, says Cashman, is to bring in more young help to supplement the older, long-term employees. While he wants to remain loyal to longtime employees and won't replace them, he also is willing to bring in some new help.

"New people are always coming on board and bringing new ideas and more energy," he says. "Those are the types of new employees you want to seek out because it's important to have a good balance between senior, well-experienced employees and fresh, eager employees. A balance between the two will hopefully bring you a combination of both good productivity and quality."

### Image upgrade

In keeping "fresh," Cashman says the longtime

business also has had to focus on keeping the image of the company "crisp and clean."

"In other words, 20 years ago our truck paint and logos might have looked brand new, but as time goes on everything stays the same and things start to look tired," Cashman says. "Then you see new businesses start up in the area and all of their stuff looks crisp, clean and fresh and it gives them an advantage."

Cashman hopes community members appreciate the fact that the business is well established. He also hopes they'll equate that to experience and knowledge.

"We hope that some people might understand we've been in the industry a long time and they won't expect us to look brand new," Cashman says. "We hope that they'll appreciate the fact we've been around for a while. But even if you don't look brand new, you still have to look crisp and clean. You have to keep your image up to date."

The business recently changed its logo and also produced new signage to help achieve that goal. Cashman adds: "We haven't changed the logos on all our vehicles yet—that's our next step—but we have changed a lot of our signage with a fresh new logo. We hope that making these kinds of changes will help us continue to compete with newer companies."

Casey Payton is a freelance writer with seven years' experience writing about landscaping.

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