

IRRIGATION

Smart marketing

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

By MARISA PALMIERI

As 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 the 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.