



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

Eschewing 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,