

# Landscaper Management



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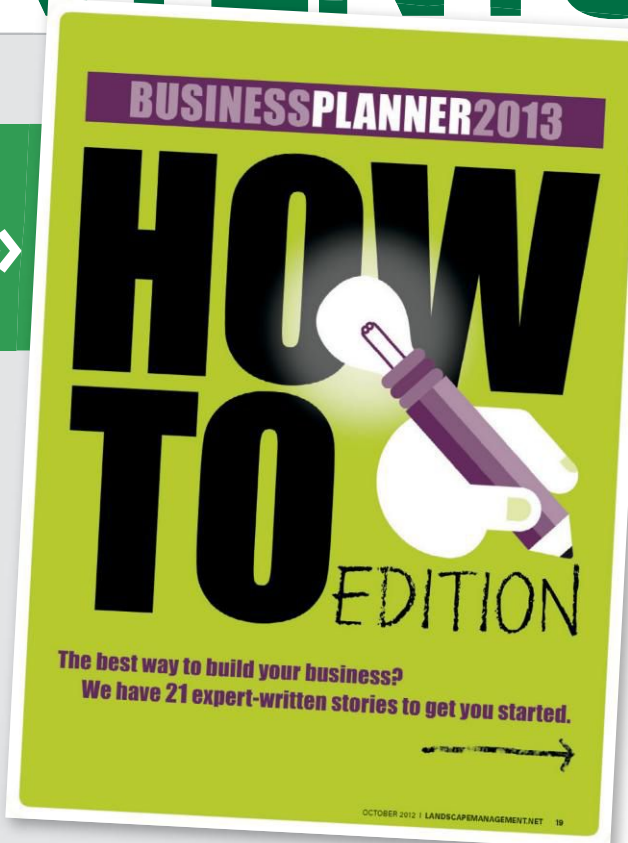
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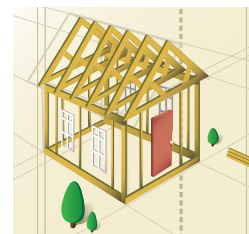
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**S1 THE INDUSTRY PULSE: THE GOOD, BAD & UGLY**  
Green Industry optimism is up. Still, many firms haven't recovered from the recession and are struggling with tough weather years.

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Management**

**OUR MISSION:** *Landscape Management* — the leading information resource for lawn care, landscape maintenance, design/build and irrigation professionals — empowers Green Industry professionals to learn and grow from their peers and our exclusive business intelligence. Serving as the industry conscience, we not only report on but also help shape news, views, trends and solutions.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

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# Don't wing it

**Y**ou've heard them all, right? *Failing to plan is planning to fail. Plans are useless; planning is indispensable. Plan your work and work your plan.*

They're clichés, but I like them. Unfortunately, we all know liking a motivational quote doesn't mean you always live by its tenets.

I have to confess, I'm not "enthused" by the planning process like columnist Bruce Wilson is ("The power of planning," page 14). But I know Bruce is right when he says plans can be road maps to success and great tools for tracking performance and improvement. And I do love the feeling of having a plan in place, especially when I know *how* I'm going to tackle the tasks before me.

It was with that in mind that we devised the "how to" theme for this year's annual Business Planner edition of *Landscape Management*.

Strategic, long-range plans are vital, but sometimes you also need

practical planning tips. Often, these ideas can be as simple as having a protocol in place or having the proper mindset for how you'll handle a given situation.

That's what we have for you here, starting on page 19. Twenty-one industry insiders share "how to" prepare for and deal with many business-limiting challenges.

Consultant and former ValleyCrest exec Bill Arman shares the importance of scripting how an employee termination will go so it doesn't come back to bite you ("How to fire an employee," page 46).

*LM* columnist Kevin Kehoe offers an example of a company that grew in 2012 by making some predictions about labor costs, gas prices, interest rates and internal processes—and laying out how it would deal with them throughout the year. It's a must-read as you get ready for 2013. (See "How to prepare for next year" on page 34.)

Contractors Roger and Sue McCarthy share their key to a successful business and marriage: having a plan for when they talk about work and when they don't ("How to work effectively with your spouse," page 50).

The common denominator among these and the 18 other expert-written "how to" stories in this issue? Don't wing it and hope things turn out well. Plan to succeed.

Let this issue of *Landscape Management* be your guide.

# Landscape Management

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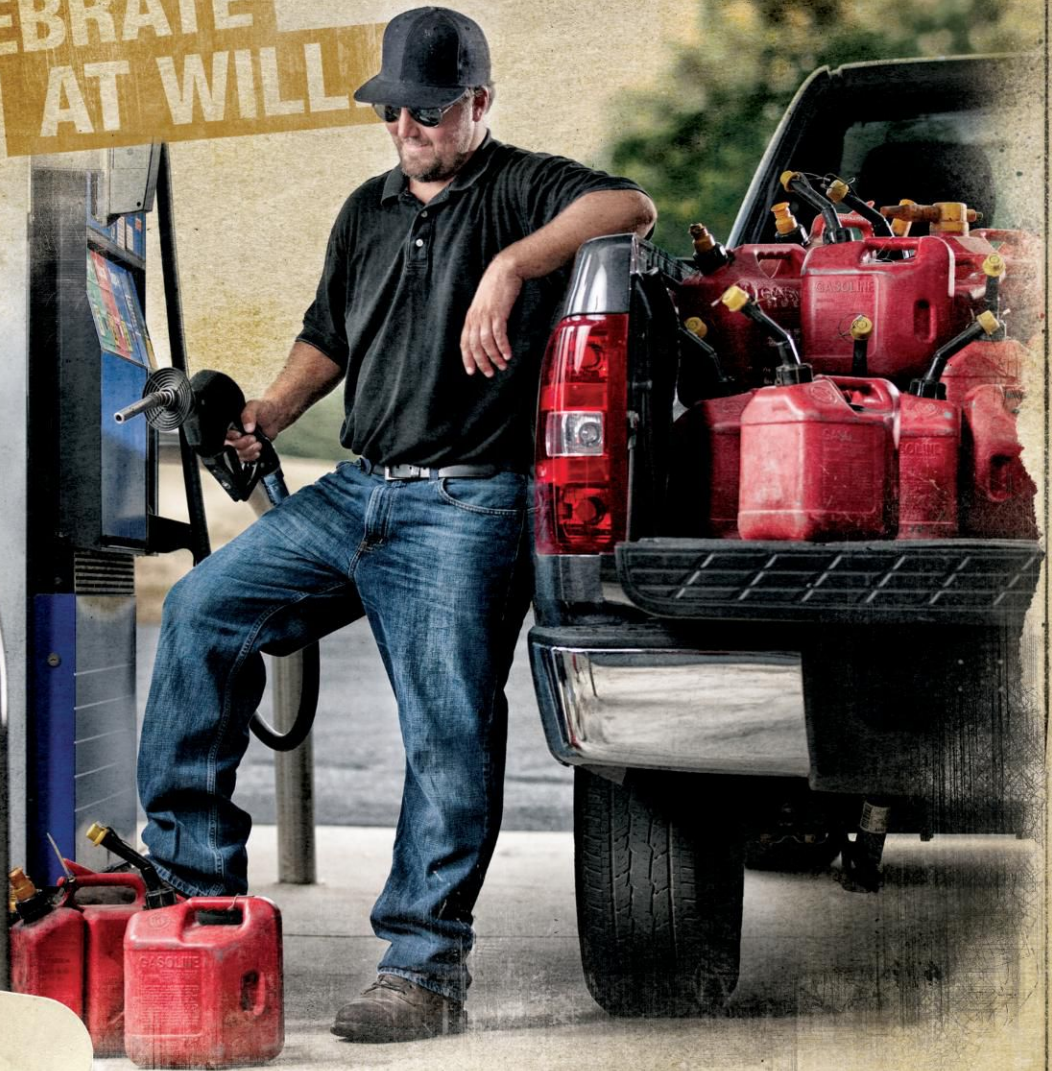
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# NEWS+VIEWS

GREEN INDUSTRY EVENTS, TRENDS AND TIPS

## Congress extends H-2B wage rule block

Last month Congress voted to extend through March 27 the law that prevents the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) from implementing the H-2B wage rule. It was part of a stop-gap spending measure to keep the government funded beyond the start of the fiscal year, which began Oct. 1.

Late last year, the DOL issued two rules that could hurt the H-2B guest

worker program, potentially making it unusable for members of the Green Industry. The two proposed regulations are known as the wage rule and the program rule.

The wage rule would artificially increase labor costs associated with the H-2B program to an unmanageable level, according to the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) and other user groups.

“PLANET will continue to fight for a longer-term prohibition, but we are happy in the meantime our members will not be subject to unprecedented wage increases,” the association said.

The program rule seeks to impose new costs, burdens and complexities. It can't be implemented due to a preliminary injunction issued against it in April in Florida's Northern District. The injunction applies nationwide.

“After the legal maneuvering in the case concludes, PLANET hopes the judge will make the injunction permanent,” the association said.



## BASF to acquire Becker Underwood for \$1 billion

BASF will acquire Ames, Iowa-based Becker Underwood for \$1.02 billion. Becker Underwood is a global provider of technologies for biological seed treatment, seed treatment colors and polymers, as well as products in the areas of biological crop protection, turf and horticulture, animal nutrition and landscape colorants and coatings. Upon receiving the necessary legal approvals, the majority of Becker Underwood's business will be integrated into BASF's Crop Protection division.

“Becker Underwood has a strong position in North America,” said Markus Heldt, president of BASF's Crop Protection division. “We will continue to expand this core business as we expand globally.”

The acquisition complements the company's existing portfolio, especially in the area of seed treatments, seed coatings and biological, reports *LM's* sister magazine, *Golfdom*. “A lot of the products they've commercialized, and just recently commercialized, are of great interest because they are new to BASF,” said BASF's Nevin McDougall, senior vice president of crop protection for North America. “I think some of [Becker Underwood's] future plans toward plant health are very interesting from the standpoint of our investment in that area and the future potential we see.”

Becker Underwood, which was expected to achieve sales of \$240 million for fiscal year 2012, employs 479 people at 10 sites around the world. McDougall said BASF will take the next three months to create a plan to integrate Becker Underwood into BASF.

“The No. 1 goal of Becker Underwood and BASF is ensuring that our customers continue receiving the high-quality solutions they have come to expect from Becker Underwood,” Charlie Hale, Becker Underwood's marketing strategy and support lead, said. “Except for a few already-planned lineup tweaks, including a couple new and/or improved products, no changes in the overall Becker Underwood product lineup is currently anticipated.”



Markus Heldt, president of BASF Crop Protection

## NEW TREE SERVICE FRANCHISE LAUNCHES

A new Green Industry franchise, Monster Tree Service, launched earlier this year at the International Franchise Expo in New York, *The Inquirer* (Philadelphia) reported. The Fort Washington, Pa.-based Monster anticipates selling 150 franchise units within eight years.

The franchise fee is about \$40,000. Several territories have been awarded on the East Coast, but no franchises have opened yet.

Monster's franchise disclosure document shows that in 2011, it had more than a half million dollars in EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization) on sales of \$1.46 million. Mark Elson, Monster's director of franchise development, said he's not guaranteeing that level of financial performance for potential franchisees, but that the profit opportunity is there.

“No one really owns this industry,” Elson said. “The opportunity is just phenomenal to be the household name.”

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# INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT

THE GREEN INDUSTRY AT A GLANCE



## CONSUMER CONFIDENCE RISES

Consumer confidence rose in September, according to The Conference Board. The index, which measures how Americans feel about the economy, rose to 70.3 from 61.3 in August. Confidence had declined in August. The reading came in well above the 63 reading that economists surveyed by **Briefing.com** expected, *CNN Money* reports.

## SAFE PARKING TIPS

Parking lot incidents are typically low-speed collisions, but they can lead to expensive repair bills. For fleets, parking lot crashes are some of the most common incidents.

Here are some tips for safe parking, provided by the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS), which sponsors Drive Safely Work Week (Oct. 1-5, 2012). The tips and tools downloadable on [trafficsafety.org](http://trafficsafety.org) are useful for safety training year-round.



**BACK IN, NOT OUT.** Where legal and where parking spaces are not angled, fleet safety experts agree it's safest to back into or pull through a parking space so your vehicle is facing out when it's time to exit.

**GET THE FULL PICTURE.** Having your mirrors properly adjusted for the best possible view is important for all driving maneuvers, but it's particularly so for safely backing into a parking space.

**GET IT STRAIGHT.** Once you've backed in, before exiting the vehicle, turn the wheel to straighten your tires so they are ready for you to drive out safely.

**APPROACH SLOWLY.** When pulling through to a parking space, particularly if there is an SUV or van on either or both sides, go slowly and be alert for other drivers coming from the opposite side that may not see you and could be approaching the same spot.

**IF YOU MUST BACK OUT:** Complete a vehicle walk-around to check for children and other objects before backing out. Once all is clear, exit promptly and cautiously, as conditions may change. Some fleet programs require tapping the horn twice before backing to alert others.

**\$74.9**  
**BILLION**

Revenue forecast for the U.S. landscaping services industry in 2017, according to IBISWorld. Industry revenue is expected to grow 4.2 percent over 2012, largely driven by an increase in per capita disposable income and a 20.1 percent increase in housing starts. Revenue is forecast to rise about 4 percent per year for the next five years.

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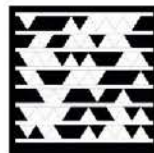
TIPS FOR SMARTER, SAFER  
CHEMICAL APPLICATIONS

By Lauren Wilson | FMC

As an applicator, some of the most important steps you can take to protect yourself and others after working with pesticides are also some of the simplest. Maintaining good personal hygiene helps ensure that family and friends won't come into contact with the powerful materials you use on the job. Be sure to wash your hands and bathe after handling, mixing or applying pesticides. Wash and store your work clothes separately from your regular laundry. Finally, wear clean work clothes and gloves whenever you're likely to come into contact with pesticides.



Lauren Wilson is the Technical Service Representative for FMC Professional Solutions.



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YOUR INSURANCE RESOURCE » BY CASEY PAYTON

## Beware the legal theory of construction defect

LANDSCAPE FIRMS THAT WORK FOR HOME BUILDERS SHOULD SIGN CONTRACTS CAREFULLY.

**S**INCE THE RECESSION, insurance companies are seeing a greater volume of claims from property owners, including construction defect claims. The little things a homeowner may have once ignored are now bringing on lawsuits. A construction defect claim is when a property owner makes a claim that there's something faulty in the construction. Landscapers can easily be brought into these claims, so we asked Hortica's casualty claim manager, Jud Ankrom, to break down what they mean.

While construction defect claims can be made anywhere, Ankrom says Hortica sees most of them in California, Arizona, and Nevada, possibly because court decisions may be more liberal in these states. Whatever the reason, it's a type of claim that can be devastating to a landscape business owner.

For example, say a homeowner contracts with a builder for a new home and the builder subcontracts a number of people to do the work, including a landscape contractor.

"In our experience, the landscape contractor may do only a small bit of work—maybe \$1,200 to install

some shrubs and do some finish grading," Ankrom says. "But the general contractor has made the landscaper sign a contract that says he will hold the general contractor harmless, pay any loss or defend the general contractor against any claims arising out of faulty work."

If the homeowners get into the home and realize it leaks, they will file a suit against the general contractor, who may turn to all the subs to get them on the hook, too. It could cost hundreds of thousands in defense costs, Ankrom says.

"When you're talking about multiplying the lawsuit by 300 or 400 homes—that's huge," Ankrom says. "As a result, we're finding that landscape contractors who do much of their work with national home builders are in a big dilemma. While they like the steady work, they can really be on the hook in construction defect lawsuits. As a result, I've seen these accounts finding it increasingly difficult to get insurance based on the problem of dealing with today's gigantic homebuilders and the growing number of lawsuits in the industry."

### Words of wisdom

Ankrom has a few pieces of advice for landscapers:



**1 Use the help of your legal counsel** when it comes to signing contracts. "I know a lot of landscape contractors scoff at spending \$300 or \$500 an hour for an attorney to review their contracts, but when it comes to the cost of what a potential construction defect claim could be, that's peanuts," Ankrom urges. "You need to go into these contracts with your eyes wide open, and having a professional with your best interest in mind review the contract is critical."

Once the contract is reviewed and you know what you're getting into, Ankrom advises asking for your own protections and for cross agreements. "Everyone should bear his or her own responsibility," he says. "I do understand that with the advent of these 'hold harmless' clauses in contracts, that can be hard. But you need to be bold enough to ask for some protection of your own."

**2 Landscape contractors also should be prepared to have their own subcontractors sign contracts.** "I understand that with the way things are right now, landscape contractors often have to

sign a contract with a 'hold harmless' clause and they don't have a lot of ability to negotiate," says Ankrom. "But I'm astounded how many of those same contractors don't then lock their own subs into agreements where they're held harmless. Say you have an electrician do some outdoor wiring for your landscape project and a fire starts. If you didn't have that electrician sign a contract that holds you harmless from their faulty work, that's now your responsibility. While there may be a common law right of subrogation, you've made your life that much more difficult."

**3 Be prepared to walk away when the risk is too big,** Ankrom adds. "Some jobs just aren't worth taking," he says. "I do realize that in this economy it's hard to walk away from work. But if you're not confident you can fully perform the job or there is looking like a lot of risk involved, you're better off just walking away."

Casey Payton is a freelance writer who has covered the landscape industry for seven years.

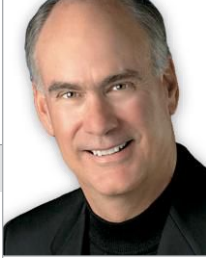
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# THE BENCHMARK

FRANK ROSS

The author is owner-manager of 3PG Consulting. Reach him at frank@3pgconsulting.com.

## Before you fire a customer...

**A**s you think about renewing maintenance agreements for next year, do you identify jobs that are underperformers and develop strategies to deal with them?

For many of us, the thought process is, "I don't really know how the job performed and don't much care. Just let me renew it!"

OK, I get it. None of us wants to see revenue go away. But, if a job is not contributing to the overall goals of the company, you might have to fire the client. I challenge you to face the cruel reality that not every job is a winner. Where to start?

The first thing I would do is run a revenue-per-hour report (see sample report below).

Revenue per hour is calculated by taking the contract amount and subtracting from it all the non-labor costs plus their individual markups. To find those markups, go to your estimating system. There you will find your typical markups for the recovery of overhead and profit. Once you subtract the non-labor costs plus their markups from the contract amount, what you have left is what you earned with your labor, or labor revenue. Divide this amount by labor hours and you have what you earned per labor hour on the job.

Pay particular attention to the gross margin percentages and the revenue per hour. A high-margin job does not necessarily mean a high-profit job.

Analyzing anything using margin percentages can be risky and lead you to the wrong conclusions.

Let's take the first job in our sample report (contract value of \$40,500, revenue per hour of \$17.96). There's every reason to believe this job is a stinker. Our break-even point for performing maintenance work is \$23. This job, at \$17.96, is 26 percent below our break-even point.

Before we fire this client, or any client, here are 10 things to consider:

1. Is the information correct?
2. Is the job part of a larger portfolio? Analyze the entire portfolio to see if this job is the runt.
3. Is there add-on work?
4. Can the job be "value engineered" to make more sense? (Consider its position in the route, the equipment used, mow patterns, etc.)
5. Does the job fill out a route?
6. Did I intentionally low ball this job to create new opportunities? If so, does it still make sense to keep this underperformer?
7. Is this a marquee job?
8. Is this a "loss leader" job to stimulate future opportunities?
9. Are we attempting to keep a predator away from a valued customer?
10. Can we raise the price of the job?

If all justifications are exhausted, raise the price of key underperformers, and if you lose them ... so what?

### SAMPLE REVENUE-PER-HOUR REPORT

Contract amount	Labor hours	Labor cost	Material cost	Sub cost	Other cost	Total job cost	Gross margin	Gross margin %	Revenue per hour
\$40,500	1,750	\$21,000	\$4,650	\$1,000	\$750	\$27,400	\$13,100	32.35	\$17.96
\$23,300	850	\$10,200	\$1,750	0	\$260	\$12,210	\$11,090	47.60	\$23.96
\$12,680	245	\$2,940	\$300	\$5,200	0	\$8,440	\$4,240	33.44	\$24.45
\$7,180	200	\$2,400	\$950	0	0	\$3,350	\$3,830	53.34	\$28.78
\$19,325	650	\$7,800	0	0	0	\$7,800	\$11,525	59.64	\$29.73
\$53,500	1,120	\$13,440	\$5,270	\$5,000	\$1,500	\$25,210	\$28,290	52.88	\$33.75
\$28,570	650	\$7,800	\$1,675	0	0	\$9,475	\$19,095	66.84	\$40.09

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## BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at [bwilson@wilson-oyler.com](mailto:bwilson@wilson-oyler.com).

# The power of planning

**T**his is the time of the year when most companies go through an arduous task: budgeting for next year. At the same time, many firms also engage in strategic planning, crafting a three- or five-year plan.

I've always been enthused by this process. If done well, it's a road map to success and a great tool for tracking performance and continuous improvement.

Unfortunately, despite our best intentions, things go awry. When that happens, the strategic plan is also your best diagnostic tool. One thing I believe in and that always works when we find ourselves off course is engaging in a lessons-learned review that documents the problem and commits to a different solution next time (rather than playing the blame game). I also recommend conducting a quarterly budget analysis, looking at budget-to-actual variances and identifying the reasons for those variances along the way.

This approach lays down the specifics you need to begin your annual budgeting and planning process. Here are some things to consider before you get started:

### Make it strong but keep it simple

- 1 The buck stops and starts in the corner office.** Don't delegate implementation and oversight of the process. As a leader, you set the tone and vision and drive the strategic-planning process. Determine who is going to be involved, how they will be involved and how the broad-based strategy, measurable objectives and specific tasks are going to be assigned and communicated.
- 2 Create a strategic planning task force.** Identify, invite and involve your core team of organizational leaders in the planning process and make them accountable for clearly defined results.
- 3 Set aside time, a day or two or three,** depending on the size of your company, to develop and fine tune your strategic thinking about the future, refine a long-term growth plan for the

company and develop ideas for how you will manage to achieve the budgeted results. The direction you take should be broad enough to include all areas of impact but narrow enough to define a clear path. Make it strong but keep it simple.

- 4 A key part of your plan should include a pivotal employee development initiative** designed to build a high-functioning team that will support your desired growth and provide bench strength.
- 5 Each department should develop its own set of goals** for departmental improvement.
- 6 The strategic planning piece should contain action items,** a timeline for deliverables and a point person responsible for each initiative.
- 7 Establish a quarterly review** to analyze milestone and status updates of all initiatives. (I recommend having new initiatives completed by the start of the busy season.)

### How helpful are facilitators?

Because each company has a unique situation, a facilitator can help you articulate your company's needs and show you the tools and techniques that will help you achieve the results you want in a manner that works best for you.

A facilitator can help create a vision or review a vision in the context of your goals, help set goals and objectives and develop a well-thought-out action plan.

A facilitator also provides neutrality that enables candid participation, removing barriers to good participation, creating an open discussion on issues and generating ideas from staff that they might not otherwise share with senior management.

If your company is overwhelmed by tactical efforts and pet projects, you may reach your goals, but it may take you a little longer and it will certainly be more difficult. Aligning with a strategy to attain your goals is not achieved by accident.

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## PURPLE DEADNETTLE

*Lamium purpureum*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

▶ With square stems and purple-red flowers, this winter annual closely resembles henbit (*Lamium amplexicaule*).

▶ Opposite leaves with pointed tips often have a purple tinge. Leaves grow on short or long petioles dependent on where the leaf is located on the plant—unlike henbit, where leaves lack petioles.

▶ Purple-red flowers grow in clusters of three to six in the upper leaves.

▶ Deadnettle, a member of the mint family, reproduces by seed.

### CONTROL TIPS

▶ Purple deadnettle germinates in the fall and flowers in the spring. It thrives in thin turf and moist, shady sites.

▶ Dense, lush turf is the best way to reduce spread and encroachment of winter annuals. Properly mow, fertilize and water in spring and summer to minimize thin turf areas.

▶ Apply a preemergent herbicide containing dithiopyr prior to germination in the fall.



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## HENBIT

*Lamium amplexicaule*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

▶ This member of the mint family, from the same genus as purple deadnettle, features a square stem.

▶ Commonly confused with deadnettle, henbit leaves are also opposite—but circular to heart-shaped, without petioles for attachment but with clasping leaves on the petiole.

▶ Pink to purple flowers grow in whorls in the upper leaves without petioles.

▶ Primarily found in turfgrass and landscapes, henbit prefers thin, nutrient-rich soil.

### CONTROL TIPS

▶ Henbit germinates in the fall, reproducing by seed and flowers in spring.

▶ Dense, lush turf is the best way to reduce spread and encroachment of winter annuals. Properly mow, fertilize and water in spring and summer to minimize thin turf areas.

▶ Apply a preemergent herbicide containing isoxaben prior to germination in the fall.

For more information regarding these and other turf weeds—and related control technologies and tips—please visit [www.DowProvesIt.com](http://www.DowProvesIt.com) or call 800/255-3726.

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HOW-TO



# Define and manage your brand

BY LARA MOFFAT

**W**hen was the last time you evaluated your brand? What process did you use to define it, and how have you managed your brand? What's branding? Simply, branding is how you and your business are viewed in the marketplace. However, it's not that simple. A brand takes a process to create, time to develop and consistency to endure.

Branding isn't solely a marketing concept—it plays a part of how every aspect of your business is communicated and perceived. The saying might be cliché, but perception is reality in the eyes of the consumer, and you want to be perceived favorably. Think about all the contact you have with your team, clients and community. How are you and your business viewed?

When defining your brand, there are several basic questions to ask:

1. What core services or products do we offer?
2. Are we servicing what our market wants?
3. Do we need to modify our business model?
4. How are we perceived by our employees, clients, competition and prospects?
5. Does our team have a clear understanding of its role in our success?

By answering these questions, you'll be on your way to clearly specifying your services, identifying your market and differentiating your company, which will help determine how to manage your brand. Use the following guidelines to help define your brand and develop a plan.

**STATE WHAT SERVICES OR PRODUCTS YOU'LL OFFER.** The more specific you are about stating what you do, the more likely you'll be able to communicate accurate messaging to the community. This includes internally to your team and externally to your customers, industry colleagues and prospects. If you're routinely contacted by consumers about services you don't offer, it's time to review what message (i.e., promotional materials) you're sending to prospects.

**DETERMINE WHAT MOTIVATES THE DECISION MAKERS IN YOUR KEY MARKET.** Knowing your target audience is essential to

marketing to any given audience effectively. Identify the consumer behavior—the study of when, why, how and where people do or don't buy a product or service—that motivates your specific group. Consumer behavior will vary greatly from residential to commercial and from tree sales to high-end landscape construction projects. Additionally, it's important to note people don't buy a service because of it; they buy it because of its benefits.

**PROMOTE WHAT DIFFERENTIATES YOUR COMPANY FROM ANOTHER.**

At first glance, many landscape companies offer the same services from the consumer's perspective. But your clients aren't concerned with the service—it's the benefits they receive that are paramount. Define a personality that speaks authentically to your target audience, business model and community culture. Focus on a client's lifestyle, a company's involvement within the community or its sustainable practices.

**NOW IT'S TIME TO MANAGE YOUR BRAND.** Develop a plan that reviews and integrates all contacts your business has with the marketplace: employees, clients, industry colleagues, collateral, marketing, equipment, etc. Every impression makes an impact on branding, and professionalism tops the list as the way to build a positive brand. Think about the individuals you respect. I bet you have a high regard for them because they're professional in the way they talk, act and look. The same is true for your business.

Train your employees to be professional by valuing what they do, and that investment will have a high return. By engaging your staff and making it aware of the business direction, you'll build ownership and develop a team mentality. Set expectations first through leading by example and second by holding yourself accountable. Put tools and guidelines in place that enable all to achieve. Then expect attention to detail, from the cleanliness of the fleet to the consistency of marketing materials. Acknowledge the successes, and constructively correct the misses.

Each year devise a focus. During



**QUICK TIP**

Determine what motivates the decision makers in your key market.



the initial year, work with your entire team, from senior managers through crew members, and lead exercises that provide them with the basis to communicate your brand. Start with a clear and concise mission statement or tagline—a succinct version of an elevator speech. Ensure everyone understands and lives it. Remind them about the message in speech, conduct and print. Share it in press releases, promotional materials and conversations with clients and colleagues. By embodying and embracing your brand, your company will be difficult to miss in the marketplace. **LM**

*Moffat, former director of marketing and recruitment for Lambert Landscape Co. in Dallas, is principal of LM Creative Consulting. Contact her at [Lara@LMCreativeConsulting.com](mailto:Lara@LMCreativeConsulting.com).*



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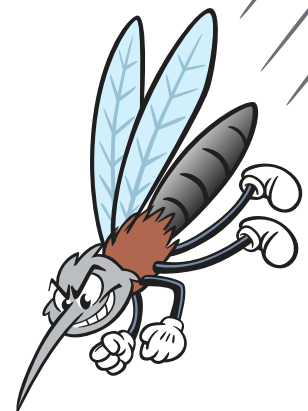
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HOW-TO

# Overcome exit-planning myths

BY JEFF HARKNESS

**H**ave you heard the phrase timing is everything? It's difficult to make money these days, which are different compared to five or 10 years ago. The economy, immigration reform, fuel costs, taxes, Obamacare and pricing competition keep companies guessing and on their toes.

So, what's your plan? Do you have an exit strategy? Do you have an operating strategy that coordinates with your exit plan? Are better days ahead after November? Take control, and start planning.

The bottom line is you have to be a smarter owner, with better people and processes. Success requires thinking

differently and takes planning with the right team of advisors. You need people who challenge you, not just "yes" men who charge a fee.

Too many advisors say you're ready and tell you there are tons of buyers in the space, but we don't see it that way. You miss vacations, school events and ballgames. You work long hours and fight fires daily, but the sacrifices are worth it because you've built a thriving business.

Negative factors and risk surround the industry, so where are you headed? How and when do you cash in your chips? You only get one shot at your exit, so get it right.

Start by sifting through the advice from accountants, attorneys, consultants, business brokers and former business owners who

suddenly are experts in deal-making. Avoid making mistakes by addressing the following three myths.

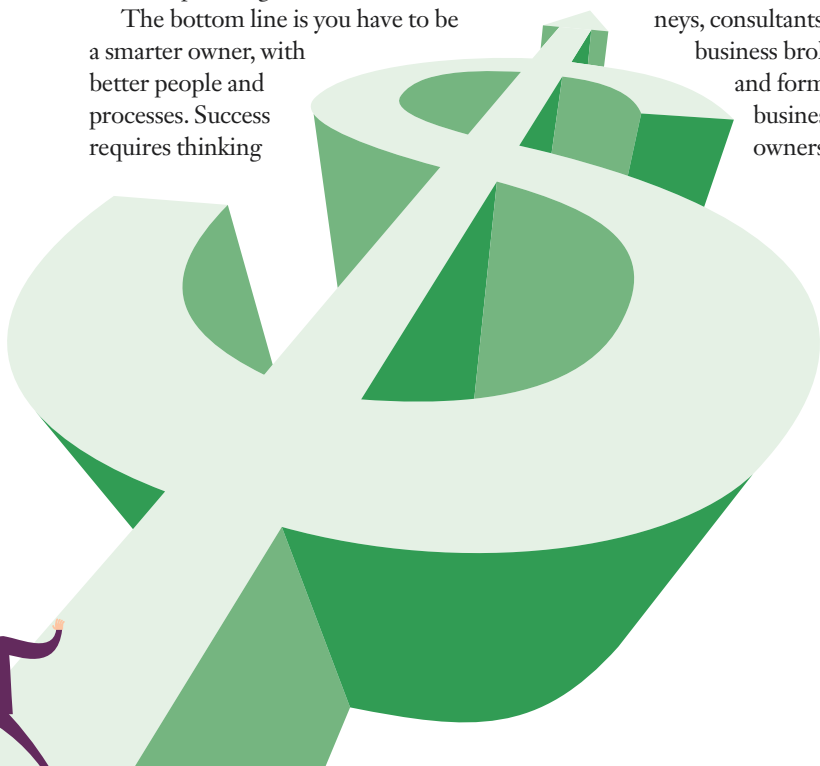
## #1 Private equity is an option for most sellers.

The industry is full of companies backed or owned 100 percent by private equity firms. Success stories exist, but most private equity companies (those not already operating in the industry as competitors and buyers) are only interested in companies that drive \$2 million to \$3 million in adjusted EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, amortization and add-backs). The revenue base must be reoccurring, typically with commercial maintenance contracts or turf care service. Size and scalability are important but so is a strong and deep management team.

Most landscaping companies don't fit that size and earnings profile. There are probably better options available than private equity. Beware of the talk that private equity is a great option and readily available. Know who you are and what options are in play for your company.

Second, private equity buyers purchase controlling interest; thus, selling anything less than 100 percent of your company (51 percent or more) means you don't call the shots. You might be able to make day-to-day decisions, but if push comes to shove or the business isn't performing, you're the guy who gets kicked to the curb.

*continued on page 24*





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*continued from page 22*

Deal structure and documentation are negotiable but important. While this strategy isn't impossible to make work, there must be unique circumstances, agreements, a common vision and a business model to make it work.

### #2 Your company is worth your revenue or five times your earnings.

Earnings, or free cash, drive the value of your organization, not revenue. The more profitable a company is, the more valuable it is. Historical performance of more than 12 months becomes less important in a value analysis.

Given uncertain market conditions, a look at a company's trailing 12-month performance becomes important. How are you trending? Are you on budget for your 2012 plan? Reporting strong earnings often counters what companies do for tax planning purposes (i.e., show as little profit as possible).

**YOUR DEAL AND STRUCTURE WILL ONLY BE AS GOOD AS THE TEAM WHO NEGOTIATES IT. BEWARE—THE INDUSTRY IS FULL OF PRETENDERS.**

We support not paying more taxes than necessary, but this becomes a balancing-act equation, and it's important to coordinate a profit plan with tax planning and the timing of an exit. Be diligent when recasting financial performance to include add-backs, depreciation and interest. An updated valuation should become standard practice in an organization

following close-out of a company's fiscal year.

Next, don't discount or ignore the importance of your company's value drivers or detractors. Is your company marketable? Revenue ruling 59-60 defines value as: "the price at which the property would change hands between a willing buyer and a willing seller when the former is not under any compulsion to buy and the latter is not under any compulsion to sell, both parties having reasonable knowledge of the relevant facts."

Translation: It's worth something only if someone will write you a check. So what factors are important, and how do they affect your multiple? Consider these factors carefully and have an execution plan:

- › intangible value, such as goodwill and recurring revenue accounts;
- › financial ability to generate an ongoing profit stream;
- › condition of equipment and fleet;
- › type of business and its financial and market history;
- › economic outlook for the industry in

- which the business resides;
- › stability of workforce and structure of the management team;
- › strength of a company's balance sheet; and
- › strong financial reporting and operating systems.

Industry, keep looking. Make sure your operating plan coordinates with your exit strategy, and get it done. **LM**

*Harkness is a landscape management consultant with 3PG Consulting. Contact him at [jeff@3PGConsulting.com](mailto:jeff@3PGConsulting.com).*



#### QUICK TIP

Beware of the talk that private equity is a great option and readily available. Know who you are and what options are in play for your company.

### #3 The amount of purchase price determines whether a deal gets done.

Each deal is unique. In every transaction, there are motivating factors for sellers and buyers. Owners need specific answers to the following questions:

- › What are your goals?
- › Have you quantified them?
- › What's your timeline?
- › What's the market bearing?
- › What are the tax consequences?
- › Is the company built and positioned to be marketable?
- › If you keep operating the way you are, what impact will time have on your value?
- › What risks exist in my industry and business?

A sound exit strategy often is time executed and planned throughout a 24-month period. Market conditions have an impact on deal structure, which means how and when someone gets their money. Structure kills more deals than valuation or purchase price, which can include or exclude balance sheet adjustments (debt and working capital), require owner financing, include/exclude real estate, and involve employment agreements and noncompetition arrangements. Often, earnouts or payouts are tied to profit or revenue. Getting paid 100 percent cash at closing is rare because of economic conditions, pricing and competition; however, conditions and terms are negotiable.

Your deal and structure only will be as good as the team who negotiates it. Beware—the industry is full of pretenders. If an advisory team hasn't closed more than 12 deals in the Green

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HOW-TO

# Understand SEO

BY CHRIS HEILER

**S**earch engine optimization (SEO) seems like such a dirty term, yet it has a tantalizing, almost magical, aura about it. SEO doesn't require a degree in rocket science, but it requires a basic understanding of how search engines work and a healthy dose of common sense.

SEO isn't easy. An ongoing effort is required to rank consistently in the search engine results pages. There's no one-time fix. Sure, your website needs to be designed with SEO in mind, but you also have to create meaningful content regularly and participate in social media.

Search engines such as Google and Bing reward web pages with the right combination of ranking factors or signals. SEO is about ensuring that the content on your website generates the right type of signals. We're

going to cover the most important signals, on page and off page, that impact your website rankings.

## On-page SEO

On-page SEO refers to how you optimize the pages on your website to rank higher in search engine results pages (SERPs). There are three primary on-page ranking factors or signals: the website content, site HTML and site architecture.

**CONTENT.** Each page on your website has an opportunity to rank in SERPs for specific keyword phrases. This is why creating content regularly, typically by blogging, is so critical to ranking high and frequently in SERPs. The search engines love fresh content. Websites regularly updated with original content are considered more relevant and credible.

While search engines love fresh, original content, they also look for signals such as quality and relevancy of content, which means creating well-written, substantial content that's relevant and timely to site visitors. Using common keyword phrases people are searching for

online is a strong signal to the search engines. Keyword usage contributes to 26 percent of a rankings impact, according to the 2011 "Search Engine Ranking Factors" report by SEOMoz. If you're not using keywords properly on your site, you're going to fall short in the rankings.

**HTML.** The meta descriptions, title tags and keywords on your site need to represent what your site is all about—showing the search engines you're credible and you know what you're doing. Title tags and meta data (like keywords) need to be relevant and support each specific page on your site.

**ARCHITECTURE.** Make it easy for search engines to crawl your site and index all your pages. Your site's navigation plays a key role—make sure it's consistent from page to page and your web pages are organized logically. Speed, as in page-load time, is also a strong signal to search engines. The faster your site loads the better. If you have many images on your site, these could be inadvertently slowing down your load times.

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**QUICK TIP**

Your website needs to be designed with SEO in mind, but you also have to create meaningful content regularly and participate in social media.

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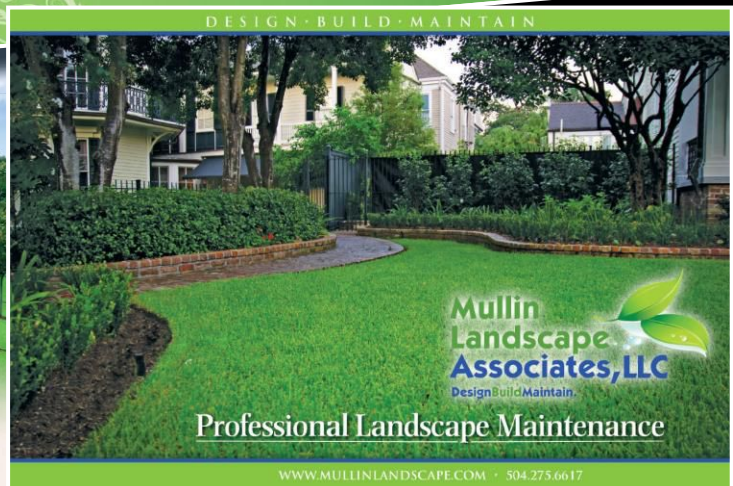
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*continued from page 26*

### Off-page SEO

Off-page ranking signals might be more important than the on-page ranking factors. And what happens off-site is much more difficult for you to control. This is where reputation and trust come into play and why inbound links and social media are so critical to determine how your website's pages rank.

**LINKS.** Inbound links to your website drive search rankings more than any other factor—they account for 42 percent of impact, according to the “Search Engine Ranking Factors” report. Companies that blog regularly have 97 percent more inbound links than companies that don't, according to HubSpot's “State

**INBOUND LINKS TO YOUR WEBSITE DRIVE SEARCH RANKINGS MORE THAN ANY OTHER FACTOR—THEY ACCOUNT FOR 42 PERCENT OF IMPACT, ACCORDING TO SEOMOZ'S “SEARCH ENGINE RANKING FACTORS” REPORT.**

of Inbound Marketing” report. The data clearly illustrate the importance of content and how vital it is to attract valuable inbound links. The bottom line is if you're not creating original content regularly, no one is linking to your site.

When it comes to inbound links, the total number of links isn't the only factor. The quality of the inbound links is an even stronger signal to the search engines. You need inbound links from relevant, credible, highly authoritative sites if you want to rank high in the SERPs.

**SOCIAL.** Social media contributes to 7 percent of the rankings impact, according to “Search Engine Ranking Factors.” The impact of social signals on the SERPs is only going to increase in the coming months and years. It's all about reputation and relevance. Are people talking about your business online? Are they sharing your content? Are they interacting with your content by liking it, retweeting or giving it a +1 on Google+? These are strong social signals that point to how relevant your business is online. If you're nowhere

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to be found, and no one is talking about you, the search engines see your business as less relevant and reputable.

**TRUST.** There are a couple of factors at play as it relates to trust—history and authority. Websites that have a long history are seen as more trustworthy to the search engines. It's similar to how your customers might view your business: Experience can be a strong signal of trust and authority. Search engines also consider how long your domain name has been registered. Always maintain your domain's expiration date a minimum of two years into the future.

Also, do the links you're sharing on your site make you a trusted authority? If you're linking to irrelevant websites from your site, it can be a strong signal to the search engines that tarnishes your authority and ultimately damages your rankings.



**SEARCH ENGINES CONSIDER HOW LONG YOUR DOMAIN NAME HAS BEEN REGISTERED.**

**ALWAYS MAINTAIN YOUR DOMAIN'S EXPIRATION DATE A MINIMUM OF TWO YEARS INTO THE FUTURE.**

**PERSONAL.** How your site appears in the rankings is partially determined by the individual conducting the search. If the individual is in your local community, he or she is more likely to find your business. Social signals are starting to play a role, which personalizes the search experience even more based on your social graph. Google and Bing have introduced these social signals into search within the past year.

The SEO world and search engines have evolved considerably during the past 10 years, most dramatically during

the past three years, with social media signals playing a key factor in how websites rank. The search engines will continue to get better at serving up relevant results for users. It's up to you to take the proper steps to remain relevant in the eyes of the search engines. **LM**

*Heiler is the founder and president of Landscape Leadership, an inbound marketing agency that combines social media, content marketing and search marketing into integrated and measurable campaigns. Contact him via [LandscapeLeadership.com](http://LandscapeLeadership.com).*

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HOW-TO

# Analyze your equipment fleet

BY KEVIN SABOURIN



It's that time of year again. Time to sharpen the pencils, clean the eyeglasses and put new batteries in the old calculator. But business planning doesn't have to be so difficult.

Close your fiscal snapshot by finishing the financial aspects of your new business plan, establishing new sales goals and reviewing your human capital needs. Now's the perfect time to reflect on last year and determine what worked and what didn't. Take a close look at one important part of your business plan that has huge implications for operational efficiency, employee retention and the bottom line—your fleet.

Fleet management—equipment costs and how well the fleet integrates with the entire operation—is one of the biggest challenges landscape contractors face every year. A fleet affects everything from employee happiness and engagement to your profitability. Sound fleet planning can't be taken for granted. You can't make poor fleet decisions and not expect it to affect other areas of your business plan.

Consider several factors about what makes a sound fleet and how it impacts your planning:

- › Does the equipment handle your jobs efficiently and effectively?
- › Does your equipment work well, or is there a lot of repair work because of its age?
- › Do you have the right equipment for the bids you're getting, or do you have to make do?
- › Are you meeting your financial goals based on your fleet's cost against the bids earned?

These questions can be viewed from the perspective of the company owner, operator and customer. If your fleet gets the job done but is old and difficult to operate:

- › The owner might be happy because he's saved the cost of new equipment, but his head is in the sand regarding the upkeep cost and inefficiencies of old equipment.

- › The operator, like the equipment, will be worn out. It takes a lot of effort to maintain a piece of equipment that no longer does the job effectively.
- › Customers, noticing the inefficient equipment, might question how the job was bid and how you manage your business. Because a customer's perception of the success or failure of your business is often based on equipment.

If the wrong machine for the job or too much machine shows up:

- › The owner will have productivity and expense tied up in a suboptimized unit capable of much more work.
- › The operator is likely to be happy with too much machine (it makes quick work of the task), but they'll be unhappy to have to make do with a machine that's not right for the job.
- › The customer could either be confident in your company resources or concerned about potential collateral damage from unnecessarily large machines operating on site. And the expense of the new equipment, which is passed on to them in higher job costs, could also be of concern.

Next, examine how you organize your jobs, by route or job type. The route approach requires nimble units closely bundled because of their physical proximity. The job type allows for more highly specialized pieces built for the task at hand. However, it sacrifices some of the geographic benefits of minimized travel time. Maybe you use a mixture of route and job types.

If your equipment deducts from, rather than contributes to, your financial goals:

- › The owner's financial goals won't be met if the equip-



### QUICK TIP

The total-cost-of-ownership model concludes it's time to dispose of a piece of equipment when the expense of an asset is greater than the return.

ment is overused or underused or if maintenance and repair costs outpace the income from jobs.

- The operator will struggle financially if compensation is based on job cost containment.
- Customers likely will be unaware of the company's inability to reach its goals, but they'll notice the higher bid and cost numbers in an attempt to balance goals better. Customers might not vocalize their frustration, then switch to a competitor that can meet its goals without higher prices.

After an analysis, you might determine your fleet doesn't match your needs for the upcoming business year. You might therefore decide that it's time to make changes. That means disposing of a portion of your fleet while paying close attention to the total cost of ownership (TCO) and fair market value (FMV) to recoup as much of your financial losses as you possibly can.

TCO consists of 1). a systematic accounting of all costs, direct and indirect, relating to an investment decision or acquisition, and 2). a model for managing an asset using data

to analyze and establish best practices. The TCO model concludes it's time to dispose of a piece of equipment when the expense of an asset is greater than the return.

Effective disposition is based on FMV, which is an estimate of the external market value of an asset based on what a knowledgeable, willing and unpressured buyer would likely pay a knowledgeable, willing and unpressured seller in the open market. FMV differs from the intrinsic value one might place on the same asset based on his preferences, biases or extenuating circumstances.

By closely analyzing your fleet you will take the guesswork out of this far-reaching portion of your plan. Inspect your fleet's age and maintenance costs, study them in relation to your jobs, and look closely at each job's costs in relation to your fleet. The data will paint a clear picture of your year, taking you one step closer to a confident and easy business planning process. **LM**

*Sabourin, a former national accounts manager for The Toro Co., is president of EquipmentSite.com. Contact him at Kevin.Sabourin@equipmentsite.com.*

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HOW-TO

# Better manage your time

BY PHIL HARWOOD

**M**any business owners, executives and managers struggle to manage their time well. Despite their best efforts, they're unable to stay on top of everything coming their way. Some even have trouble deciding what to do, what not to do and when to do it.

Most busy people have tried various time management or organizational systems. Some have given up because of the complexity of these systems or the weight of the burden they place on a person. A good time management system is simple, easy to use and results in less stress and anxiety.

Busy people who have many responsibilities are prone to becoming overwhelmed by worrying about everything in their lives. They can't concentrate and be productive because of the noise in their heads, constantly reminding them about all the things they need to do.

Albert Einstein said, "A happy man is too satisfied with the present to dwell too much on the future." Notice he doesn't say we shouldn't think about the future or plan for

it because we need to live our lives. When the burdens of tomorrow overwhelm you so much that you can't focus on what you need to accomplish, you can become paralyzed, confused and depressed.

Jesus said, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes." An effective time management system will reduce your tendency to worry about things you shouldn't.

In the mid-1990s, I was introduced to a time management system outlined in the book "Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity" by David Allen. Before this, I was dutifully using Franklin Planner tools with limited success.

For the first time, I could envision a comprehensive system for organizing and keeping control of my personal and professional life, using a simple, easy-to-understand methodology. I embraced the system and began to implement it immediately. (See "Web Extra" at the top of page 33.) As you'll see, the system is simple; the entire system diagram fits on one page. Being easy to understand allows easier implementation and use.

The beginning point of the "Getting Things Done" system is with our *stuff*—everything in our lives we need or want to deal with. Stuff comes to us differently. We receive phone calls, emails, mail, memos, packages, text

messages, Facebook messages and LinkedIn messages. Additionally, we have reoccurring and one-time tasks to accomplish. We have personal and business stuff. We also have stuff we should be doing that isn't written down or doesn't appear in our inbox. We want to:

- spend more time with our children, parents and neighbors;
- volunteer on a committee;
- vacation in a special place; and
- accomplish everything on our bucket list.

All of our stuff needs to be captured and entered into a system, which seems like a huge undertaking but isn't. Once committed to a system, you capture stuff and enter it constantly. In a relatively short time, all the stuff will be dealt with.

The beauty of the system is it helps capture and organize stuff and enables us to not waste time on stuff we shouldn't be wasting time on. Without an effective time management system, it's too easy to waste precious time and energy.

Much of our stuff doesn't require action: e-newsletters, advertisements, catalogs, etc. When stuff isn't actionable, we have three options:

1. eliminate it immediately;
2. file it away for review at a later date; or
3. take action when no action is required.

We become distracted and stop what we're doing. We drift off mentally and lose focus because we don't have a clear sense of our priorities



**QUICK TIP**

All of our stuff needs to be captured and entered into a system, which seems like a huge undertaking but isn't. Once committed to a system, stuff is constantly captured and entered.



**WEB EXTRA** → For a diagram and overview of the time management system Harwood uses, visit [landscapemanagement.net/2012/09/27/timemanagement/](http://landscapemanagement.net/2012/09/27/timemanagement/).

## A GOOD TIME MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IS SIMPLE, EASY TO USE AND RESULTS IN LESS STRESS AND ANXIETY.

and what we're supposed to be doing with our time. The distraction doesn't appear to be damaging, but it is.

Much of our stuff is actionable—we need to do something. If this is the case, we need to ask ourselves another question: What's the next action? Once we identify this, we can decide how to deal with it in our system.

There also are three options when stuff is actionable: Do it if it takes less than two minutes to do (option 1). If the item takes more than two minutes, you can delegate it (option 2) or defer it (option 3). Either way, the item stays

in your time management system to ensure it's completed eventually.

When we delegate or defer, we create next actions, which are the next steps that need to be taken to move an item toward completion. Next actions appear in our calendar if they're date specific. They appear in a categorized task list if they're not date specific.

Reviewing our calendars and tasks to determine what needs our attention is the next logical step in the system and must be done regularly. I review my calendar and tasks daily, with a much deeper review once a week. This might be sufficient for you, depending on how fast your world moves. **LM**

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*Harwood is founder, president and CEO of Pro-Motion Consulting. Reach him at [phil@myppmteam.com](mailto:phil@myppmteam.com) or visit [myppmteam.com](http://myppmteam.com) to learn more.*

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HOW-TO

# Prepare for next year

BY KEVIN KEHOE

**P**ainfully aware that any prognostication or prediction might be off base, it's safe to say the 2013 forecast depends on the presidential election this November. At the same time, any change in the national office can't alter the reality that a global economic slowdown will pressure the commercial real estate market, which will affect growth aspirations, profits and access to capital. So, make a business plan that addresses accurate market conditions, your profit and your cash needs.

The following story is a slightly disguised version of a company's experience planning and executing that plan in 2012. We'll call it Company X, and I'll use \$1 million as a fictitious revenue number. The company is larger, but \$1 million makes it easier to understand the financial relationships among the numbers. Although the year hasn't ended, the company is on track. I hope this example serves as a lesson that might inform your decision making and planning processes for 2013. The plan included, but wasn't limited to, the assumption that:

**LABOR COSTS WOULD RISE**—based on the mishandling of the H-2B program, increased labor department rules and regulations, a dysfunctional unemployment policy and the health care uncertainties that remain.

**UNIT PRICING FOR LABOR WOULD REMAIN FLAT**—based on conversations with customers who suggested they were rejecting lowest prices more often (this wasn't true from 2008 to 2010) and were less tolerant of lower quality. (They were calling vendors about their strategy of fewer hours applied to the job to reduce contract prices.)

**INTEREST RATES WOULD REMAIN LOW AND GAS PRICES WOULD REMAIN FLAT**—based on our faith in Ben Bernanke to continue his easy money policies. These conditions would make equipment purchases less expensive. At the same time, the crashing euro would result in dollar-denominated oil prices being less inflationary.

**IMPROVED INFORMATION SYSTEMS WOULD ALLOW REVENUE GROWTH WITHOUT OVERHEAD STAFFING GROWTH**—based on a stubborn refusal to add staff, by benchmarking the return-

on-overhead-dollars-expensed ratio with high-profit companies and the purchase of new software the year before. We had good people, and with proper information, motivation and a clear plan, they could perform small productivity miracles.

Here's how we planned for these assumptions. You can see the results in the tables below.

➤ The first assumption called for a labor cost increase. We increased wages for several key foremen to retain their services. As a result, the average wage rate increased 5 percent, from \$13.33 to \$14 per hour. To offset the cost increase, we planned for a productivity improvement of 6 percent in the return on labor dollar paid from \$2.13 to \$2.25. Given that the high-performance benchmark for this ratio was \$2.40, it suggested we still had room for improvement. Also, the operations people committed to reduce hours through lean management practices across the board. Work could be done more efficiently, saving 6 percent of hours.

➤ The second assumption called for flat unit pricing to the customer. In many cases, we believed we could raise prices on some jobs through the renewal process and still meet the 90 percent retention goal, which we did. We also made salespeople breathe easier when we kept pricing tight on new work. At the same time, we expected them to do a better job qualifying prospects so they wouldn't waste time bidding work where the customer gave us little chance of success and by managing the job specification (occurrences and frequencies) tighter to reduce total hours needed to do the work on a new sale. This would

pressure production to be more efficient and manage the schedule more in tune with the weather (we prayed for a hot, dry summer) and the customers' feedback through account managers. As a result, the adjusted revenue per hour would increase 11 percent, from \$28.33 to \$31.50 per hour.



**QUICK TIP**

**Make a business plan that addresses accurate market conditions, your profit and your cash needs.**

› The third assumption called on stable gas prices and minimal equipment purchases based on tighter route management to reduce drive time and better emphasize minimizing equipment abuse. As a result, our overhead spending for this expense increased 13 percent (\$225,000 from \$200,000). This change was reasonable and in line with the 15 percent revenue increase. We believed we could improve these expenses but erred on the side of caution.

› The fourth assumption called for no additional overhead spending for staff. The 15 percent sales growth was based on an increase of the return on overhead dollars by only 6 percent. This number was well within reasonable, high-profit benchmark performance and no more unnecessary overhead spending. We kept salaries flat and installed a bonus system based on gross profit dollar performance at year's end, when the staff could earn much more than a standard 3 percent raise. At the same time, we barely raised the new sales goal for the salesman from \$250,000 in 2011 to \$252,750 for 2012. The salesman felt it could be accomplished with the more focused approach

and pricing model outlined in the table.

The tables below tell the story of Company X's planning process, from where we started in 2011 to where we wanted to end in 2012. Given tight access to capital, we had to show a near-10 percent profit to drive cash flow. This was the ultimate goal of the planning. Everyone understood how critical it was to achieve this.

The key to making the plan was based on sweating the numbers, involving managers and getting buy-in to the strategy and ownership of the result.

The same type of planning can be used this year when you lay out your goals for growth and profit for 2013. Keep in mind there's no such thing as the perfect plan. General Patton famously said, "No plan survives contact with the enemy." He also said, "An average plan aggressively executed is far better than a perfect plan never completed." Therefore, focus your plan, and see if you don't have a prosperous 2013. *LM*

*Keboe, a Landscape Management columnist, is a consultant with 3PG Consulting. Contact him at kevin@3PGConsulting.com.*

**TABLE 1: COMPANY X**

**BEFORE**

**ACTUAL RESULTS: PROFIT AND LOSS 2011**

Revenue	\$1,000,000	
Labor	\$400,000	40%
Material	\$150,000	15%
Gross profit	\$450,000	45%
Overhead	\$400,000	40%
Net profit	\$50,000	5%

**OVERHEAD**

Supervisory	\$50,000	5%
Fleet/equipment	\$200,000	20%
Rent/office	\$40,000	4%
Marketing	\$20,000	2%
Insurance	\$75,000	7.5%
Computer	\$15,000	1.5%

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$400,000</b>	<b>40%</b>
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Paid production labor hours	\$30,000
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**RATIOS 2012**

Sales growth	11%
Contract revenue retention	85%
New sales made	\$250,000
Average wage rate/hour	\$13.33
Adjusted revenue earned/hour	\$28.33
Return on labor dollar paid	\$2.13
Return on overhead dollars expensed	\$2.50

**TABLE 2: COMPANY X**

**AFTER**

**BUDGET/PLAN: PROFIT AND LOSS 2012**

Revenue	\$1,152,750	
Labor	\$435,483	37.8%
Material	\$172,913	15%
Gross profit	\$544,354	47.2%
Overhead	\$435,000	37.7%
Net profit	\$109,354	9.5%

**OVERHEAD**

Supervisory	\$55,000	4.8%
Fleet/equipment	\$225,000	19.5%
Rent/office	\$40,000	3.5%
Marketing	\$20,000	1.7%
Insurance	\$80,000	6.9%
Computer	\$15,000	1.3%

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$435,000</b>	<b>37.7%</b>
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Paid production labor hours	\$31,106
-----------------------------	----------

**PLANNING RATIOS 2013**

Sales growth	15%
Contract revenue retention	90%
New sales made	\$252,750
Average wage rate/hour	\$14.00
Adjusted revenue earned/hour	\$31.50
Return on labor dollar paid	\$2.25
Return on overhead dollars expensed	\$2.65



Revenue includes contract and extras invoicing. Labor dollars and paid production hours include all payroll expenses (taxes, too) for foremen and crews. Material includes subcontractor costs. Contract retention percentage is based on dollars. The average wage rate equals labor divided by paid production hours. The adjusted revenue earned per hour equals revenue minus materials divided by paid production hours. Return on labor dollar paid equals adjusted revenue earned per hour divided by average wage rate per hour. Return on overhead dollars equals revenue divided by total overhead. The last two ratios are the most consistent ones used to plan and compare companies because they remove regional and local differences in unit labor costs and market unit pricing.

HOW-TO

# Position your company for growth

BY JUDY GUIDO

**W**hile the economic fallout has converted many companies into corpses, it also has attracted many new players to the market, of which about 25 percent will survive. Regardless of the state of the competitive landscape, you need to position your company strategically for sustainable growth.

Let's begin by defining positioning, which is the act of designing a company's offering and image to occupy a distinct place in the mind of the target market, according to Philip Kotler, the father of marketing.

One of the first steps in positioning a company is understanding the position your brand occupies in the stakeholder's mind. This requires objectively assessing and evaluating your brand from their point of view, not yours.

After working with hundreds of companies and conducting primary research about positioning, I've learned only 40 percent of companies assess their brand positioning accurately. Key reasons for this include:

- › large gaps of time between assessments;
- › poorly designed assessments; and
- › assessments conducted by inexperienced people.

Positioning is a strategic, competitive tool. In its simplest form, it pits a brand against its competitor's. It forces the customer to answer the question, "Why should I buy from your company instead of the competition?" One of the key attributes of positioning is mean-



ingful differentiation, so stakeholders can distinguish your offerings from the competition. In a recent research study I conducted with commercial and residential customers, less than 8 percent could articulate or identify any real differentiation among companies.

There are various ways you can differentiate and position yourself: target markets, geographical footprint, product or service, pricing, sales channel and promotion. Additionally, you can differentiate by expertise, equipment, technology or supply chain.

For example, does your supply chain provide a price or time-to-site advantage over your competition? Your position might be that of an innovator whose customer receives the benefits of cost reductions and operational efficiencies. If you're a landscape maintenance provider:

- › Do you offer services your competitors don't, such as storm water management?
- › Do you deliver your services faster and at a lower price?
- › Do you offer expanded hours and days of operation?

- › Do you perform your services seven days a week, whereas the competition limits its service delivery to five days a week?

Perhaps your company positions itself as customer centric, reliable, convenient and easy to do business with. Research shows customers place high value on ease of conducting business, reliability and convenience.

## Communicating your position

You create your brand identity via marketing tools such as brochures, fleet design and a website. A brand image is the view the market has of your company. Identity and image need to be aligned and consistent within the target market you serve. It might come as a surprise, but your brand identity and image might differ by target markets. For example, in an industrial market, you might be positioned as the low-maintenance provider, whereas in a Class-A retail target, you might be positioned as the high-design, colorscape, subject-matter expert.





## QUICK TIP

One of the first steps in positioning a company in target markets is understanding the position your brand occupies in the stakeholder's mind. This requires objectively assessing and evaluating your brand from their point of view, not yours.

When positioning your company, it's critical to know how to read the market. Understanding and identifying market fads, trends and market force de jure are important. A fad is short lived, a trend generally lasts a decade and a market force de jure can last decades. The green and sustainable movement is an example of a market force de jure.

Another key market dynamic to read and understand is real estate. It's also important to analyze demographics and psychographics (why people buy), as well as regulatory, social and political issues.

Buyers dictate what's important and relevant to them, so your positioning needs to be aligned with their world. Is your position relevant to your key buyers? Is your position different or are you simply another commodity claiming to be different? Can you communicate and distinguish the differences? If you're

offering the same services and delivering them the same way at about the same price, you've positioned yourself as a commodity in the eyes of the market. One test is to ask yourself, "Can our position or differentiation be copied easily?"

Common positioning errors include underpositioning, in which the market has a vague idea of your service or product and its differentiation. Conversely, overpositioning occurs when only a small group of prospects can identify with your position. The most common error in our industry is confused positioning, which occurs when a company claims too many benefits or changes its communications too often. There's also doubtful positioning, which takes place when stakeholders don't believe the claims a company is making about its service or product offering, pricing, team or value proposition.

To occupy a meaningful and distinct competitive position in your stakeholders' minds, focus on highlighting:

- › uniqueness;
- › attributes and benefits of product/service;
- › team expertise;
- › operational efficiencies; and
- › innovative equipment or technology.

Highlight and position the meaningful benefits relevant to the customer. Don't claim you're the best at everything; cite specific applications or target groups where your people, service or product are best. Position and prove when you're better than the competition.

So, what kind of position is your company in? **LM**

*Guido is a Green Industry consultant with Guido & Associates. Contact her at [jmguido@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jmguido@sbcglobal.net).*



## WHO'S IN CHARGE OF YOUR FLEET?

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HOW-TO

# Benefit from peer networking

BY JODY SHILAN

**W**e're all familiar with business-to-business networking (B2B) as well as business-to-consumer networking (B2C). Well there's a category of networking that you've likely been involved with for years but rarely think about as a business networking opportunity.

It's what I call C2C networking. No, it's not consumer-to-consumer networking—but contractor to contractor.

Think about it, have you ever borrowed a truck, machine or attachment from one of your “friendly” competitors? Maybe taken some fill or boulders from his or her project and trucked it to yours, saving both of you time and money? You see, you've been C2C networking for years but have never really thought about its true potential or value in helping you grow your business.

Who can better understand what it takes to be a landscape contractor more than another landscape contractor? Unfortunately, most business owners don't want to share anything with their competitors. What if you could strip away the fear of competition and just talk openly and honestly with other Green Industry professionals, sharing your thoughts and opinions on everything from equipment purchases to human resources issues? Even your financials.

These days there are so many opportunities to network with your fellow contractors, whether they are in the next town, the next state or the next country. Learning by trial and error has become way too expensive, and a few bad decisions can put you right out of business. Today you need information from people who have been there and done that and aren't afraid to share. People who will tell it like it is whether you want to hear it or not. People who are landscape contractors themselves.

To be successful at C2C networking you just need to be open to the idea. Here are three opportunities.

## Association involvement

The first and most obvious place to begin your foray into C2C networking is through a landscape association. There is no better source of industry information than another



landscape contractor, and there's no better place to find one than at a landscape contractor association.

If you already belong to one you know the value of membership; if not, just keep reading. Landscape associations, by design, are groups of peers working together to improve their businesses and help the industry as a whole.

At the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association (NJLCA), we have worked very hard to break down the barriers between competing contractors to show them the value of working together. We frequently remind our members that they are not in competition against other NJLCA members; rather, they are competing against non-members, along with every other industry that competes for the same consumer dollars and disposable income that we do. Members are slowly starting to get the message.

Our most highly attended and successful meetings

*continued on page 42*



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*continued from page 40*

occur when one of our own members does a presentation on something his or her company does very well. It could be about snow, lawn maintenance or design/build. Whatever the topic is, when peers talk, everybody listens.

The cost of a state association membership is usually minimal—typically a few hundred dollars per year, depending on the company's size. In addition to the great networking opportunities, member benefits often include a health benefits program, member discounts and educational opportunities.

## Peer groups

Another C2C opportunity is peer groups: collections of professionals (typically six to 12 contractors) who have scheduled meetings, both face to face and via conference calls, to openly discuss their businesses. Peer groups provide more structure to the sharing process than association memberships and are managed by facilitators or consultants. They can be made up of a local group of peers within driving distance of each other or a national

## THE MORE YOU SHARE, THE MORE OTHERS WILL SHARE WITH YOU.



group of landscape contractors that are in different states.

Professionally managed peer groups have specific criteria for their members, such as company size, type and/or geographic location. The cost of these types of peer groups can run anywhere from \$1,500 to

\$10,000 or more a year, depending on the frequency and intensity of the meetings. Meetings can be held once a month, once a quarter or once a year. They can happen in person or via a conference calling bridge.

A great way to try out C2C networking is to attend the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET's) Green Industry Conference (GIC) in Louisville, Ky., held every October, and participate in the Breakfast with Champions event. It features many roundtable discussions, where you and nine peers enjoy breakfast while



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discussing a specific topic that is assigned to your table. One of the greatest things about this event is that you have no idea who's going to sit down with you. It could be anyone from a kid just out of college looking for advice on how to get started in the industry to the owner of a multimillion-dollar landscape company looking to share his or her experiences with you.

PLANET membership ranges from \$340 for a smaller contractor to \$8,820 for companies worth more than \$100 million.

### Social media

If you're still not sure if these opportunities sound good to you, a third and very convenient way to C2C network is online. The business social media site LinkedIn is a great example. There are dozens of "groups" that focus on Green Industry topics and are filled with companies seeking advice or willing to give it on almost any topic. And it's free. I am a member of several of them, including

"Landscape Design-Build" and "Landscape Construction." I also belong to several association groups including Landscape Ontario and the APLD. Outside of LinkedIn there are various landscape and lawn care industry message board sites where many companies get great advice, especially early on in their careers.

One last option to consider is membership websites where you can C2C network through an open discussion forum, weekly conference calls or online virtual peer groups.

However you decide to get involved with C2C networking, I can promise you one thing: The more you share, the more others will share with you.

That's good advice from one contractor to another. **LM**



#### QUICK TIP

**A great way to try out C2C networking is to attend the Green Industry Conference and participate in the Breakfast with Champions event.**

*Shilan, a Landscape Management columnist, is an award-winning landscape designer, consultant and former contractor. He's executive director of the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association and editor of the membership site FromDesign2Build.com.*



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HOW-TO



# Improve your work/life balance

BY JASON CUPP

**A**t some point in their careers, most business owners have to take a hard look in the mirror and address their work/life balance. When I ran my own landscape company, I was a statistic on the work side of the balance—working 70 to 80 hours a week, sometimes seven days a week, including early mornings and late nights. It affected my sleep, health and the success of my company, but hindsight is 20/20.

A lack of an appropriate work/life balance hinders the health of your business. Everything can be at risk—including culture, efficiency, energy and profitability. The solution starts with the owner, CEO or upper management. It comes down to 10 simple, easily executable strategies:

**1 MANAGE YOUR TIME.** Divide your day into blocks of time to execute tasks. If there are three blocks per day, only work two. I used 7 a.m. to noon, noon to 5 p.m., and 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. For example, if I had an evening meeting, I'd likely work noon to 10 p.m. and take the morning off.

**2 WORK FROM HOME.** Working from home can be efficient. Most days, I'd work from home in the morning and go into the office after a lunch meeting. Mornings were project based, and afternoons were client and team based.

**3 HIRE YOUR WEAKNESSES.** It might pay off to invest in your office team, including an executive assistant for yourself. My assistant was my left arm,

so to speak, and was an integral part of my business strategy to help with sales appointments, time management, accountability and executing tasks.

**4 RESIST WEEKEND WORK.** Although weekends are necessary in peak sales and operations times, such as spring, fall and winter events, they also should be held as sacred time off. We often had crews running on Saturday because of weather, but we split Saturdays among our managers, so each one only had to work one out of every six or eight Saturdays.

**5 RETREAT.** It's amazing what a clear mind can do for you when planning and running your business day to day. Several times a year for a few days, I'd retreat by myself to think, reflect, rest and strategize. I was offline during this time, other than an emergency. It refreshed me to be more focused when I was in the office.

**6 VACATION.** It's difficult, but make it happen. Take a few days here and there; then try to take an entire week. Pick a time when business is slower. If you work on building your team, you'll be surprised how well things will run in your absence. Avoid the staycation. Otherwise, if the office is, say, 20 minutes away, you might trek in to work on a few things.

**7 UNPLUG.** We're slaves to our iPhones, laptops, social media and the Internet. Unplug a few hours a day. Try to schedule time for phone calls rather than just answering your phone on a whim.

It might cost you 45 minutes when you don't have that much time to give.

**8 SCHEDULE.** Use your schedule to accomplish tasks. Big client

contract you need to write? Schedule it. Need to review your financials? Schedule it. Blocking off time to accomplish tasks allowed my day to be less free flowing, and I accomplished more quicker.

**9 JOIN A PEER GROUP.** Consider meeting regularly with a peer group to provide accountability and serve as a sounding board for the challenges of running a business. None of mine were in the Green Industry; they were local and served as lead generators.

**10 INVEST IN YOURSELF.** Most business owners spend a lot of time investing in their teams and ignore themselves. Hitting the gym, networking at a local charity, donating your time to a worthwhile cause or scheduling a massage are all things that are investments in you, which is OK. An investment in ourselves re-energizes our business minds and our bodies.

I hope these tips help you regain control of your work/life balance struggle. Don't stop with you. Chances are everyone in your organization can benefit from a company culture that values individuals' time, so consider the investment. The effect could be tenfold when your employees are afforded the same luxury of focusing on themselves rather than work every second of the day. The results—in company culture and the bottom line—will be dramatic. **LM**

*Cupp is a former Green Industry CEO turned Kolbe Certified Growth Consultant. Follow him on Twitter @jasoncupp or visit [jasoncupp.com](http://jasoncupp.com).*



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HOW-TO

# Fire an employee

BY BILL ARMAN

**W**hen it comes time to fire an employee, there are many questions and concerns—fears of discrimination, wrongful termination, retaliation—that can weigh heavily on landscape contractors’ minds and pocketbooks. So let’s review the fundamental process for conducting an employee termination fairly, correctly and consistently.

To start, be prepared. Collect the facts, review them and interpret them objectively. Ask:

**WHAT DOES HIS LAST PERFORMANCE REVIEW LOOK LIKE?** Invariably, when I ask this question, the answer is “I don’t know” or “We haven’t done performance reviews for a while—actually, ever.”

**ARE PERFORMANCE OR BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS WELL DOCUMENTED?** If there are problems with an employee, it must be reflected in his performance reviews. If there’s no documentation, then you might need to rethink your plan.

**ARE THERE ANY WRITTEN WARNINGS?** Has the company made it clear to the employee that if his behavior or lack of performance continues his job is in jeopardy? Written warnings must explicitly state to employees the consequences of not improving their performance. Managers need to be clear (in writing and signed) that whatever the employee is doing or not doing could result in job loss.

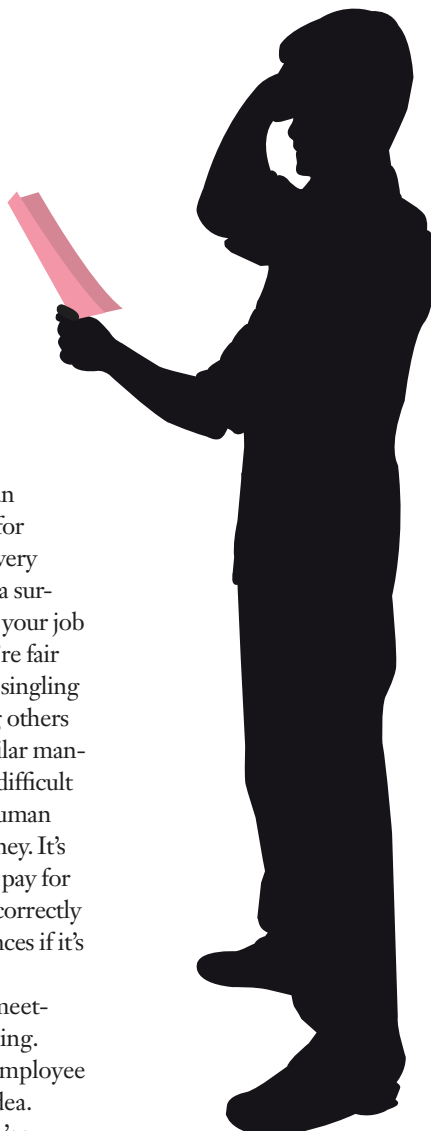
Without documentation, an employee has a stronger case for wrongful termination. At the very least, being fired shouldn’t be a surprise. If it is, you haven’t done your job as a fair leader. Be certain you’re fair and consistent and you’re not singling out this person while allowing others to perform or behave in a similar manner. If you have a particularly difficult issue, seek assistance from a human resource expert or labor attorney. It’s considerably less expensive to pay for expertise to fire an employee correctly than paying for the consequences if it’s done incorrectly.

Plan for the termination meeting by scripting it and practicing. Winging a meeting with an employee you’re going to fire is a bad idea. If you don’t prepare what you’re going to say to the employee, you could speak out of turn, and your comments could be fodder for a lawsuit. Determine who’s going to say what during the meeting. Let the employee know the purpose of the meeting from the start. Determine what’s going to happen after the

meeting and who’s going to do what. For example, will you need to take the terminated employee home?

If the termination is because of a chronic performance problem, a fundamental script should be used: “As you know, you and I have had several meetings during the past several weeks/months to discuss your performance-related problems (e.g., interpersonal skills, accuracy of work, not wearing personal protective equipment, etc.). Despite that documented coaching, your performance hasn’t improved to the required level of your position and is negatively affecting company operations. As such, today will be your last day of employment with the company.”

*continued on page 48*



**QUICK TIP**

**Remember to show respect and dignity. Employees at all levels deserve to be treated well when their employment is being terminated, whether it's because of performance, behavior or financial reasons.**



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MANAGERS WHO FEEL BAD ABOUT HAVING TO FIRE AN EMPLOYEE SOMETIMES WILL TRY TO SOFTEN THE BLOW TO THE EMPLOYEE DURING THE MEETING. BE CONCISE AND TO THE POINT. STICK TO YOUR LINE.

*continued from page 46*

If the termination is because of a significant policy violation, a different fundamental script should be used: “An investigation has provided us with evidence you violated company policy (i.e., sexual harassment, alcohol use, time card fraud) on (specify date). As stated in the employee handbook you signed (specify date), that policy violation results in employee termination. As such, today will be your last day of employment with the company.”

Make sure you have everything ready to go:

- › Cut the employee’s final paycheck and include pay for any unused vacation.
- › Have the termination form acknowledging administrative details ready to sign.
- › Provide the employee with a COBRA notice so he or she knows how much it will cost to continue health insurance.
- › Provide 401K information.
- › Where appropriate, provide transportation home. Don’t let him or her take a company vehicle home.

### **Plan the details**

Planning the details of the termination helps demonstrate respect for the employee. This will show you care enough about the employee to think about the questions and issues he or she will face.

Do it in person, not through email, a letter or over the phone. Remain calm, and be prepared for potential responses such as swearing or crying. Make it quick, about 20 minutes maximum. Have two people other than the employee present—one person should be the point communicator and the other is the witness. Conduct the meeting in a quiet, private space with no interruptions and when few people are around.

Remember to cut to the chase. For example, “Bob, we’re meeting today because we need to let you go. Today is your last day here.” If the employee asks why they’re getting fired, have a line and stick to it. For example: “We’ve discussed your performance or behavior several times.

*continued on page 73*

A SUPPLEMENT TO

# Landscape Management

THE  
INDUSTRY  
PULSE

2012

# THE GOOD BAD & UGLY



Green Industry optimism is up. Still, many firms haven't recovered from the recession and are struggling with tough weather years.

## INSIDE

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# Finding opportunity



**Dan Ariens**  
President  
Ariens Co.  
Manufacturer of  
Gravely Commercial Equipment

**A**s we move into the next lawn and garden season it seems the media is still serving us a steady diet of doom and gloom. Certainly the nature of the current U.S. economy makes our jobs as business owners more challenging. But I've always believed you can find opportunity in any kind of economy. My great-grandfather started our family business in 1933 in the midst of the Great Depression. He had to set his priorities, stay focused and challenge the doom-and-gloom mindset that surrounded him at that time. But with a small loan borrowed against his life insurance policy, he slowly and steadily grew a business that would go on to sustain three more generations of employees.

Despite the negative news about the economy, there are many landscape businesses that are not only surviving, but thriving, in this uncertain market. I personally choose to focus on improving efficiencies in my business and use any downtime to get best prepared for the imminent upswing. One advantage of an uncertain economy is that it forces focus—whether we like it or not. It's times like this when all business owners need to monitor their business, manage their cash and even reassess their profit structure.

Whatever position you find your business in as we go into the next year, we all need a clear focus on profitable growth. Selling short your services is not a viable business model. It only will catch up in the near future and it will hurt the entire Green Industry in the long run. As an industry, we need to find new opportunity to create value for our customers—even if it means finding more and more creative ways to do so.

Certainly, all of our success hinges on the weather to a certain extent, but there are many positive indicators that show we are moving in the right direction as an industry. Use this downtime to make sure you will come out of the gate strong, healthy and re-energized for your most successful year yet!

---

*Despite the negative news about the economy, there are many landscape businesses that are not only surviving, but thriving, in this uncertain market.*

---



By Marisa Palmieri / Editor

# THE GOOD BAD & UGLY



*Green Industry optimism is up. Still, many firms haven't recovered from the recession and are struggling with tough weather years.*

**T**he good: There's a swing in the number of landscape and lawn care professionals calling the industry "healthy" versus "flat" or "down" compared to last year. (See "Pulse check" on page S5).

The bad: More than a quarter of industry members say they're "uncertain" about 2013 and 5 percent say they're "pessimistic" about next year (See "Optimism index," on page S5). (Last year only 12 percent were uncertain and 10 percent were pessimistic.)

And the ugly: Many companies were hit by back-to-back bad weather seasons with little snow in 2011-2012 and a historic drought in the spring and summer.

Still, companies report a 7.5 percent increase in gross revenue from 2010 to 2011 and are anticipating a 17 percent bump in revenue from 2011 to 2012. Many industries would be happy to have that growth in a post-recessionary economy. When it comes to profits, although a quarter of companies expect net profits to be less than 4 percent, 41 percent expect 10 percent or more. (See chart on page S7.)

## On the upswing

John Newman is happy to report his company will meet its goal for 2012 of \$500,000 in revenue, which is back to the level it hit in 2008—before it started feeling the effects of the recession. That

half-million dollar mark is about 30 percent up from last year.

"We're excited because it's not just top-line growth, it's bottom-line growth," says the president of Classic Landscapes in Hampton, Ga. He attributes that growth to marketing (direct mail and some social media) and forming a maintenance division over the past few years. Residential maintenance now makes up 25 percent of the business. Previously it was 100 percent design/build. Newman is also encouraged by "little signs" he sees that tell him the industry's on the upswing. For example, his main landscape supply vendor's delivery board is fuller this year than the past few. And he just got news of a thousand-acre development underway in his area.

"That fired me up," he says. "It's one little sign that a turnaround is coming." Newman plans for 10 percent growth for 2013.

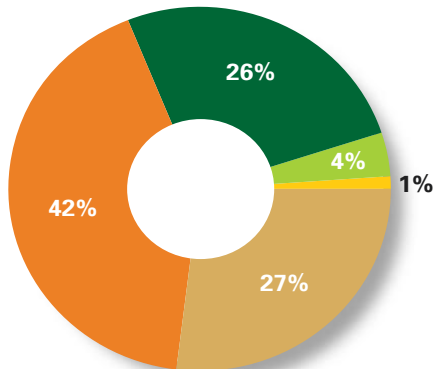
Jeff Bowen, owner of Stuart, Fla.-based Images of Green also says the economy is getting better. "I think it's improving, at least here," he says. "One way I can tell is by the number of what I call the 'no-name landscapers,' that pop up, and we have as many of them as ever," he says, referring to contractors who don't have logos on their trucks and don't wear uniforms.

Bowen's company budgeted for \$1.5 million in



## Optimism index

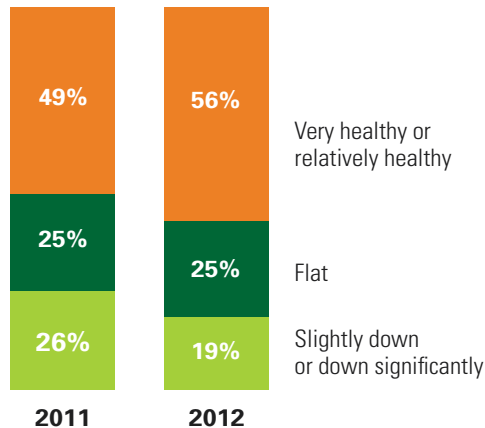
What's your 2013 business outlook?



- Somewhat optimistic
- Very optimistic
- Uncertain
- Somewhat pessimistic
- Very pessimistic

## Pulse check

How contractors describe the state of the landscape industry



## Methodology

We surveyed *Landscape Management* readers online in August and September, garnering 537 complete responses. Based on the sample size and response rate, a 95 percent confidence level is assumed with a +/- 5 percent margin of error. Unless otherwise noted, all charts and figures throughout this report come from this survey.

revenue in 2012 and says it'll reach its goal, despite dumping a \$225,000 homeowner association client in the spring.

"We spent the summer getting it back in other work, but it's better now," he says. He's optimistic about next year, and is budgeting to be 10 percent to 15 percent up for 2013. On top of that growth, Bowen hopes to continue growing his new tree care company, Jeff's Arbor Care. His goal when starting the business last year (which isn't part of Images of Green primarily due to risk and workers' compensation insurance reasons), was to achieve \$200,000 in revenue the first year, and he says it's on track.

"We're trying to take advantage of things like tree care with better margins that make more profits," he says. "Our biggest margin isn't mowing lawns. I wish it was, but it's not. It's irrigation, tree work and pesticide applications."

## PULSE PROFILE



**John Newman**  
President  
Classic Landscapes  
Hampton, Ga.

**2012 projected revenue:** \$500,000

**Service mix:** 75% design/build;  
25% maintenance

**Challenge:** Overall growth

**Solution:** "Growing our maintenance division and reinvesting in branding. We bought a big box truck and splashed graphics all over it. There are a lot of people who say, 'Hey, I've seen your truck and I'd like to have you give us a maintenance quote.' We've also done a large investment in direct mail these past 18 months. We spent about \$6,000. The business it's brought in more than exceeds the investment."

# Warm & Dry

Warm and dry conditions—in both the winter and the summer—dominated the national weather story this year, affecting the Green Industry in various ways. December 2011 through February 2012 marked the fourth-warmest winter on record for the continental U.S., according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The average temperature for the Lower 48 states during the December through February period—the time span defined as meteorological winter—was 3.9 degrees F above the 1901 to 2000 long-term average, making it the warmest winter since 2000, [worldweatherpost.com](http://worldweatherpost.com) reports.

According to the Rutgers University Global Snow Lab, winter snow cover extent in the contiguous U.S. was the third smallest in the 46-year satellite record. The only winter seasons that had smaller snow cover extents were the winters of 1991 to 1992 and 1980 to 1981, NOAA reports.

Summer, too, was hot and dry throughout much of the U.S. A warmer-than-average June, the hottest July, plus a warmer-than-average August equated to the third hottest summer on record, according to NOAA. The national average temperature for the summer season was 74.4 degrees F, 2.3 degrees above the 20th century average. Only the summers of 2011 and 1936 had higher temperatures for the Lower 48.

The national average summer precipitation total of 7.39 inches, which was 0.86 inch below average, marked the 18th driest summer on record for the contiguous U.S. Drier-than-average conditions prevailed across much of the central U.S., from the Rocky Mountains to the Ohio Valley. Nebraska's summer precipitation was 5.92 inches below its average of 9.46 inches, while Wyoming's precipitation was 2.3 inches below its average of 3.97, marking the driest summer on record for both states. Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, South Dakota and New Mexico had summer precipitation totals among their 10 driest.

The summer was wetter than average across the West Coast, the Gulf Coast and New England. Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi had wet summers, partially driven by Hurricane Isaac in August and Tropical Storm Debby in June.

## Optimistic about next year

Jeff Swano, president and owner of Dig Right In Landscaping, Brookfield, Ill., also projects “modest” growth of 10 percent for 2013.

“Although I think it could be more, depending on the weather,” he says. His company, more than four-fifths of which is made up of revenue from design/build work (including residential drainage services), had a record year in 2011 at \$854,000 thanks to the soggy weather. In a dry year like this one, Dig Right In will gross \$750,000.

“It’s been a slow year since June,” he says. “It’s a mix of the economy, drought and we feel the election is also having an effect on the economy. “It should be better after the election, no matter who wins,” Swano says. “The wondering will be over. Once that’s resolved, hopefully there will be pent up demand from everyone who didn’t spend money this year.” (For more on the election, see “Cast your ballot” on page S8.)

Swano’s also hoping this year’s drought will create a need in the fall and next spring.

“We’re already seeing a pickup in lawn replacements with sod,” he says. “We’re very optimistic about next year.”

## Tough markets persist

Though optimism is prevalent, there are some areas of the country where difficult conditions remain. In Reno, Nev., where the worst-in-the-nation state unemployment rate was 12.1 percent in August, Steven Fine says Signature Landscapes is shooting for no growth in 2013 except in its commercial maintenance division, in which he expects a 10 percent bump.

“Going into 2012, things were looking up,” he says. “All signs were pointing to the recovery we heard so much about. In 2012, the recovery just never took place. We’re seeing this in every industry in the state. The only companies showing growth are those doing business outside of the state. Reno’s really taken a hit and that’s affected Signature.” The large company, which didn’t disclose its revenue, employs more than 250 workers at peak. It has an 85 percent/15 percent commercial/residential split.

For 2013, uncertainty remains.

“We want to budget aggressively, but it’s tough out here,” he says. “We’re going to plan for the worst and live within those means.” ■■

## WHAT'S AVERAGE?

19.5

Average number of years in business.

21

Average number of seasonal and year-round employees

+7.5%

Average gross revenue change from 2010-2011

+17%

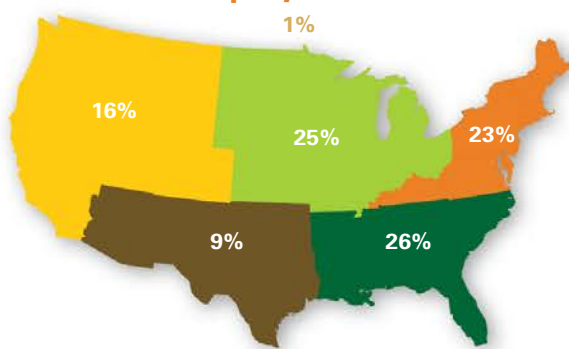
Average anticipated gross revenue change from 2011-2012



### TOP REVENUE OPPORTUNITIES (RANK CHANGED FROM LAST YEAR)

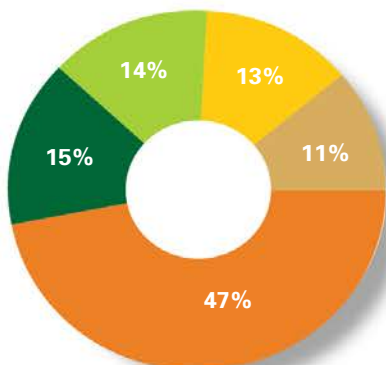
- 1 Residential design/build/installation
- 2 Residential maintenance/mowing (+1)
- 3 Commercial maintenance/mowing (-1)
- 4 Irrigation/water management (+3)
- 5 Snow and ice management (-2)
- 6<sup>t</sup> Landscape lighting (+3)
- 6<sup>t</sup> Commercial design/build/installation (0)
- 8 Chemical lawn care services (-3)
- 9<sup>t</sup> Water features/pond installation (0)
- 9<sup>t</sup> Green/sustainability services (-2)

### Company Location



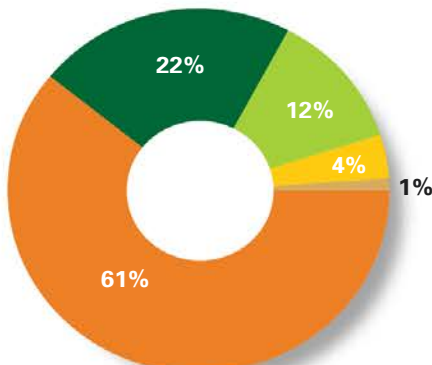
- Midwest:** OH, IN, IL, MI, WI, MN, MO, IA, ND, SD, NE, KS
- West:** AK, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY
- Southeast:** AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, WV
- Southwest:** AZ, NM, OK, TX
- Northeast:** CT, DE, ME, MD, MA, NJ, NH, NY, PA, RI, VT, D.C.
- Canada**

### 2011 revenue



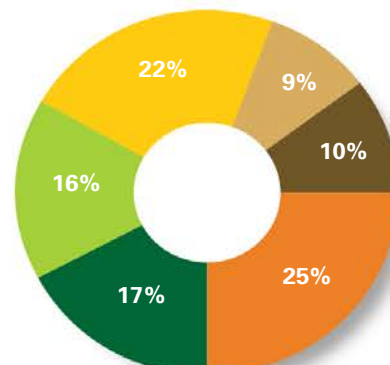
- Under \$250,000
- \$250,000-\$499,999
- \$500,000-\$999,999
- \$1 million-\$2.49 million
- \$2.5 million and up

### Customer mix



- Single-family residential
- Commercial
- Multifamily properties
- Government/institutional
- Other

### 2012 anticipated net profits



- Less than 4%
- 4-5%
- 6-9%
- 10-15%
- 16-20%
- More than 20%

By **Beth Geraci** / Senior Editor

# Cast your ballot

*The uncertainty of an election year weighs on landscape contractors.*

**W**ho will win the 2012 presidential election is anyone's guess. But according to our 2012 Industry Pulse survey, 57 percent of landscape professionals say the election is affecting their 2013 business outlook.

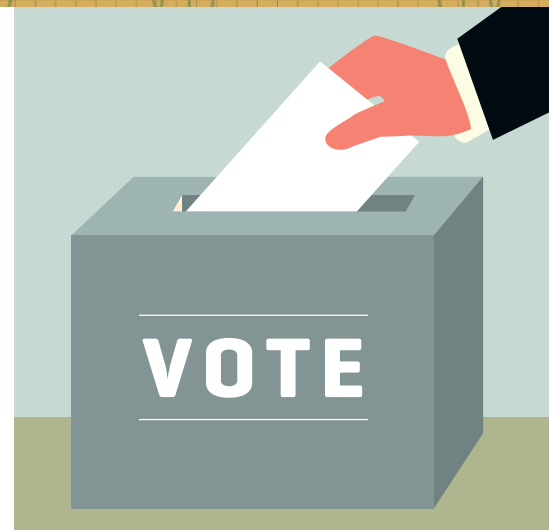
The election is still up for grabs, but it's less of a mystery which candidate landscape contractors are overwhelmingly behind: Mitt Romney. Green Industry support for Romney stems less from him and more from his politics.

Brad Johnson, founder and president of Brad Johnson's LawnAmerica in Tulsa, Okla., says he's concerned, not just from a business, regulation and tax standpoint, "although those are pretty huge. But just the overall direction of the country. There are some big concerns of how that's been going."

Many others in the industry are likewise anxious about what lies ahead. For Dave Reed, vice president of Meadows Farms Landscape in Chantilly, Va., the upshot of the election will hit close to home. The company has many clients who work in the Washington, D.C. metro area.

"The election is a big deal for us," Reed says. "A good number of our customers work for the government, either directly or indirectly. When we start talking about government cutbacks, those are pretty important considerations for us."

Reed says overall there's a lot of stability in government-related work and being near the Beltway "is a lucrative place to be" no matter who's sitting in the White House. But many of Reed's clients work in defense. If the government cuts defense spending by say, 20 percent, he says, it would make an impact. Because let's face it: "The defense clients are the big spenders."



## The health care factor

Landscape contractors also worry about the impact an Obama win would have on health care costs. Dan Sohovecky, vice president of finance at San Diego-based New Way Landscape & Tree Services, says his No. 1 election concern is Obamacare, specifically its mandate that businesses with more than 50 employees must provide health insurance.

That's because New Way is just 30 miles from the Mexico border. Many of its workers live in Mexico and have alternative sources of health care.

"A number of them aren't interested in insurance," says Sohovecky. "It makes it more painful for everyone. Our employees are being forced to have it, and we're being forced as an employer to provide it and pay for it."

## Keeping a level head

Some say things will be better no matter who wins the election, because we'll know what to expect.

Ricardo Baldi, president and owner of Baldi Gardens Landscape in Arlington, Texas, says the economic situation is improving there and he's getting more calls and more business. "I have a lot of hope," he says of the election. "I'm not too worried about it. In my opinion, both parties are the same, pretty much. They complain about each other, but they're pretty much the same in the end."

If Obama wins, Johnson worries the capital gains tax will be raised to help pay for changes in health care. But he's been here before.

Johnson says his company will still grow, no matter who wins. "We're not going to cry about it," he says. "But I sure would rather have policies in place that are more friendly to business owners." **LM**



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By Marisa Palmieri / Editor

# On the mend

*Slow but steady improvements in key indicators reveal a housing marketing recovery is taking place.*



**A** poor real estate market affects the entire economy—and the Green Industry in particular. There's the obvious impact: Fewer new homes means fewer new lawns and landscapes to install and maintain. Steven Fine further explains the predicament in his area.

“What you have is zero equity in homes,” says the manager of marketing and business development for Reno, Nev.-based Signature Landscapes. “That’s a motivation not to spend money on your home.” Including your outdoor space.

Although Fine’s not lucky enough to have his region on the list of improving housing markets across the country, contractors in 99 other markets are as of September, according to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB)/First American Improving Markets Index (IMI). This is up from 80 metropolitan areas that were listed as improving in August and only 12 that were on the list last September. (See “Number of improving housing markets nationwide” on page S11.)

The housing market certainly isn’t back to its pre-recession level, but key reports like the IMI

show a slow, steady housing recovery is taking place.

“More metros across the country are experiencing a sustained uptick in house prices, employment and new building activity, as rising consumer confidence in local market conditions pushes more people to consider a new-home purchase,” says NAHB Chief Economist David Crowe.

The IMI identifies metropolitan areas that have shown improvement from their respective troughs in housing permits, employment and house prices for at least six consecutive months. It includes representatives from 33 states as well as Washington, D.C. Markets added to the list in September include such geographically diverse locations as Tucson, Ariz.; Jacksonville, Fla.; Springfield, Ill.; Greenville, N.C.; and Bend, Ore.

## Builder confidence up

Also improving is builder confidence. The NAHB/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index (HMI) shows builder confidence in the market for newly built, single-family homes rose for a fifth consecutive month in September to a level of 40. This latest three-point gain brings the index to its highest reading since June 2006.

“Builders across the country are expressing a more positive outlook on current sales conditions, future sales prospects and the amount of consumer

“More metros across the country are experiencing a sustained uptick in house prices, employment and new building activity, as rising consumer confidence in local market conditions pushes more people to consider a new-home purchase.”

—NAHB Chief Economist David Crowe



traffic they are seeing through model homes than they have in more than five years,” Crowe says. “However, against the improving demand for new homes, concerns are now rising about the lack of building lots in certain markets and the rising cost of building materials. Given the fragile nature of the housing and economic recovery, these are significant red flags.”

Builder confidence also rose across every region of the country in September. Looking at the three-month moving average for each region, the Midwest and West each registered five-point gains, to 40 and 43, respectively, while the South posted a four-point gain to 36 and the Northeast posted a two-point gain to 30.

#### Existing home sales rise

Existing U.S. home sales rose in August, marking the 14th consecutive year-over-year increase in home sales, according to the National Association of Realtors (NAR). The median home sales price in August was \$187,400, slightly down from the previous month (\$187,800), but above last August’s price of \$171,200 by nearly 10 percent.

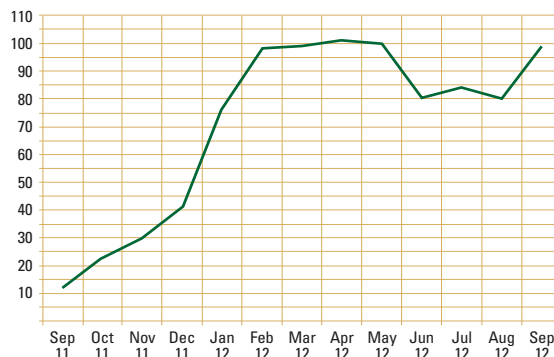
“The last time there were six back-to-back monthly price increases from a year earlier was from December 2005 to May 2006,” NAR says. “The August increase was the strongest since January 2006 when the median price rose 10.2 percent from a year earlier.”

Another positive sign from the September report, according to University of Michigan-Flint economist Mark Perry, includes a decrease in the median marketing time from 92 days in August 2011 to 70 days in August 2012 (almost one-third of homes sold in August were on the market for less than a month).

#### Multifamily market uptick

Through the second quarter of 2012, the NAHB’s Multifamily Production Index (MPI) improved for the eighth consecutive quarter with an index level of 54, rising from 51 in the first quarter. It’s the highest reading since the second quarter of 2005. The MPI measures builder and developer sentiment about current conditions in the apartment and condominium market on a scale of 0 to 100.

### Number of improving housing markets nationwide



Source: NAHB/First American Improving Markets Index

“The strength of the MPI suggests that multifamily production is likely to increase somewhat going forward,” says Crowe.

“Multifamily production has already recovered substantially from a historic low of about 110,000 starts a year in 2009 and 2010 to the current annual rate of a little over 200,000. However, prior to the downturn multifamily starts remained about 300,000 per year for 12 consecutive years, so there is room for further improvement before apartment and condo production return to normal, sustainable levels.” **LJM**

#### At a glance: HOUSING

### GOOD

Many housing markets are showing signs of life, with prices and single-family starts rising.

### BAD

Builder concerns are rising about the lack of building lots in certain markets and the rising cost of building materials.

### UGLY

Multifamily production is improving, but is still 30 percent off the pre-recession level of 300,000 starts per year.

By **Marisa Palmieri** / Editor

# Consumers remain cautious

*Many Green Industry businesses have adapted the way they sell and price residential services.*



**W**hen it comes to their residential clients, landscape contractors and lawn care companies say the hesitation and price consciousness prevalent during the last few postrecession years still exists.

What it comes down to, says Rob Reindl, is people are still choosing to spend less on lawn care and landscaping than they did prior to the Great Recession. "Until they choose to spend more again, you just have to convince them to spend their discretionary dollars with you," says the owner of Oasis Turf & Tree, a \$2.4 million firm in Loveland, Ohio.

Burt DeMarche, president of The LaurelRock Co. in Wilton, Conn., agrees. "It's not like 2007 when people were saying, 'Just give me the price, I want to get it done,'" he says. "Now everyone's negotiating. Consumers' attitudes have changed: They want the same for less."

LaurelRock is located about 90 minutes from New York City. Many of its clients work on Wall Street or for investment banking firms, so their incomes are tied closely to the stock market, and much of their disposable income is tied to their bonus checks, which come in March. Many bonus-driven, six-figure jobs went away from 2009 through 2011. Thankfully, DeMarche says, some of that came back this year, but it's been no small feat. Since 2009, LaurelRock boosted its annual

marketing budget from \$20,000 to \$100,000. It has paid off. Through August, the company is up 80 percent from the same period in 2009. It's on track to gross just over \$5 million in 2012.

Although Jeff Swano calls the market in Chicago's western suburbs "somewhat of a bubble," he says clients are still being cautious.

"Most of our customers are really taking their time making decisions," he says. "They want everything, but they can only afford so much, so they started downsizing the project or doing it in phases."

Swano's company, Dig Right in Landscaping in Brookfield, Ill., is on track to hit \$750,000 in revenue, which is an average year for his primarily design/build and maintenance business.

## Pricing problems

The fact that consumers are still watching their spending doesn't make raising prices easy.

"I feel like we should be up, but we haven't raised prices since 2008," DeMarche says. "It's hard to go to a longtime client and say, 'We're doing a price increase.' Their natural response will be, 'Are you kidding? In this economy?'" The reality is they don't want to have that conversation with you. So, we've just worked really hard to keep our expenses down and to gain efficiency and not lose quality."

Swano says he avoids discounting. "We



know what our margins need to be and we bill accordingly," he says. "Maybe that's affecting some clients' decisions because they find someone cheaper, but I know what I need to make and I'm here to make it."

When it comes to design/build pricing, smart contractors offer to scale back projects rather than reduce prices. "If we come in with a \$5,000 project and they only want to spend \$4,000, then we'll shrink it down or phase it in over this year and next year," Swano says.

John Newman, president of Classic Landscapes in Hampton, Ga., says the recession changed the way he sells design/build projects.

"Before, I didn't ask for a budget," he says. "Whatever it cost, that's what they'd pay. Now, with the economy being tight, I started asking for a budget and coming back with a proposal that meets it."

On the maintenance side, he says his closing ratio has taken a hit because he doesn't want to get into a bidding war. "Instead of doing something for almost no profit, we'd rather let them experience what they will with the half-price guy and then stand by and answer questions and be around for them when the phone call comes that says, 'Hey, these guys aren't doing XY and Z.'"

On the lawn care side of the business, Reindl says it doesn't make sense not to raise your prices every year. "Customers are not likely to complain about a \$1 or \$2 increase a year, but if you wait a few years and try for \$5, they are going to be shocked," he says. **LM**

## At a glance: RESIDENTIAL MARKET

# GOOD

Consumer optimism is rising slightly.

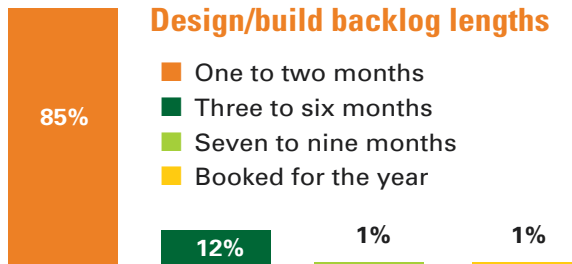
# BAD

Discretionary dollars are still tight for many homeowners, causing price shopping and negotiating.

# UGLY

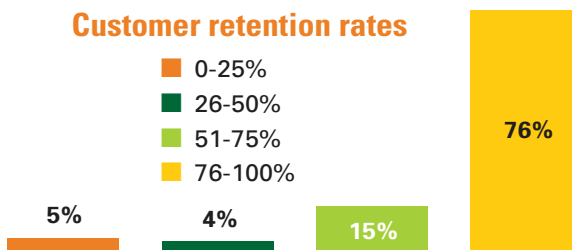
National unemployment only has dipped below 8 percent two times since January 2009 (April 2012 and May 2012).

## Design/build backlog lengths



Asked only of companies that do design/build. Numbers don't equal 100 due to rounding.

## Customer retention rates



Asked only of companies that provide recurring services.

## PULSE PROFILE



**Burt DeMarche**  
President  
The LaurelRock, Co.  
Wilton, Conn.

**2012 projected revenue:** \$5 million

**Service mix:** 50% maintenance; 50% design/build

**Challenge:** Spring cash flow

**What are you doing about it?** "For the last five years we spread out maintenance invoicing over 10 months. This year when we did renewals, we decided to make it a 12-month payment plan. I really expected push back from people who didn't want to pay us in months we weren't providing services, but people were happy it lowered their monthly payment. A few clients even prepaid their entire contracts."

By Marisa Palmieri / Editor

# Margin pressure persists



*There is some improvement, but contractors fear it will take years for the commercial market to dig out of its pricing hole.*

**E**ven with a slowly improving economy, Green Industry firms that serve commercial clients fear the “damage has been done” when it comes to price undercutting and property managers’ habits of annually bidding out contracts.

“The industry has changed a lot over the last few years for the long term,” says Steve Rak, president of Southwest Landscape Management in the Cleveland area, explaining that many property managers are going out to bid much more often than they did prerecession.

Southwest subcontracts for national maintenance firms like Brickman Facility Solutions and Associated Grounds Management Group.

“Those guys are bidding properties across the country, and they say it’s not just happening in Cleveland; it’s across the board,” he says.

Some changes to the commercial maintenance landscape could be seen as an opportunity, says Steven Fine, manager of marketing and business development for Reno, Nev.-based Signature Landscapes.

“Because everything is going out to bid almost annually, we’ve had conversations with so many more property managers who a few years ago were just happy with who they always had,” he says.

Rak agrees that more frequent bidding has opened some doors “because people are shopping a bit more.”

## Digging out?

Thankfully, another trend of the downturn—flat

out asking for a price reduction—may be finally going away.

“I haven’t had one customer now for next year’s contracts ask for a reduction,” Rak says. “But I think the damage has been done. It’ll be a while before the market will get back to where it used to be, or maybe it never will.”

Fine agrees. “Our market has dug itself into such a horrible hole that it’ll take decades to get out of this undercutting,” he says. “It’s really hurt the industry as a whole.”

Dan Sohovecky agrees that margin pressure is at an all-time high.

“It’s more difficult to win new work that’s as profitable,” says the vice president of finance for New Way Landscape & Tree Services, San Diego. “We’re finding we have to focus on our longer-term clients, so retention is No. 1 in our book.”

The good news for Fine is that some clients who’d left for lower-priced competitors returned this year.

“They’ve seen how that low dollar bid worked out for them, and it’s very clear you get what you pay for,” he says. “We’ve seen a number of high-profile clients come back to us, and we take them back with open arms. That’s the catalyst for us thinking we may see some bright lights for maintenance in 2013.”

Such tough competition over the past few years has caused companies to run more efficiently and often remove services to meet a client’s price requests. “When a client said, ‘Everyone else is 20 percent or 30 percent lower,’ I said, ‘I can drop my price, but we

can't mulch beds in the back or trim shrubs,' and he was OK with that," Rak says. "So we've had to get creative."

Signature handles price reduction requests similarly, Fine says, adding it can be an opportunity to up-sell. "A lot of our clients switched to ET irrigation controllers," he says. "We were able to say, here's the initial cost, but you'll see savings the first year and you'll be blown away after five years."

### Commercial construction outlook

Despite challenges, the volume and high dollar levels of both commercial maintenance and bid/build work are an attractive area of the business for many contractors.

Although Fine is budgeting flat in 2013 for commercial construction ("there's just no building going on here"), he says suppliers tell him other markets are doing well after so many years of stagnation.

Research shows there's modest good news for nonresidential construction spending, according to the American Institute of Architects semiannual Consensus Construction Forecast, a survey of the nation's leading construction forecasters.

A spike in demand for industrial facilities so far this year, along with sustained demand for hotels and retail projects, factors into what projects to be a 4.4 percent rise in spending this year for nonresidential construction projects. The forecast also projects a 6.2 percent increase of spending in 2013. *Additional reporting by Beth Geraci. LM*

#### At a glance: **COMMERCIAL MARKET**

**GOOD**

Multifamily development is expected to pick up in 2013.

**BAD**

Many property managers continue to bid maintenance contracts annually.

**UGLY**

Contractors say it will take years to overcome commercial maintenance price undercutting.

## Multifamily growth ahead?

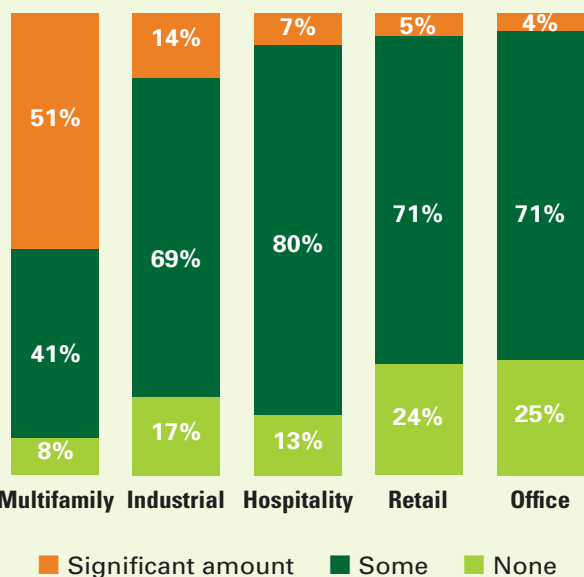
The commercial real estate market is seeing gains despite a sluggish economy, according to KPMG's Commercial Real Estate Survey 2012. "While progress is slow going, bright spots are emerging," the report says.

Executives expect to see continued development over the next year, especially in the multifamily sector, where more than 50 percent of executives say there will be significant development in 2013. (See chart below.)

More than two-thirds of commercial real estate executives say improving real estate fundamentals will be the biggest growth driver over the next one to three years, representing a 22-point increase in this category over last year's survey.

More than half (58 percent) of executives believe the economy will improve over next year, while only 22 percent expect conditions to stay the same. These predictions are nearly unchanged over last year.

### Commercial real estate: Expected areas of development in 2013



Source: KPMG Commercial Real Estate Survey 2012

By Marisa Palmieri / Editor

# Labor pains



*Hiring and retaining workers remains a challenge, but successful operators show creativity and investment pay off.*

**F**inding and keeping high-quality employees is a perennial challenge for landscape contractors and lawn care operators. The overall economic situation and new regulations are playing a role in the availability of the labor force, as are local market conditions.

“Despite the fact that unemployment seems to be high, it’s gotten more difficult to hire people in the last couple of years,” says Lee Edwards, president and CEO of The Greenery in Hilton Head, S.C. “In South Carolina we have the E-Verify law, so immigrant labor has really changed a lot.” As of Jan. 1 all employers in the state were required to enroll in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s system to verify the legal status of all new employees within three business days.

“I’m in favor of those laws, but it makes our job harder,” he says, explaining more employers are going after the same pool of legal workers. “It’s been more expensive to hire people.”

Keeping a legal workforce is a challenge nationwide. It’s a top concern for Ricardo Baldi, president and owner of Baldi Gardens in Arlington, Texas.

“We’re having a hard time finding qualified workers,” he says. You have a lot of companies after the Latino legal workers because they work really hard.”

The labor situation in Jeff Bowen’s market has been “funny” this year. “This year it’s been tough,” says the owner of Images of Green, Stuart, Fla. “We’ve talked to other companies and they’ve experienced it, too. I think we’re finding people in general know landscaping is a hard, hot job in

Florida. You can make the same money at Walmart or McDonald’s, especially if you speak English. And folks that used to want to work in landscaping are finding there’s an easier way to make \$8, \$9 or \$10 an hour.”

His solution has been to tap temporary workers. He hired two temps for the month of August and one for September. “By the fourth quarter all of our temp labor will be gone,” he says. “It’s only in the summer we need it. We do the same amount of work in the winter and summer, but it takes 30 percent longer to do it in the summer.”

## Being aggressive

John Newman, president of Hampton, Ga.-based Classic Landscapes, rates his labor situation as “medium” in terms of difficulty lately.

“It’s still not easy, but because of the fact that we’re pretty aggressive, it’s not our biggest challenge,” he says. By aggressive, he means he’s forged relationships with instructors at a local technical college’s horticulture program, he’s been active with the chamber of commerce and he’s been involved in the community as part of his recruiting effort.

For Newman, sales positions are the toughest to fill. “There are people who are either very astute salespeople without as much technical background or there are great designers who are very talented but aren’t skilled in sales or don’t want to be,” he says. “I’ve been interviewing for that position.”

Rob Reindl, owner of Oasis Turf & Tree in Loveland, Ohio, names recruiting and retaining employees a top challenge. His solution is being

## Wage report

### Hourly

	0-5 years experience	% change from 2010	> 5 years experience	% change from 2010
Mower operator	\$10.60	2% ▲	\$12.73	7% ▲
Spray technician	\$12.87	4% ▲	\$15.54	1% ▲
Construction worker	\$11.72	1% ▲	\$14.84	1% ▲
Irrigation technician	\$13.05	3% ▲	\$16.23	2% ▲

### Salary

	Current wage	% change from 2010
Crew foreman/team leader	\$34,175	12% ▲
Saleperson	\$46,214	1% ▲
Equipment mechanic	\$34,762	6% ▲
Landscape designer	\$41,496	1% ▲
Landscape architect	\$56,837	7% ▲
Account manager	\$42,034	3% ▲
Supervisor	\$41,066	8% ▼
Operations manager	\$53,151	3% ▼
Owner/president	\$75,238	8% ▲
Branch manager	\$67,321	n/r in 2010

proactive: always interviewing for sales reps and technicians and sometimes hiring more people than he needs to—so there's always someone trained and ready to go if something happens to an existing employee.

For sales positions, Reindl interviews in early fall for the following year, compared to many lawn care firms that don't scale up until December or January. "If we have the opportunity to pick up someone impressive, we'll hire him," he says. Plus, Reindl doesn't lay off his sales team after the spring rush.

When it comes to technicians, he lays off a few of them in December, January and February, but a few of them work in the shop all winter, servicing equipment. *Additional reporting by Beth Geraci. LMI*

## H-2B update

Late last year, the Department of Labor (DOL) issued two rules that could hurt the H-2B guest worker program, potentially making it unusable for members of the Green Industry. The two proposed regulations are known as the wage rule and the program rule.

The wage rule would artificially increase labor costs associated with the H-2B program to a level users call unmanageable.

In September, Congress voted to extend the law that prevents the DOL from implementing the wage rule through March 27. It's part of a stop-gap spending measure to keep the government funded beyond the start of the fiscal year, which began Oct. 1.

"PLANET [the Professional Landcare Network] will continue to fight for a longer term prohibition, but we are happy in the meantime our members will not be subject to unprecedented wage increases," the association said in an alert to members.

The program rule seeks to impose new costs, burdens and complexities. It can't be implemented due to a preliminary injunction issued against it in April in Florida's Northern District. The injunction applies nationwide.

"After the legal maneuvering in the case concludes, PLANET hopes the judge will make the injunction permanent," the alert said.

At a glance: **LABOR**

## GOOD

Companies with creative, aggressive recruiting and retention programs report mild labor difficulties.

## BAD

Uncertainty remains about proposed rules that could render the H-2B guest worker program unusable.

## UGLY

Contractors fear an overall change in workers' attitudes makes landscaping an undesirable profession.

By **Beth Geraci** / Senior Editor

# Going up

*In economic times still uncertain, there is one thing you can count on—rising costs.*

**L**andscape contractors and lawn care operators are affected by rising costs in seemingly every area of the business, from labor to equipment. Aside from labor, which always is a major expense, no two things are hitting contractors' wallets quite as hard as fuel prices and insurance rates.

"I don't think we've had a single expense that didn't go up," says Rob Reindl president of Oasis Turf & Tree in Loveland, Ohio. "Fuel has gone up, insurance goes up 15 percent a year. Fertilizer prices are going up every year. Herbicides. You name it. I think they're all well above 5 percent."

Dan Sohovecky is vice president of finance at New Way Landscape & Tree Services in San Diego. The company has a small tree service division, but 93 percent of the company's work is maintenance. "The challenge for a landscape maintenance company in this environment is rising costs," Sohovecky says, "and work is being bid cheaper now. It's affecting our margins ... The bid price in general has gone down in the last couple years. It's a sign of the times." (For more on commercial contract prices, see page 14.)

With lower margins and rising costs, companies need to be creative and focus on their stable, long-term clients if they're to remain profitable. "Retention is No. 1 in our book," says Sohovecky.

## Liquid gold

In 2012, New Way Landscape & Tree Services



has felt the weight of rising fuel prices as much as anything. Over the last two years, California's fuel prices have skyrocketed by 40 percent. The price of gasoline stands at \$4.10 a gallon, up from \$2.90 two years ago.

"Out here in California, we get hit by refinery charges," Sohovecky says. "That's definitely been a large impact costwise."

Steven Fine can relate. At the mere mention of fuel prices, the first words out of his mouth are "Ugh. Awful." The marketing manager and business developer for Reno, Nev.-based Signature Landscapes says Reno's gas prices also just topped \$4 per gallon.

Add to that the fact that in 2012 Signature committed to traveling farther to secure more work, and fuel costs are definitely hitting Signature's margins. "As we speak, we're working on solutions to rerouting and consolidating routes to see how we can stave off this fuel issue," Fine says.

Fuel is always a big item for The Greenery in Hilton Head, S.C. The company anticipated the worst in 2012, budgeting more for fuel than it did in 2011.

"We budgeted just under \$1 million for fuel this year," says The Greenery President and CEO Lee Edwards. "We sent out a letter last winter saying if the prices go up to such and such levels then we will have to raise your price by X amount. Fortunately, we never had to do that. The prices never went up as we expected, so it ended up being very tricky."

## Rising insurance rates hurt, too

In California, business owners are getting hit by higher workers' compensation costs, a result of both more claims and higher claim costs.

"I've heard that this year they're looking at a 20 percent to 25 percent increase," says Sohovecky. "In response, you can take on more of the risk yourself, and you have to do everything you can to minimize those losses."

That's one reason New Way ramped up its safety instruction in 2012. The company holds weekly safety meetings with each of its crews. Over the last year, the sessions have led to a drop in workers' comp claims. "They have had an impact," Sohovecky says, "especially in having everybody think about safety and be conscious of it, it puts it into everybody's mind to think twice."

Like workers' compensation costs, rising health insurance costs are affecting landscape contractors' margins. Companies across the board are experiencing rate hikes of 10 percent to 15 percent annually.

"Every year there's an increase," says Jeff Bowen, owner of Images of Green, based in Stuart, Fla. "Some things I'll never understand. I used to supply benefits to all employees, even to laborers. I haven't for six years, since everything started getting bad."

Under President Obama's health care plan, businesses that employ 50 people or more will have to provide health insurance for employees or be fined by the government.

"Where's the sense in that?" asks Bowen. "They're not going to take the money and give my employees health care." The move will be problematic for business owners for many reasons, Bowen says, adding that it will make budgeting for 2014 a challenge.

Signature Landscapes long has provided health insurance to workers, and it takes pride in doing so. "It's been our model at the beginning to have a generous insurance package and be the company people strive to work for," Fine says, adding health insurance rates go up about 15 percent a year.

"There's no way around that right now," he says. "I don't know what's going to give in the near future, but everything's on the table when we look at those expenses."

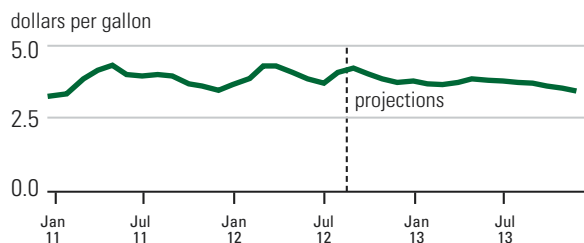
Fine's other insurance costs have remained stable, but the state of health insurance costs, he says, "is a little distressing. For us it's important that we offer a package to keep the best and brightest."

**"I DON'T THINK WE HAD A SINGLE EXPENSE THAT DIDN'T GO UP. FUEL HAS GONE UP, INSURANCE GOES UP 15 PERCENT A YEAR. FERTILIZER PRICES ARE GOING UP EVERY YEAR. HERBICIDES. YOU NAME IT. I THINK THEY'RE ALL WELL ABOVE 5 PERCENT."**

ROB REINDL, OASIS TURF & TREE

### Stable fuel outlook

*U.S. average gas prices—regular grade retail price including taxes*



Source: Energy Information Administration's Short-Term Energy Outlook

At a glance: **COSTS**

**GOOD**

Though fuel prices in some regions are high, the overall outlook is stable.

**BAD**

Companies are bracing for Obamacare, which, starting in 2014, will require businesses that employ 50 people or more to provide health insurance or face a fine.

**UGLY**

Health insurance costs routinely go up 10 percent to 15 percent annually.

Green Industry purchasing habits

Equipment type	% purchased in last 12 months	% will purchase in next 12 months
Mowers	49	46
Construction equipment/attachments	16	15
Sprayers/spreaders	48	29
Aerators	16	16
Handheld equipment	70	52
Trucks/trailers	47	45
Alternative fuel equipment/vehicles	4	8
Trees/shrubs	69	65
Annuals/perennials	67	64
Turf seed/sod	69	65
Hardscape	54	54
Water features	31	34
Landscape lighting	37	40
Irrigation products	47	44
Herbicides	60	55
Insecticides	48	45
Fungicides	38	37
Fertilizers and fertilizer/pesticides combos	64	59
Plant growth regulators	14	15
Tree care chemicals	22	23
Snow/ice control equipment and products	31	30
Computers and business/design software	49	39
Mobile phones/communication devices	53	38
GPS systems	24	16
Consulting services	15	16
Subcontracted services	45	36

Signature Landscapes also is paying more for fertilizer and herbicides, driving the company to try buying in bulk and extrapolating the costs over several months. “We have to be creative and roll the dice to a certain degree,” Fine says.

But despite the higher costs of so much these days, Fine’s not about to stop spending where he needs to.

“Bottom line, we’re always on the lookout for new gear,” he says. “If we do buy new equipment, it’s because we got a smokin’ deal. If the deal’s there and it translates to better service for our customers, we’ll invest.” *Additional reporting by Marisa Palmieri. LM*

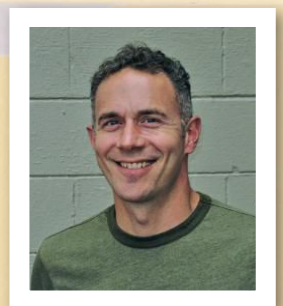
15%

Increase in operating costs from 2010 to 2011.

11%

Anticipated increase in operating costs from 2011 to 2012.

PULSE PROFILE



**Jeff Swano**  
President/owner  
Dig Right In  
Landscaping  
Brookfield, Ill.

**2012 projected revenue:** \$750,000

**Service mix:** 12% maintenance; 85.5% design/build, 2.5% misc. **Challenge:** Slowdown since June.

**Solution:** “We’re in a spending freeze. We were going to move into a larger facility, but I decided we’d just tread water for a while. I’m glad we didn’t move.”



By **Beth Geraci** / Senior Editor

# Playing their cards right



*Landscape professionals are taking their time on the M&A front, strategically crafting their next moves instead of taking risks.*

**W**ith the economy still resting on a slowly spinning axis and with recent changes at the top for some of the Green Industry's largest players, a blockbuster merger in 2013 would come as a surprise, consultants say.

But that doesn't mean businesses are sitting idle, either. The mergers and acquisitions (M&A) market simply is trending toward more small and mid-sized deals. And behind those deals is a greater amount of scrutiny and wisdom than in past times.

Ruppert Landscape, based in Laytonsville, Md., has made three acquisitions in the last four months. Among them, Raleigh, N.C.-based commercial grounds management companies Eco Scapes and New River Landscape, and site development project management firm the Watchman Group out of Kensington, Md.

The first two acquisitions have led Ruppert to grow by about \$1.8 million and have brought it outlets for more diverse services, says company President Chris Davitt. The Watchman Group acquisition, meanwhile, will bring Ruppert millions of dollars more in opportunities.

With its Raleigh buy-ups, Ruppert acquired businesses that already were well established in the local market, giving it a foothold in the city and putting its Raleigh branch in the fast lane to profitability.

"It's gotten us to size a lot sooner, it's gotten us a

group of partners who know the market and we now have more jobs to use as references," says Davitt.

Raleigh is a strong market now for a couple reasons, says Ron Edmonds, a consultant at the Principium Group. "Not only is there built-in growth, but also in markets that are expanding, the competitive fire might not be as severe," he says.

## Being more selective

Before making its newest moves, Ruppert hadn't made an acquisition in six years. And though it's become more active lately, Davitt says it looks at eight or nine companies for every deal it strikes.

Edmonds says that selectiveness is in line with what he's observed in the last couple years. "The predominant trend is playing it safe," he says. "The process of acquiring companies is very disciplined now."

Jeff Harkness, a landscape management consultant with 3PG Consulting, agrees, saying buyers' due diligence is more focused today. "Buyers are more detailed and cautious in their analysis of a company," he says, adding they're taking a closer look at everything from job pricing to equipment condition.

Harkness also sees more discipline on the side of sellers. "Selling your business is becoming much more strategic," he says. "You really plan for it over a 12- to 36-month period, if you're wise. If you're waking up and saying, 'I want out of this,' it

becomes more of a liquidation at that point.”

To bring stability to the company during the transition, buyers are asking sellers to stay involved in the business longer, Harkness says. So, sellers need to be prepared for employment agreements that keep them in the business for two or three years after the sale. “The days of taking money and heading to the beach are over,” he says.

Like Ruppert, Denver-based Swingle Lawn, Tree and Landscape Care looks at several companies for every deal it strikes. It made its most recent move in August, when it purchased Saratoga Ventures, a lawn services company in Boulder/Longmont, Colo.

Practicing patience and making the right buy is crucial, says Swingle CEO Tom Tolkacz. “The right acquisition enables us to eliminate a competitor and bring density to routes,” he says. “It also demonstrates to staff and customers Swingle’s commitment to growing the company.”

Edmonds believes the market will remain disciplined for the foreseeable future. “I doubt we’ll see a big change in it anytime soon,” he observes. “Nobody wants to repeat mistakes.”

Lessons learned is one reason for the discretion; the economy is another, says Kevin Kehoe, consultant at 3PG Group. “People’s appetite for taking risks is lower, and their profits are lower,” he says.

“I think people will rest on their pain a little bit more—not rest on their laurels but rest on their pain,” he adds. “They’re looking at their house in a good neighborhood and can’t sell it right now. I think the real estate industry right now is a good analogy for the landscape industry.”

**Deals to learn from**

Edmonds says he sees M&A movement most among mid-sized landscape companies and that more buyers and sellers are emerging from the recession. Among 2012’s most notable transactions, Edmonds says, is Austin Outdoor’s acquisition of Cornerstone Solutions Group’s maintenance operations in Florida and McKinney Capital’s investment in Landscape Workshop, Alabama’s largest landscape company.

“I believe there are several groups looking to do the exact same thing as McKinney in other markets,” Edmonds says. “I could see that kind of thing working in other areas that have long-term positive economic outlooks, such as Austin, Raleigh and Nashville. Those are all markets that attract attention.”

**2013 predictions**

Former CoCal Landscape co-owner Tom Fochtman now owns Arvada, Colo.-based consulting firm Ceibass Venture Partners, which helps prepare Green Industry owners to sell their companies. Fochtman says he is observing interest in the landscape business among private equity firms and wouldn’t be surprised if in 2013 they begin investing in landscape companies in a larger way.

Fochtman predicts firms will invest in the lawn care, irrigation and commercial landscape maintenance sides of this business.

“They like the reoccurring revenue part of the landscape maintenance business model and the predictability of the service side of our industry,” he says.

While Fochtman theorizes about potential interest among private equity companies in 2013, Edmonds says people can expect to see more regional transactions and activity among lawn care businesses.

But today’s sales are driven not so much by a rebounding economy as by retirement-ready owners looking for an exit.

“They’ve waited out the economy for quite a while, and now people are tired of waiting,” says Edmonds. **LM**

At a glance: **GREEN INDUSTRY M&A**

**GOOD** People can expect to see many deals involving small and mid-sized companies in 2013, and things will heat up regionally.

**BAD** M&A activity in 2012 to 2013 will be driven not by a strengthening economy, but by the fact that people are just tired of waiting.

**UGLY** A seller’s market is still two to four years away.



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## MORE TERMINATING TIPS

› Don't make inappropriate comments about the employee verbally or via email. Be careful about what you write in emails about employees whose performance might warrant termination. Those emails are discoverable in a litigation case.

› Download all the employee's computer information before your meeting in case it's deleted.

› Be prepared to divert email correspondence to a point person so you don't lose continuity with your customers.

› Prevent his or her ability to tap into the company's email or server.

› Don't share the bad news through social media. This will make the company vulnerable.

*continued from page 48*

This job is no longer a good fit. Today is your last day."

Managers who feel bad about having to fire an employee sometimes will try to soften the blow to the employee during the meeting. Remember to be truthful about the reason for the termination. Be concise and stick to your line.

Finally, collect assigned items such as credit cards, keys, phone, vehicle and computer files. Consider whether the employee will be allowed to collect his belongings from his desk, or whether the company will pack them up and send them to him. If the employee has company files at home, determine how to obtain those files. After the meeting is concluded and all is well, debrief to see how it went. Learn from any mistakes and make needed adjustments.

Remember to show respect and dignity. Employees at all levels deserve to be treated well when their employment is being terminated, whether it's because of performance, behavior or financial reasons. If you're the employer or manager, treat the person, whose life

this news will be dramatically changing, with as much dignity and respect as possible. Handling an employee termination in anything but a professional manner can have serious and costly legal consequences.

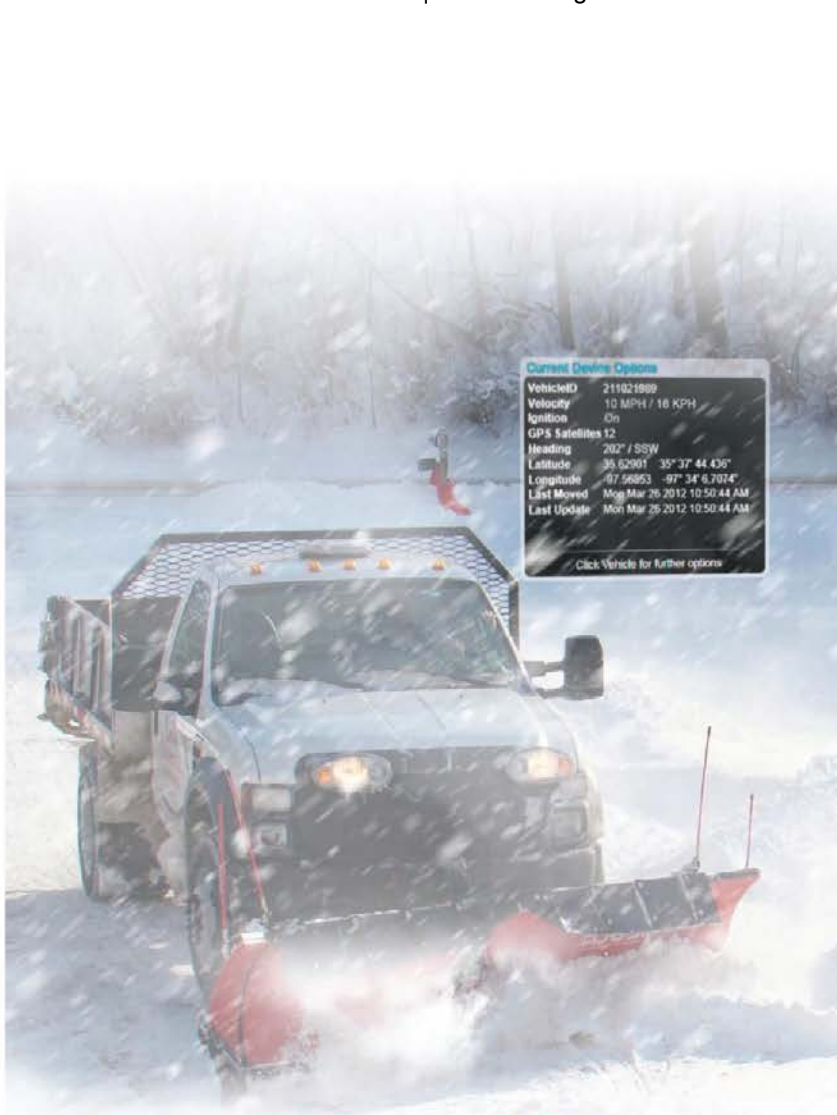
Handling this part of your business

correctly, fairly and consistently will make it easier and less painful. **LM**

*Arman is co-founder of the Harvest Group, a landscape and business consulting/coaching firm. Reach him at [bill@barvestlandscapeconsulting.com](mailto:bill@barvestlandscapeconsulting.com).*

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HOW-TO



# Work effectively with your spouse

BY ROGER MCCARTHY & SUE MCCARTHY

*Roger McCarthy and Sue McCarthy met in 2003, got married in 2004 and started working together soon afterward, when Sue “temporarily” joined Roger’s business, McCarthy’s Landscaping & Irrigation, after being laid off from an environmental services company. Eight years later, she’s still there. And she’s been an integral part of the 15-year-old, West Boylston, Mass., firm’s growth. The couple has learned working together isn’t always easy, but it can be rewarding. They offer some tips for other Green Industry husband-wife teams. —MARISA PALMIERI*

**She says**

**He says**

**I’M ITALIAN.** So, the most challenging thing for me is to remember he’s the boss. It’s our future, it’s our retirement, so I do have a lot of input, but it’s Roger’s company.

**OUR OFFICE IS 500 FEET FROM OUR HOUSE.** We look out our back window and there’s the building, trucks and trailers. It got to the point where we were talking about work all the time, so we put some rules into place. While I’m making dinner, we’ll talk about the workday. Once dinner’s on the table, it’s over. In the beginning it was tough to wait to talk about things until tomorrow. It took about two years from when I started working with him before we got to that point. We were trying to improve and get systems in place, so there was a lot to talk about. Once we were on an even keel we said, “This can’t be our life all the time.”

**WE NEVER WORK ON A SUNDAY AND RARELY ON SATURDAYS.** It took a lot to separate ourselves, but once we did it was better for us as a couple. But it’s still hard, even for me. Once we went away for the weekend and I said, “What do you want to do with that invoice?” He said, “We’ll talk about it Monday.” And I said, “Yes we will.”

**I HAVE ONE SON.** He’s 27. He’s worked for the company since 2004. Last year he got into a motorcycle accident. He hasn’t been able to work for over a year. It put everything into perspective. We hope he’ll be able to come back next season.

**YOU’VE GOT TO WATCH EACH OTHER’S STRESS LEVEL.** Roger had a heart attack at 41 years old. He doesn’t smoke. Doesn’t eat bad. It was all stress related. After that he went from working 90 hours a week to maybe 70. We had started not talking about work at home around the same time. Sometimes he has a lot on his plate. He keeps it all on his plate instead of asking for help. I have to say, “Stop. Take a breath. And what can I take off your plate?”

**IT’S CHALLENGING TO SEPARATE CHURCH AND STATE.** We work together. We live together. We spend a lot of time together.

**MAKE SURE YOU SEPARATE YOUR TASKS.** Set up job descriptions for each person so they know what they’re going to do and don’t step on each other’s toes. The first couple years Sue joined, it was crazy for me to let go of everything and try not to micromanage her, not worry about what she was going to do and how it was going to be done. I’d been doing all the invoicing, billing, setting my own appointments and sometimes back then I was in the field, too. I knew my life would get easier, but having done it for so long with my way of doing it, it was tough to let her take over certain things.

**SHE’S ALWAYS GOT MY BACK.** I can walk away and not worry that she’s going to let things slip through the cracks. She proved it and my guys proved themselves back in 2006 when I had a heart attack and I was removed completely for a few weeks and part time for a few weeks. I worried about things because it’s just who I am to worry, but the customers really didn’t even know I was out unless someone told them.

**WE TRY TO ENJOY EACH OTHER.** We don’t work on Sundays. We really limit our Saturdays. Even for our employees, Saturdays are strictly a rain day. Allowing your employees to have two-day weekends, they’ll work harder for you Monday through Friday.

**YOUR RELATIONSHIP HAS TO BE STRONG OUTSIDE OF WORK BECAUSE WORK WON’T MAKE IT STRONG.** If you don’t have a strong relationship emotionally, spiritually or however you define it, working together won’t make it stronger. It will drive it apart. There are so many pressures on meeting expectations: customers, financial institutions, payroll. You know the old saying, “When money troubles walk through the door, love flies out the window.” It’s the same in a business. **LM**

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HOW-TO

# Establish business systems

BY PAUL WOLBERT

**A**s business owners or managers, we've spent years trying to implement the secret of success by attending seminars, reading books and magazines, and listening to CDs about business systems and standards. When we're done with those things, we return to our businesses and are swamped by real life events that pose everyday challenges, and we never get to implement the ideas we just learned about.

All of us have heard advice from others: We need to systemize our businesses and set standards. This is probably the most important project to complete because it will go a long way to ensure short- and long-term success.

Systemization starts with documenting how we do what we do. This task has many names: systems, operations, and policies and procedures manuals. Whatever it's called, the purpose is to capture the collective intelligence or know-how of the business (the why, what, when, where, who and how of what a business does). Hence the business system.

The most important processes to capture are:

**SALES**, which describes how your business finds prospects, presents quotes and closes sales.

**DELIVERY OR FULFILLMENT**, which details how your product or service is delivered to your customers.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE**, which shows how your business stays in contact with your customers over time.

Others' systems might include: advertising and marketing; accounts payable, receivable and payroll; recruiting, hiring, inducting, training and performance; production, routing and scheduling; safety and quality; and administration, reception and record keeping.

To start capturing this information, start with a basic Word document, and write the simple steps that show how your company works through the process. Then expand on each step with a paragraph or two about the important steps involved, so it starts to become specific to your company. Write it as you would say it if you just hired a new salesperson. There is no wrong way to do this.

For each step, continue to identify the steps needed. Example: "How to

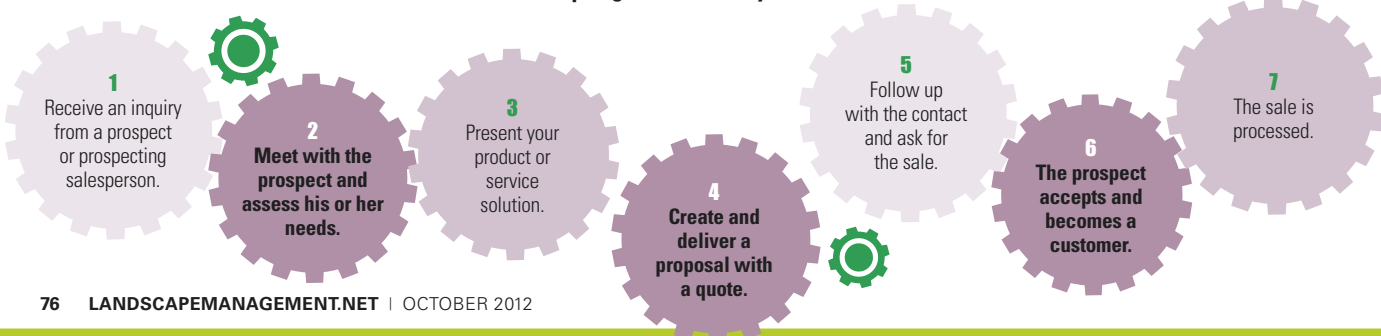
arrange a meeting with a customer" could be the title of a document that might be required to train new employees. Next, expand the detail. Once completed, you might have three, five or more pages that explain the actions required. Don't forget about the rules and guidelines that govern the decisions along the way. The bottom line is you need to make a profit. Typically, when one system ends, another starts. Be careful, and follow the plan.

Measure the effectiveness of your systems. When your systems are working, you'll know because you'll have:

- no customer complaints;
- high customer satisfaction;
- on-time service;
- no team complaints;
- high productivity;
- met goals and objectives; and
- a bottom-line increase.

Now for the test. Ask employees to explain a system. Then compare what they described to you with your interpretation. Additionally, conduct a customer satisfaction survey (you need to know what they're thinking), and ask your customers about their experiences with your business. You want to hear it all—positive and negative.

## SALES SYSTEM EXAMPLE Here's a simple, generic sales system.







### QUICK TIP

**At each step in any system, analyze its effectiveness by looking at the inputs and outputs and measuring the result. In many cases, you'll have to decide what your goals are for certain steps first to determine if the system is delivering.**

At each step in any system, analyze its effectiveness by looking at the inputs and outputs and measuring the results. In many cases, you'll have to determine what your goals are for certain steps first to determine if the system is delivering. For example, in the sales system, a goal could be the number of new proposals that end up as contracts. If you have set a standard or goal, you'll be able to measure the result and determine if the system needs to be adjusted.

A business with an up-to-date operations manual will experience higher productivity, because staff will execute tasks properly without continuously asking for clarity. It also will experience better staff accountability and greater customer satisfaction and confidence, resulting in higher sales and increased repeat business. Plus, it's easier to train new employees and cross-train existing employees. The owner also will be able to delegate more because he's not the only one with the important information, and there will be greater control of the flow of information throughout the business.

Be careful with the tasks of writing documents and creating folders, files, forms and checklists, or you may find yourself quickly developing another dilemma: how to organize and deliver the contents logically. In this case, less

is more. There are many tools available, such as software programs, to help you develop a systems manual. Yes, there's an app for that. Look around at the new software on the market.

It's critical to make a plan for the whole project at the start. Research the

available tools and expertise required to evaluate your intended method before jumping in too far. Look for the improvements at the bottom line. **LM**

*Wolbert is vice president of U.S. Lawns. Contact him at PWolbert@uslawns.com.*



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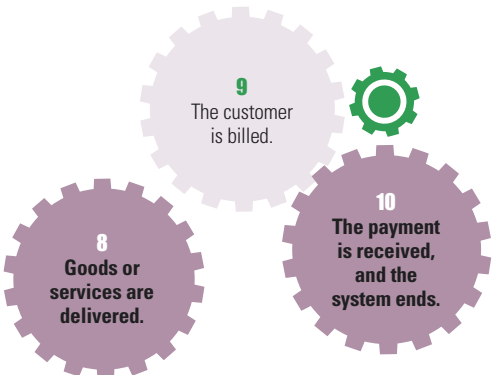
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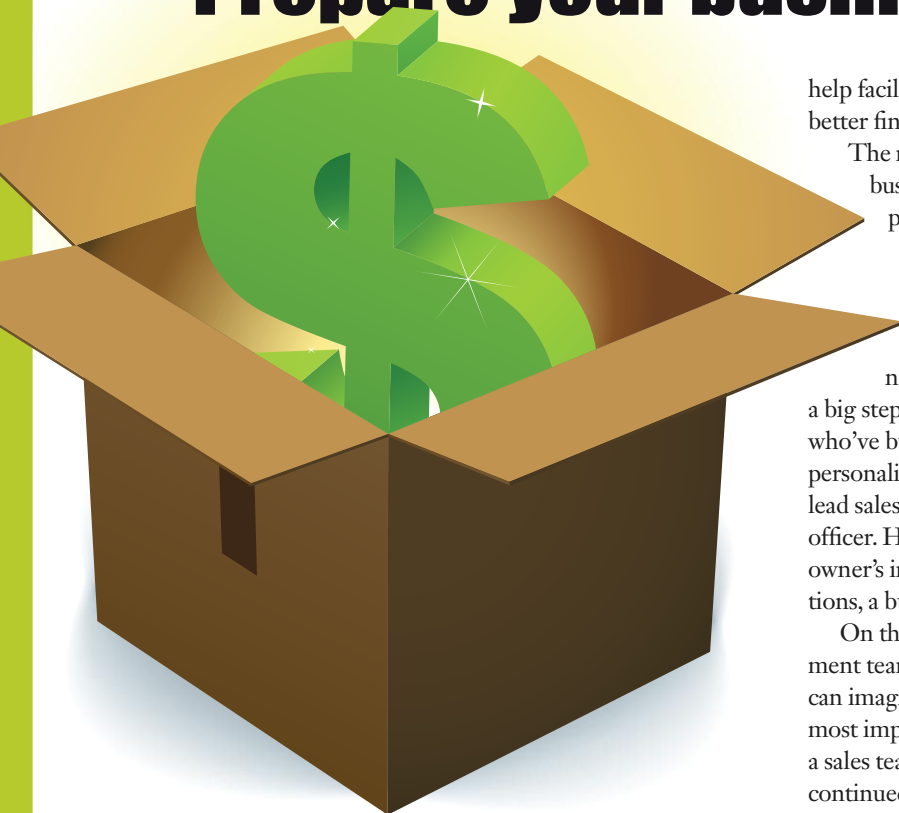
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HOW-TO

# Prepare your business for sale



help facilitate a smoother process and likely produce a better financial result when the time comes to sell.

The most important thing to do when preparing a business for sale is keep it growing and operating profitably, generating consistent, positive cash flow.

## Team dynamics

Another key issue is structuring the business to thrive without the owner involved. That's a big step for many Green Industry business owners who've built their businesses around the talents, skills and personality of the owner. The business owner often is the lead salesman, operations supervisor and quality control officer. His name is often the name of the business. If the owner's involvement is crucial in terms of sales or operations, a buyer likely will be wary of an acquisition.

On the other hand, if the business has built a management team and has depth in operations and sales, a buyer can imagine taking over the operation and retaining its most important assets—its people and customers. With a sales team and system, a buyer can see a pathway to continued growth and profitability, making the business much more attractive.

BY RON EDMONDS

**P**reparing a business for sale usually isn't one of a landscape contractor's highest priorities for two reasons: A Green Industry business owner usually doesn't start his business with the goal of selling it, and the complications of a daily business operation often keep business owners from planning for the future effectively.

Nevertheless, business owners have to confront the reality of needing to sell or transfer their business. All owners will sell their business, transfer it to a family member or liquidate their interest, planned or unplanned, during their lifetime or at the time of their death.

Often, the need to sell is triggered by unforeseen circumstances, such as death, disability or divorce, which might add pressure and make effective planning and decision making difficult. Basic steps taken in advance will

## An objective look

It's a sound idea to take an objective look at the business and consider what attributes it has that would make it attractive to you if you were a potential buyer. Focus on what you can affect positively in the period before a sale is made.

Identify the areas that will be most attractive to likely buyers and emphasize them. In many cases, buyers will put a premium on recurring revenue, such as contractual maintenance, lawn care and irrigation service revenue. Unless you have significant lead time, it's not practical or a good idea to change the focus of the business completely, but it might be possible to make changes that enhance the recurring revenue components.

Additionally, by implementing effective systems, you might be able to make theoretically nonrecurring revenue

have characteristics of recurring revenue. For example, although design/build projects aren't recurring revenue, if you have an effective system for generating new design/build projects on an ongoing basis, that segment of the business can be attractive still.

### Financial focus

Also address the quality and timeliness of financial information. Sit down with your accountant and discuss your financial statements, focusing on what can be done to improve their quality and timeliness. A buyer will be wary when the financial statements he's given are full of errors. If financial reports aren't timely, or it takes a long time to respond to a buyer's questions, buyers often will lose interest.

Look at your balance sheet and consider how much working capital is tied up in the business. Managing the business to minimize working capital (mostly accounts receivable minus accounts payable) often will increase the value of the business, even if working capital stays with the seller. The

*continued on page 81*

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continued from page 79

less money a buyer will have to inject into the business as working capital after a sale closes, the more the business will be worth to him.

Another important step is identifying potential roadblocks to completing a transaction and working to resolve them. Examples of potential roadblocks include unpaid taxes or unfiled tax returns. In many cases, these issues won't derail the deal if they're identified and addressed. However, if a buyer finds this kind of issue during due diligence, his confidence will lessen. Another potential roadblock is unresolved litigation. If possible, these matters should be resolved. At a minimum, they should be discussed openly with the potential buyer so their impact can be evaluated and a solution can be found.

**\$ THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO DO WHEN PREPARING A BUSINESS FOR SALE IS KEEP IT GROWING AND OPERATING PROFITABLY, GENERATING CONSISTENT, POSITIVE CASH FLOW.**

One more potential roadblock is ownership, which should be made clear to the buyer. Are there former partners who, legally, still retain an interest in the business? Another problem can arise from promises of equity ownership that might have been made to a key employee. Such promises often are forgotten by business owners, but rarely by the key employees to whom the promise was made. If these issues emerge late in the sale negotiations, they're more difficult to resolve without unexpected costs, difficulties and delays.



#### QUICK TIP

**It's a sound idea to take an objective look at the business and consider what attributes it has that would make it attractive to you if you were a potential buyer. Focus on what you can affect positively in the period before a sale is made.**

#### Consider impressions

Another important step involves facilities and equipment. Do they present a favorable impression of the business and its operation? For example, a junk pile of old equipment somewhere behind the main warehouse facility presents a generally negative impression, and it might raise questions in a buyer's mind about potential environmental liabilities.

Cluttered and disorganized storage facilities present a negative impression, even if the facilities aren't part of a proposed transaction. The condition of facilities and equipment will affect a buyer's perceptions of the value of the business, especially if he perceives a significant amount of deferred maintenance that will have to be addressed after the transaction is closed.

As you plan for the sale of your business, assemble your team of advisors—your lawyer, accountant and merger-and-acquisition advisor. Make sure they're deal makers, not deal breakers. Your team will guide you through the process and help you avoid mistakes.

Taking steps to ready your business for sale often will improve the value of your business and its marketability. Preparation can help increase the sale price of your business and make it more likely to sell within a reasonable time frame. **LM**

*Edmonds, a corporate finance professional with experience in merger-and-acquisition transactions, is the principal consultant for The Principium Group. Contact him at redmonds@principiumgroup.com.*



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HOW-TO

# Be a woman in a male-dominated industry

BY CHRISTY WEBBER

**L**andscape Management asked me to write about my experience as a woman doing business in the landscaping industry. You know the drill: Write about how the industry held me back, how men treated me unfairly, how I never could catch a break and throw in a few of those big words I can hardly spell, such as bigotry, prejudice, chauvinism and sexism.

Gals (and anyone else who may be reading this), my story doesn't follow that pattern. Maybe I am too naive to recognize all of those terrible things. Or maybe I just don't care. I am not saying those terrible things don't exist or that I didn't experience discrimination as a woman. But I can tell you this: I never let it stand in my way.

I got started in this business in 1988. I was teaching high school in Chicago—and hated it. So, for extra money, I began mowing grass for friends and others who would hire me. My residential business grew, and in 1997 I hired a great landscape architect who helped me win a prestigious contract for a new arena—the United Center—during the Chicago Bulls' Michael Jordan era. Go Bulls!

Today, 15 years after landing that contract, Christy Webber Landscapes employs 400 staff and has gross revenue of \$32 million. And we're still growing.

So, how did I do this as a woman in an industry completely dominated by men? In an industry so male that

when I signed up for trade shows, women in the industry had nowhere to meet but in rooms reserved for our male counterparts' wives? I did it by doing the same things successful men need to do—work hard, put in long hours, make smart hiring and banking moves and learn from your mistakes. I never allowed my being a woman to work against me.

## Make connections

Yes, there were comments such as, "Honey, how are you?" or people like the beast in the job trailer who treated everyone poorly, not just me. I never let it get me down or let my frustration show. Instead, I schemed



### QUICK TIP

Do the same thing successful men do—work hard, put in long hours, make smart hiring and banking moves and learn from your mistakes. If you experience roadblocks, never let them get you down or let your frustration show.

to figure out how to make men *want* to work with me. Sometimes that meant simply retreating and letting one of my male staffers handle the situation. But more likely it meant letting go of those things that could be considered discrimination and just doing a good job so they had to deal with me.

Many times I would bring a man with me to client meetings if I knew the client would feel more comfortable speaking “man speak.” Literally, some clients would look and talk only to the man on my staff—even though I owned the darn company! Did I care? Hell no. If I could get the business, the product or the answer, why should I care? I didn’t take it personally. I just listened, took notes—and took the work.

The fact is, most good men have a good woman in the mix. It’s their secretary, their wife or their daughter. Who writes the checks or answers the company phone? Usually a woman. Find her. I figured out early on how to connect with these women and make it work for my

## WHO DOESN'T LIKE TO DO BUSINESS WITH A COMPANY THAT DOES GREAT WORK AND HAS A GOOD STORY?

business. If you can connect on a basic human level and find something you have in common, you are in, no matter the race, creed or gender of the person you’re dealing with. Ladies, find that woman you can connect with.

Lastly, my secret weapon, and one that many of you don’t have, is I’m a lesbian. How does that help me? When someone finds out, there’s a curiosity and openness that breaks down the male-female barrier of business. Sure, there are lots of stupid questions and many stares (but not at my chest). Hey, if it works, work it!

Sometimes all the attention it attracts is embarrassing, but it’s a story. And who doesn’t like to do business with a company that does great work *and* has a good story?


Women: Find that niche, that story and that strength to rise above the noise. Business is business, and something is better than nothing. **LM**

---

*Webber is president of Christy Webber Landscapes in Chicago.*

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continued from page 84

be as easy as connecting the dots to bring a proven solution from another industry or community to your own.

Ideally, your value should be published on a stand-alone blog on a domain you own or a subdomain of your primary

website. Make this hub the source for the high-quality, evergreen content you share to the respective social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+, and whenever possible, customize the sharing for the characteristics of each channel.



### QUICK TIP

**A simple formula for earning your customers' trust and building a process to better understand and serve them is to provide value, engage the community and facilitate the conversation.**

### Engage the community

The reason for creating and sharing interesting, useful and valuable information is to spark online conversations by giving your audience something to discuss. This engages your business with its customers and the friends they influence.

Social engagement is the result of numerous activities, including listening, asking good questions and offering suggestions and other types of assistance. When these actions are combined with the value your business provides, the natural result is engagement in the form of likes, shares and comments that serve to build your online communities.

As a leading business in the Green Industry, your customers look to you to be current with trends and developments, so it's essential for you to set alerts and notifications to monitor leading publications, blogs and news sources. This can be accomplished through email, but using a news reader such as Google Reader is more efficient.

As you curate and share news, add your perspective to clarify and personalize it for your community. This is invaluable for encouraging engagement. Also, ask good questions—ones that have no right or wrong answer—that respect the community. Here are a few from the Facebook page of Sublime Garden Design, one that attracts a lot of engagement: *Is this a garden or a landscape? Wouldn't you love to have a cozy hideout like this in your backyard? What do you think of this rustic arbor?*

Finally, because social media is virtual and devoid of human qualities, it's vital your content-sharing is accompanied by a photo, video or quotation to connect with people emotionally.



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SMART BUSINESSES LEARN TO LET GO OF THEIR BRANDS AND FOCUS ON HOW TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND SERVE THEIR LOYAL CUSTOMERS, LETTING THEM OWN IT.

### Facilitate the conversation

The purpose of social media is to create sustained alignment with a specific community, namely your ideal customers and fans. To accomplish this, you have to be worthy of their attention, actively engaged and willing to share the spotlight.

Encourage them to talk and then step into the background. As the facilitator, you're only there to moderate the discussion so the community can interact and share their views. When your customers talk within an online forum centered around your business, they're marketing for you. Here are suggestions about how to make this happen:

- › Create expectations.
- › Publish regularly.
- › Stay on topic.
- › Be brief.
- › Clarify with a relevant perspective.
- › Break things down.
- › Provide practical examples.
- › Point out trends.
- › Build excitement.
- › Be awesome.
- › Inspire.
- › Hint at what's next.

Online marketing works best when it's driven by the customer. What matters most is what your customers say. This is what lubricates the social networks. Smart businesses learn to let go of their brands and focus on how to use social media to better understand and serve their loyal customers, letting them own it. It's a fundamental shift that, when embraced, builds a more engaged, relevant and profitable business. **LM**

*Korban is a consultant who helps Green Industry businesses use social media and Internet marketing to create exceptional customer experiences. Contact him at [jeffkorban.com](http://jeffkorban.com).*



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HOW-TO

# Become certified

BY MICHAEL BECKER

I've been involved in certification for several years as a candidate, certified individual and volunteer. My motto is "I'm certifiable, and so are you."

If I grabbed your attention, my mission is partially accomplished. Getting your attention is important, but encouraging you to act is essential. My sole purpose is to convince you to become Landscape Industry Certified.

## My story

I care about certification and encouraging others to pursue it because it made a difference in my life and career. I became involved in the landscape industry during the 1980s but didn't earn my certification until 2001. I was a technician who started a company and believed obtaining the Certified Landscape Professional credential (CLP, as it was called then) was my ticket to personal benchmarking. I wanted to know if I had the knowledge to operate a business. Now I'm a proud Landscape Industry Certified Manager and member of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) operating a successful company. Being able to study and test my business and leadership savvy through certification was, and continues to be, inspiring, motivating and empowering.

PLANET's certification program has been a driving force in my personal growth and development as a leader and business owner. It's opened so many doors. The benefits have been tremendous, mostly because I promote my landscape industry certification to customers, colleagues and the community whenever I can. Certification gives me a competitive edge.

While more than 5,000 people worldwide hold this distinction of excellence, it's a relatively small number compared to how many Green Industry service providers are capable of becoming certified. And certification as a marketing vehicle won't work effectively until customers who want to specify Landscape Industry Certified service providers have access to them.

These realizations led to my pivotal next step of progressing from newly certified bystander to participant. I

became involved in the International Certification Council (ICC)—PLANET's certification administrative body. Now I chair the council and couldn't be prouder of ICC members, past and present, along with our certification partner, the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association. Our passion for certification bonds us to improving the programs under the manager and technician labels. For several years, we've made many strides, beginning with:

- › planning certification strategically;
- › conducting occupational analyses (OAs);
- › revamping our brand to Landscape Industry Certified to replace the alphabet soup of acronyms;
- › introducing a two-year recertification process that requires continuing education units (CEUs); and
- › aligning the program with best practices in general.

We even launched a new exam last year—the Landscape Industry Certified Lawn Care Technician-National—and released two OAs for educator documents for use in curriculum development.

## Certification wants you

For me, certification progressed from being a personal and professional achievement to a cause I've committed my time and energy to with other like-minded volunteers. We have momentum and drive, we just need more people to invest in the program to create demand and reach critical mass. I can visualize a variation of the famous Uncle Sam poster: "The ICC wants YOU ... to get certified!"

We need to build legions of certified professionals, and it starts with you and me. We must work together to create demand and simultaneously build an inventory of certified individuals. This will help shorten the time frame needed to reach critical mass and a widespread demand for certified individuals.

That's where you come in. While you might have different motivating factors than I did for becoming certified, it's important to certify your skills and knowledge. It's time to get certified now. If you're an owner or manager, it's the right time to encourage your crew to become cer-



### QUICK TIP

**The first step is to visit the certification section at [landcarenetwork.org](http://landcarenetwork.org), review the manager and technician certifications available and determine the best program to meet your needs.**

Certification has upped my A-game and made me more marketable to customers. Earning bids, impressing customers, distinguishing yourself from the competition—these are just a few of the potential benefits you can look forward to once you study, test and become certified.

Seize the opportunity, map your certification game plan and go for it. The first step is to visit the certification section at [landcarenetwork.org](http://landcarenetwork.org), review the manager and technician certifications available and determine the best program to meet your needs. Once you've reviewed this information, don't hesitate to contact PLANET's certification team at [certification@landcarenetwork.org](mailto:certification@landcarenetwork.org) or 800-395-2522.

Good luck, and I look forward to counting you among my fellow Landscape Industry Certified colleagues soon. Remember, I'm certifiable, and so are you. **LM**

*Becker, a Landscape Industry Certified Manager, is the owner of Estate Gardeners in Elkhorn, Neb., and chair of PLANET's International Certification Council.*

tified. I invite you to join me and thousands of certified professionals who've earned the Landscape Industry Certified status and continue to maintain our credential through recertification. As Green Industry service providers, we need to show we care enough about our craft to continually sharpen our skill set by pursuing certification.

Take Landscape Industry Certified Manager and Technician Shayne Newman, owner of YardApes in New Milford, Conn., for example. In a recent issue of Inside Certification, PLANET's e-newsletter to certified professionals, he said: "Certification is something that allows me to define and set the standard for what I want from employees. To be certified means, unequivocally, that we're safer, more knowledgeable, more efficient and more productive. I can say, with confidence, once they become certified, our employees are professionals who absolutely understand the proper management and care of property, execute quality work and are dedicated to safe practices."

It's your turn to join the certification ranks and enjoy the benefits that being Landscape Industry Certified affords.

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HOW-TO

# Build a company that runs itself

BY JEFFREY SCOTT

**A**re you ready for the good life—by handing off the reins of your business? It requires making a three-step transition from full-time and overworked owner-operator, to professional manager, to partly or fully retired owner enjoying the fruits of your labor.

To achieve the dream of more discretionary time and money, you have to make eight personal shifts in how you think about and run your business.

## 1 Shift from gut instinct to data-based decisions.

Many owner-operators start off running their businesses based on instinct and manually gathered data, which they use to confirm their instincts. To transition to a professionally run firm, managers must acquire data, and employees must use them to improve their performance without having to wait for the owner's feedback.

Every day, foremen and supervisors should gather and use important data such as job costs, contribution per hour, revenue per day and percent of chargeable time.

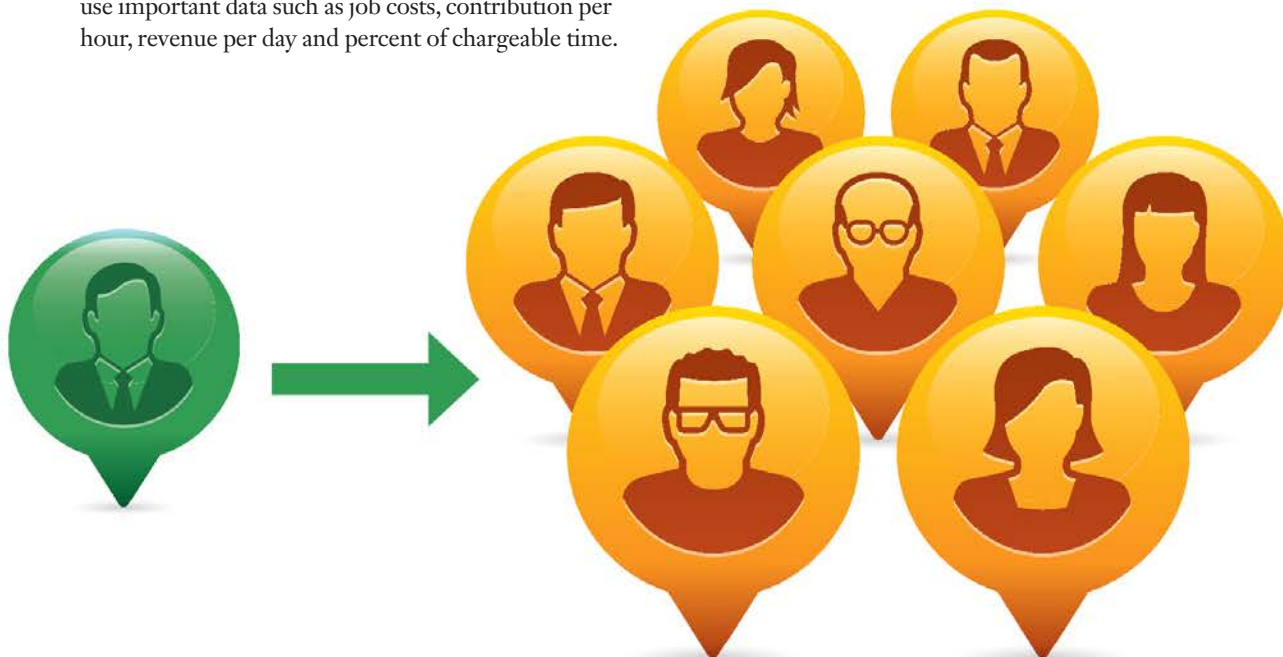
To stay on track, managers should collect and report gross profit, overhead expenses and other data weekly and monthly. They also should create and use sales goals to keep salespeople engaged.

Sometimes an owner needs to hire a manager who understands numbers better than he or she does. Don't be ashamed of your weaknesses; instead, hire people smarter than you. It's common in the corporate world.

## 2 Shift from owner-centered to management team lead.

The management team you put together can be as small as you and one other person or it can be a team of managers; it all depends on the size of your business. The team can consist of a general manager who oversees the entire operation, or it can consist of a team of managers each overseeing their own divisions (including the administrative division). You won't achieve wild success without building a team of people you can count on.

*continued on page 92*





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*continued from page 90*

### **3** Shift from micromanager to coach.

The owner of a developing firm drives its actions and profitability. It's through this micromanagement that the company succeeds. But this same management style may hold the company back from further success.

Delegate more by letting go and allowing others to decide. Also, become a coach to your people, supporting them in their decision making.

If you went into business at a young age, you may not have had a boss to be a good role model to you. But you've likely experienced a good coach through sports programs. The best coaches are interested in building up individual athletes and winning teams. Here are a few critical characteristics of winning coaches.

**EDUCATOR.** Winning coaches teach not just technical aspects of the job, but morals, hard work and teamwork. They also ensure their workers learn the skills they need to excel without obsessing that employees may take these skills elsewhere. It's better to have your employees be well educated and leave you than to be under educated and stay on your payroll. Be committed to their growth, and they will commit to your company's growth.

**LIFELONG LEARNER.** Leaders are readers—they go to education events, read and listen to books. You must be willing to stretch yourself to stretch the minds of others.

**PASSIONATE, POSITIVE.** You must bring this attitude to work every day. How would your employees rate your attitude, on a scale of zero to 10? Ask them for feedback. You are the thermometer by which they reset their own internal thermometer each day when they come to work.

**OPEN YET DECISIVE.** You must be open to input and engage your people to be part of your firm's success. On the other hand, you must not linger in doubt.

**HONEST AND RELIABLE.** The best employees want to work for someone who's trustworthy and reliable. That means being willing to take short-term hits (e.g. rip out a walkway and rebuild it to meet specs) to do the right things and build an honest reputation.

### **4** Shift from generous to selfish with your time.

Many contractors spend their time doing low-level tasks, and running around supporting their crews or taking their calls. This can be a huge time drain that keeps you from doing more profitable tasks. Getting out of this rut can be as simple as protecting a two-hour chunk of time each day to focus on strategic activities. Instead of

an open-door policy, consider a closed-door policy where you aren't to be disturbed between 10 a.m. and noon.

Start by delegating more. Meet with your employees and ask them what tasks you should be delegating to them, so that you can focus on more important business building. Create your own list of 10 things and then compare with the list they come up with. You will be surprised what they volunteer to take on.

### **5** Shift from 'all hands on deck' to clear roles and accountability.

All-for-one and one-for-all is how you first grew your business. But there comes a time when you have to instill more clarity and accountability into your culture. The following five steps will help create an accountability culture.

**WRITE DOWN THE "MEASURABLE" GOALS EMPLOYEES ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR.** Make sure they first buy-in to the goals. Spend your time upfront creating buy-in, and accountability will come easily.

**CREATE RELATIONSHIP CONTRACTS.** Identify what key employees should be doing for each other day-to-day. Most owners focus on what the person does for the company or boss, but they fail to write down what the boss does for the employee, and more importantly, what employees do for each other.

**DON'T TOLERATE BAD PERFORMANCE.** Give consistent and increasing feedback when people aren't performing. Give them three chances on critical activities. They may be in the wrong position or you may have a "systems" problem. When you meet with your employees, including during reviews, be prepared to take a hard look at your systems and be willing to make changes.

**WEED OUT EMPLOYEES WHO DON'T SHARE YOUR VALUES.** You may say, "It's hard to find employees, so I put up with their bad behavior." But if you don't let them go, you will find it hard to retain top employees because you've lowered your standards.

**WALK THE TALK.** You can't hold others to standards you are unwilling to meet yourself. You have to follow the company rules and behave with the same attitude and character you expect from them.

### **6** Shift from rainmaker to sales manager.

The owner cannot be the sole salesperson, and at some point he or she will want or need to step out entirely. Either way, form a sales team now. Ideally a team should have three salespeople to create internal competition and a spirit toward winning and cross sell-





#### QUICK TIP

Ask employees what tasks you should be delegating to them so that you can focus on more important business building. You will be surprised what they volunteer to take on.

ing. Develop a system for tracking weekly success. The sales leader should track more than sales. The leader should be tracking pipeline activities; there are two kinds:

**LEADING INDICATORS:** new contacts at association meetings, lunch and learns, other warm leads, additions to your email list; and  
**LAGGING INDICATORS:** prospect calls, prospect meetings, proposals given, etc.

The key in this transition is the owner shifts from sole rainmaker to sales manager.

## 7 Shift from the owner's brain knowing everything to having systems that guide growth.

There's a common belief that putting systems in place allows you to move around employees like chess pieces so you don't have to rely on people. It's not true. Great companies are built on good people running good systems. You will fail with poor systems, and you will fail with poor people. You need both.

## 8 Shift from working to taking time off.

Here's the Litmus test: Can you go on vacation without the company coming to a stop?

If not, start taking time off in chunks, identify what falls through the cracks, set up systems to handle it and empower your staff to make decisions.

Many contractors are afraid to take time off because they don't feel they deserve it.

I'm here to say that not only do you deserve it, but it's very important to building up the competence and trust required of your staff. They cannot feel empowered if you are always around.

Soon, you'll discover the definition of true wealth: discretionary time. **LM**

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*Scott, an author and consultant, facilitates peer groups for landscape business owners who want to transform and profitably grow their business. Reach him via [gettheleadersedge.com](http://gettheleadersedge.com) or [jeff@jeffreyscott.biz](mailto:jeff@jeffreyscott.biz).*

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HOW-TO

# Avoid customer service problems



BY KEN THOMAS

In 2006, I learned a valuable lesson about customer service. My company had recently completed a beautiful project for a wonderful client who happened to be a 9/11 widow. She was quite pleased with her new backyard patio and waterfall until she was hit with a flood that washed through her yard, overwhelmed the development's storm drains and flooded her finished basement. She called us in a panic, and we responded by helping her stop the water and clean the basement.

But I was surprised when the client blamed our company for the flooding, even though we had nothing to do with the storm drains or epic storm. As a seasoned businessman, I pushed back when challenged and explained, in my most gracious southern manner, this wasn't a problem caused by our company. I felt confident that my logical and accurate explanation of why her basement flooded would sink in and she'd appreciate all we'd done to help her.

The next day I received a phone call from her lawyer, who started the call by asking me, "Do you want to become famous on the news?" He said my client would be contacting a local news station's consumer advocacy reporter to tell him her story about how a big landscape company took advantage of a poor, helpless widow. So, at a considerable expense to our company, we did whatever it took to make sure that didn't happen. But did we do the right thing?

While not all customer-service problems are this severe, they all have the ability to cost you money and hurt your reputation if not handled properly. Behind every client problem, I try to remember one thing: This is a relationship business. Most of our business comes from referrals. Every year we're in business, our base of satisfied clients grows, creating a larger circle of positive influence for additional business. There's a huge advantage to making sure every client we deal with has a positive experience.

Many times our clients have legitimate issues with the way we conduct business or the product or services we provide. It's important to deal with those issues quickly and efficiently. The best response is to apologize, listen and empathize; fix the problem quickly and fairly; keep your promises and follow up. Every now and then we get that client from hell who just doesn't get it, and it's our natural response to draw a line to protect our margin or be right.

Customer service breakdowns often involve customer expectations and our processes. Here's what I've learned:

**COMMUNICATE CLEARLY.** Don't over promise to close a sale. Slow down and get everything in writing. Many uncomfortable client experiences can be avoided by being thorough about your scope of work and payment terms upfront.

**GET A SIGNATURE ON EVERY CONTRACT AND CHANGE ORDER.** It's good business, and

most reasonable clients understand. If someone won't sign a contract or change order, it should be a red flag. Email approvals are OK as long as the paper trail is clear about what they're approving.

**ADMIT MISTAKES.** When you or your team make a mistake, don't cover it up. Own up to it and make it right quickly.

**DON'T BE PENNY-WISE AND POUND-FOOLISH.** You did everything right, and the client expects additional work or plants. Don't nickel and dime him. Weigh the cost against the future damage to the relationship and make a value-based decision. If this is a reoccurring problem, get to the root of it.

**FIX THE PERSON, THEN THE PROBLEM.** Address the emotional state of the client first. Once they believe you care, they're more interested in solutions.

**DROP ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS.** Sometimes it's best to move on when you're dealing with an unreasonable client. At some point, you have to determine what's good for the client and your company.

Effective service recovery doesn't happen accidentally. It's a well-thought out and executed process with the objective of delivering a positive experience to every client. Hopefully, these tips will help you avoid some client-related problems, build your base of referrals and keep you from becoming "famous on the news." **LM**

---

*Thomas, founder of Envvisor Consulting, has owned three of Atlanta's most successful landscape companies. Reach him at [kentthomas@envvisorco.com](mailto:kentthomas@envvisorco.com).*



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HOW-TO

# Prepare Latinos for leadership

BY SONIA DIAZ

It's no secret the Hispanic workforce has become an integral part of success for many lawn care and landscape companies. A recent study published by the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce declared the lawn care and landscape industry as key to the economic and entrepreneurial development of the Hispanic community in the U.S., and the numbers are staggering. Latinos represent 35.2 percent of the industry's workforce—more than twice the national average for Latinos in all other industries combined.

While it's clear that Latinos are a vital part of the industry, it's not as clear how we can best prepare them today so that they will be ready to fearlessly lead into tomorrow. Many companies and organizations in the industry have already begun to teach, train and invest in their Hispanic staff with the goal of preparing them for senior level positions.

CoCal Landscape in Denver, owned by Jesus "Chuy" Medrano, president of the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance, is one of those companies. Let's look at some of its best practices when cultivating Hispanic talent.

## Mentoring programs

*"Cross-train the best guys. Have the irrigation techs show the new guys the way to run the controllers. Have the supervisors ride with the foreman. Show them the way little by little and you will soon have an efficient and well-organized workforce."*

—MARK YAW, LANDSCAPE PROJECT MANAGER, COCAL LANDSCAPE

The one factor that keeps most of us motivated at our own jobs is the possibility of being able to expand and grow in our roles. These expectations and hopes are no different for your site crews, regardless of their ethnicity. For companies with a particularly high number of Hispanic



CoCal Landscape owner "Chuy" Medrano networks at a National Hispanic Landscape Alliance reception.

employees, their future success, and maybe even their survival, depends on being able to move some of these employees into leadership roles. While some leaders will emerge naturally, it's important to realize that making a conscious effort to educate and promote Latino talent is crucial. Mentoring programs allow workers to get a broader perspective of what it takes to run the business while providing employees with

the feeling that the company has taken a vested interest in their growth.

When mentoring, employers should pick those employees who have shown the most potential and highest level of performance, as not all employees are cut out to be leaders.

If incorporating a mentoring program is not possible, simply allowing your best talent to cross-train with others on the job can really make a difference.

## Attitude reflects leadership

*"I get by with little Spanish and I think it's because the guys know I am trying to help them do their job and they want to help me."* —STACY PARCELL, LEAD DESIGNER, COCAL LANDSCAPE

While Hispanics are increasingly playing a vital role in our economy, the language barrier continues to be a big challenge for many employers. Learning English is one of the most overwhelming challenges for this workforce.

Instead of seeing the language barrier as an obstacle, employers should consider it an opportunity to build a closer relationship with their crews. Simple interactions such as asking them to teach you key Spanish words and phrases will not only help you communicate with them better, it also will make learning English words less intimidating for them.

When possible, employers should have their most important employee documents translated into Spanish, such as health benefits and employee handbooks. Some



**QUICK TIP** Create an environment where Hispanic employees feel their ideas and initiatives are valued, whether it's through brainstorming sessions, providing personal and professional growth opportunities or simply asking for their feedback.

companies also provide in-house English as a Second Language classes for their employees. By making these efforts, employers will find that two-way communication works to their advantage.

### Cultural awareness

*"Company owners need to demonstrate an interest in Hispanic workers' capacity, listen and maybe implement their suggestions and opinions. I believe if you let someone know what's expected of them, but also give them the space to fulfill those expectations, it's a great way of growing the company because they become an integral part of its operations."* —MARI MEDRANO, HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER, COCAL LANDSCAPE

One of the biggest challenges employers face when dealing with Hispanic employees for higher-level positions is the lack of cultural understanding. Adding to the complexity of the relationship are the cultural nuances among Latinos themselves. Rather than focusing on what makes them different, it's important to understand what brings them together. As we already

know, one thing they all share is that they are dedicated, loyal and extremely hard working. Hispanics feel their jobs are a reflection of themselves. They pay close attention to detail, as if the client's property were their own.

Yet, what we don't realize is the workforce in Latin American countries tends to be much more hierarchical and cultivates a belief that a worker cannot grow within the company, despite showing leadership abilities and improving his skills. Additionally, Hispanic culture carries a deeply rooted respect for authority, and as a result many Hispanic workers will not voluntarily offer feedback or ideas for fear of "challenging" their superiors. By creating an environment where Hispanic employees feel their ideas and initiatives are valued, whether it's through brainstorming sessions, providing personal and professional growth opportunities or simply asking for their feedback, they will feel as if they are part of the team and will be more likely to excel. **LM**

*Diaz is a senior account executive at Balsera Communications, where she works with the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance. Reach her at [sonia@balseracommunications.com](mailto:sonia@balseracommunications.com).*

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HOW-TO

# Sell sincerely

BY BILL BEMUS

I remember a conversation I had with a friend who worked as a project manager for a large commercial real estate development company. The name of a particular landscape company came up and my friend became apoplectic: “Oh! Those guys suck! I just had them on one of my projects. Hate ‘em! They were a pain in the ass every step of the way! I will never use them again...ever...unless they’re the low bidder.”

The recollection of that exchange always puts a smile on my face, especially when it’s juxtaposed with the concept of “relationship selling.” Is it really effective?

I am certainly no sales or marketing guru, but I have hired, read and listened to a lot of them—and I mean a *lot*—over the years, and almost all have touted relationship selling. In its basic form, you foster a relationship with a procurer of products or services (the products or services you happen to be offering) and then attempt to leverage or presume upon that friendship to sway the outcome of the sales process in your direction. A variant of relationship selling is “consultative selling.” How it works: You use your vaunted expertise to help an overworked and under-informed procurer make a purchasing decision. By providing this advice, you become a valued “team member” and your selfless service will be rewarded with the sale.

These approaches to selling never worked for me in the past.

They always seemed insincere. And given the realities of today’s business climate, they seem even more out of touch, especially in a B2B setting. Today’s business buyer, whether it’s a property manager, facilities manager, purchasing agent or government employee, does not have enough hours in the day to finish what he or she has to do as it is. They certainly don’t have time to cultivate new relationships with all of their prospective vendors. And their performance is not going to be judged by their superiors on the personality strength of the vendors they provide. They will be evaluated on the price they pay relative to the value delivered.

If you’re fortunate enough to be proposing on a project and have any kind of online presence, it is likely that the decision maker knows something about your company and service offerings already. You don’t need to waste a lot of their time introducing yourself. This also pertains to their technical questions. With the Internet and Google, nearly all of the information is there for anyone to find; they don’t need you for that anymore.

What, then, is a winning strategy for effective selling? All of us are consumers and buyers of myriad products and services. If you’re reading this, chances are you are an owner or operator of a company and are called upon by salespeople yourself. What motivates you to buy from one supplier or vendor over another? How would *you* sell to *you*? The following are tips that would help you sell something to me:



- 1 DON'T WASTE MY TIME.** We are not going to be friends, at least not at first. I don't need to be flattered nor have my ego stroked.
- 2 GET TO THE BOTTOM LINE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.** What is this going to cost and what's included? And I don't like surprises.
- 3 BE BLATANTLY HONEST.** Tell me what you do well, but I will be more impressed if you tell me what you don't do well. Don't ever tell me you do it all well.
- 4 DON'T PRESSURE ME.** I'm not going to make my decision today. I'm going to sleep on it. Follow up, but not too much.
- 5 DON'T EVER CALL AND SAY YOU JUST NEED 15 MINUTES OF MY TIME.** I know it will take at least an hour to get rid of you. (Refer to Nos. 1 and 3.)

Let me conclude on a positive note. If you're fortunate enough to garner a sale, here's your opportunity to engage in true relationship selling. It used to be called “customer loyalty” and it's still out there. It's a simple concept: Focus on delivering great service at a fair price and you will enjoy long-term relationships with your customers, who may even become your friends. That's a truly satisfying event. **LM**

*Bemus is the owner of Bemus Landscape, based in San Clemente, Calif.*

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HOW-TO

# Prevent business failure

BY FRANK ROSS

**A**s consultants, we're constantly asked "What are the reasons companies succeed?" or "What do other companies do to make more money?" Recently, I received an unusual question: "What are the top 10 reasons companies fail?" Typically, consultants are optimists and think about why businesses succeed, so fielding this question is outside the normal response zone, but here goes.

## 1 Lack of cash flow

Poor cash flow is probably 90 percent of the reason companies fold. Everything makes up the other 10 percent. You can lose money every year you're in business, but as long as you have positive cash flow and can pay the bills, you can live to fight another day. The first day you're unable to pay your bills or meet a payroll, vendors can shut you down and employees will leave.

There are an infinite number of reasons companies don't have adequate cash flow (most of them created by management), but there's one that resonates above all. We don't do a sound job collecting the money we're owed because we don't like asking for it.

Here's a tip—make collections a responsibility of the sales process. Customers are at the highest level of euphoria at the time of the sale. You've created a vision in their minds—it's a beautiful garden or a proposed low price. Either way, at that moment, they're as happy as they'll ever be. This is when you set the terms about how you'll bill the job and how you expect to be paid. Don't expect customers to know how to pay you. Get a commitment from them, and follow that commitment through to the completion of the job.



## 2 Drive-by estimating systems

I constantly meet folks who'll price a job by driving by a site and rationalize doing so because the job is similar to other ones. This method doesn't always work. There's a reason the Small Business Administration ranks construction as the second most risky business behind restaurants. Every job must have a quantity takeoff and extension, be marked up for overhead and marked up with a profit. For every job, know how much profit you have and how low you can go before you bid. It's a time-consuming process, but one that's focused on eliminating losers.

## 3 No job tracking

Once you earn a job, track your performance to ensure you're harvesting the margin (overhead and profit) you put on the job when you sold it. If there was a way to verify this statistic, we'd discover fewer than 25 percent of contractors have job-tracking systems that work. If you don't know how a job is performing, you have two problems. One, without a tracking system, you can't spot problems in the job before they manifest. Two, you can't verify that your estimating standards to price work are correct.

## 4 No financial reporting by profit center

Few of us perform only one type of work. We're normally involved in installation, maintenance, enhancements and retail. Every type of work you perform has different cost and overhead structures. If you don't know performance by profit center, how can you control



costs and accurately price the work?

Have an income statement that separates total company performance into the various profit centers with which you conduct business. Furthermore, break down all financial information by month and compare that performance to the budget.

Without a solid reporting system, you're taking far too much risk by not knowing where you stand financially. This industry is risky, and you make it more so by not having the correct information to guide you.

## 5 No budgets

Fewer than 10 percent of the businesses in the U.S. prepare a budget, according to *Inc.* magazine. A budget means a working budget—one you think through methodically, starting with how much net profit is needed to support cash flow and identifying how you'll spend money in each overhead account so you know how much gross margin you must generate to support your standard of living. Once the gross margin is established, analyze the backlog to determine the margin you're carrying into the year. Then forecast how much new business you must sell, and at what price, to create gross margin coverage for overhead and profit needs. Every month, track how you're performing against budget, and make adjustments to your plan to reflect actual performance (rolling budget). A budget is the road map for your business needed to make smart decisions.

## 6 No pricing by profit center

One of the principle reasons to categorize your income statement into profit centers representing various types of work is pricing. It makes no sense to price all types of work the same. Breaking your income statement into profit centers will allow you to create a relationship of the direct costs necessary to perform the work and overhead required to support it. Once done, depending on the type of work,

a relationship between overhead and direct costs can be established such that you can create the appropriate markups to price the work correctly. Without correct pricing, you run the risk of pricing low-risk work too high and not getting it and pricing difficult work too low and not realizing it.

## 7 No long-range planning

Creating a vision of where you want the company to be in three to five years is a constant in highly successful companies. The three- to five-year plan starts by understanding what you do best then strategizing how you can capitalize on that skill set to maximize the bottom line.

A long-range plan, which isn't a financial plan, comprises a series of definitions of how you see the business in the future. For example:

- › What markets will you serve?
- › What types of work will you perform?
- › Where will you find your labor pool?
- › What facilities and equipment will you require?
- › What will be the capital required to fund those requirements?
- › What organizational growth do you see?
- › What tracking systems do you require?
- › Will you be expanding geographically?

It's brainstorming at its best, but here's the catch—on any one of those issues, we'll likely be spending money to achieve our long-term goals. Be proactive to maximize efficiency and the return on investment.

## 8 Lack of labor control

We're in the service business, which means we sell labor, but it's amazing how few of us control our labor force. Consider the following:

- › Do you have proven labor standards by which you estimate every job?

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- › Do you prepare a labor budget for every job you bid?
- › Do you measure the hours and tasks completed each day?
- › Does the labor budget include the support activities such as load time, travel, clean-up, maintenance of completed operations and a punch list?
- › Does the crew leader have a definitive understanding of what needs to be accomplished every day along with the hours budget to accomplish those tasks?
- › Do you track weekly billable time against total hours paid?
- › Do you know the composite wage rate of your crews?
- › Do you track the amount of overtime hours paid against total hours paid?

If the answer to any of these questions is “I don’t know,” you can control your labor better. Do that by measuring it. William Edwards Deming, an American statistician, said it best: “If you can’t track it, you can’t control it.”

## 9 No control of overtime

Is overtime a good thing? As far as your employees are concerned, it’s most appreciated. But is it good

for the company? Do you control it or leave it up to the employees? Many consider it a necessary evil. But overtime is as much a controlled line item in your financials as advertising. Accept that overtime is a management decision, not an employee decision. To control it, appreciate there’s good and bad overtime. Good overtime includes:

- › Setting an annual budget for overtime and because you do, that cost for overtime is embedded in your pricing strategies and is captured over all jobs.
- › Billing the customer at overtime rates when you work overtime.
- › Billing certain skill sets—irrigation and lawn care techs, for example—at a high rate. Whenever the hourly billing rate for an employee is three times his hourly cost, you can work as much overtime as you can bill and you’ll be fine financially.

All other overtime is bad because it’s neither embedded in your pricing nor billed for separately, which means it’s a drain on profitability.

## 10 No ownership of benchmarks

Most managers assume people under their tutelage know what’s important and will do what they must to achieve excellence. I beg to differ. Employees are willing warriors and will do your bidding. If you don’t set expectations, they’ll interpret what they think you meant to say. Here’s an exercise: List what you believe defines an excellently run company. Do you measure those things? And if you do, have you assigned ownership of those items to someone on your team? Do you:

- › measure leads coming in;
- › know how many leads to chase on average to sign a contract;
- › track job efficiencies and profitability, as well as overtime;
- › know the revenue per hour you earn on every job;
- › know by profit center if you’re hitting sales and margin goals, as well as whether you’re making a profit in each;
- › budget; and
- › reforecast the budget every month following the publication of financial statements?

If you track these items, is each owned by a key employee, and do you hold that person accountable for the performance of each? If not, there’s a huge opportunity for your company. Tracking, creating measurement benchmarks, assigning ownership and holding people accountable at all levels will propel your company to levels of efficiency and profitability never seen before. **LM**

*Ross is a Green Industry consultant with 3PG Consulting. Contact him at frank@3PGConsulting.com.*

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### THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE | The author is owner-manager of JPC Consulting. Reach him at editor@thebenchmarkmedia.net.

## The power of pricing

There is still a lot of gnashing of teeth about market pricing. I showed a chart at a recent Professional Land-care Network (PLANET) event that reported moving prices in different regions of the country and what the average

Some explanation is in order, however, to explain pricing differentials. Table 2 shows the contractors in two geographic markets can at a very different price for the same service and make the same profit percentage. In this very example, the respective contractors each made



### PROFITING FROM DESIGN

JODY SHILAN | Shilan is editor of fromdesign2build.com. Contact him at

TABLE 1: MOVING RATE VS. GROSS MARGINS	
AMR	AGM
\$0	51%
\$5	49%
\$10	47%
\$15	45%
\$20	43%
\$25	41%
\$30	39%
\$35	37%
\$40	35%
\$45	33%
\$50	31%
\$55	29%
\$60	27%
\$65	25%
\$70	23%
\$75	21%
\$80	19%
\$85	17%
\$90	15%
\$95	13%
\$100	11%

This table shows what a contractor's average gross margin is based on a given average moving rate.

## The unbiddable master plan

This might be a silly question, but is there anything that you can do to stop your client from taking your design, making copies of it and then shopping it around to your competitors to try and get a lower price? Any advice would be greatly appreciated.

— Danny Wartogaj, Dreamscapes LLC, St. Paul, MN

The short answer, Danny, is yes! However, it is my opinion that if clients pay you for a design, they own the plan and can do whatever they want with it. You've been paid for your design services.

With that said, there are things that you can do to provide professional design services and still make it difficult for a client to shop your plan.

Unlike the alternative process, where homeowners hire an independent landscape designer or land-

scape designer, you are the one who is doing the design. One of the reasons that you can't stop your client from taking your design, making copies of it and then shopping it around to your competitors to try and get a lower price is that you are the one who is doing the design. One of the reasons that you can't stop your client from taking your design, making copies of it and then shopping it around to your competitors to try and get a lower price is that you are the one who is doing the design.



### BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON | The author, of the Wilson-Dwyer Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at editor@thebenchmarkmedia.net.

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

You cannot do today's business with yesterday's tools or yesterday's thinking.

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

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

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

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

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

In my consulting practice, I see some companies

as if nothing is working the way it should. A recent study by IBM reported that over the next three years, the number of businesses that will



### THE BENCHMARK

JEFF HARKNESS | The author is owner-manager of JPC Consulting. Reach him at jph@jpcconsulting.com.

## Considering an exit?

Building profits and increasing the value of your company in the current environment is a challenge. Does it seem like today's economic climate and political agenda are working against you? Health care mandates, expiring tax cuts, immigration reform, high fuel costs and little change in the housing market—shall I go on? If you're considering an exit in the next six to 18 months, make sure you have a plan to quantify

deal is unique, understand that retained assets or liabilities can be negotiated just like your multiple or adjusted EBITDA. Cash, timing of a closing date, working capital requirements or the payoff of long-term or short-term debt all contribute to your net purchase price.

**Tax consequences**  
Most deals in the Green Industry typically involve purchasing assets rather than stock. Liability risk



### THE BENCHMARK

The author is owner-manager of JPC Consulting. Reach him at editor@thebenchmarkmedia.net.

FRANK ROSS

## The 90-day scrub

ent planner is the property. Why would you want to do this? Principally because wherever you are in your year's activity, you are that much smarter than you were when the budget was created however many months ago. Put those smarts down on paper.

It is not so hard, either. For example, if just closed June, we are looking at our updated rolling budget numbers and it is the second week of July.

If we don't know how July is performing when we are halfway through the month, something's wrong. So, update July's numbers. We also know what the

# Meet the Columnists

## Stop by booth #3018 at the GIE+Expo to say hello to LM's expert contributors.

### Bruce Wilson Best Practices

The former president of Environmental Care and vice president of the parent company, Valley Crest Cos., Bruce Wilson has held numerous leadership positions in the landscape industry. Under his guidance, Environmental Care grew from a single-service California operation to the first \$100 million multi-service landscape maintenance company in the country.



### Jody Shilan Profiting from Design

As a former design/build contractor, Jody Shilan has designed, sold and managed millions of dollars worth of highly profitable installation work. He's now an independent designer, consultant and executive director of the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association. He also operates fromdesign2build.com.



### Kevin Kehoe, Jeff Harkness and Frank Ross The Benchmark

Kevin Kehoe has worked with more than 150 companies in the services industry, helping them increase profits, grow revenues, acquire companies and exit for retirement. Jeff Harkness specializes in growth and exit strategy planning and has spent the last 10 years working exclusively with the owners of contracting and service firms. Frank Ross' in-depth work on several national Green Industry financial studies and 35 years of hands-on experience with the most successful companies in the country give him unparalleled knowledge of what Green Industry firms do to become profitable and what steps they must take to make money.



# Landscape Management

# GIE+EXPO

October 25-26,  
Louisville, KY



# RESOURCE PROFILES

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**Our annual round-up of Green Industry supplier information**

**Andrew K. Mittag**  
Senior Vice President,  
Agrium and President,  
Agrium Advanced  
Technologies

**Mission Statement**

Agrium Advanced Technologies is the leading manufacturer and marketer of slow- and controlled-release fertilizers and micronutrients in the agricultural, professional turfgrass, lawn care, horticulture and consumer lawn/garden markets. We are a single, convenient source of a broad range of innovative and highly effective fertilizer technologies.

Dependability, environmental responsibility and cost efficiency are hallmarks of those technologies. They make professional turfgrass managers and lawn care operators more productive, while at the same time enhancing environmental stewardship.

We deliver innovative, premium quality products with unsurpassed customer service. We achieve this through the expertise of our employees, strong customer relationships and our passion for developing new technologies. Polymer-coated plant protection products, for example, are some of the newest technologies we're bringing to our turf and ornamental customers.

**Agrium Advanced Technologies**  
2915 Rocky Mountain Ave.  
Ste. 400  
Loveland, CO 80538

# Agrium Advanced Technologies

Relying on proprietary, high-tech manufacturing processes and top-quality ingredients, Agrium Advanced Technologies has been able to establish a family of innovative products respected for their dependable agronomic performance, as well as their economic and environmental advantages.

Our most advanced fertilizer technology—predictable, consistent DURATION CR® Controlled-Release Fertilizer—makes it easier to maintain healthy turf while reducing maintenance costs. With DURATION CR, nitrogen is released gradually throughout a plant's growth cycle, resulting in precise feeding that lasts for weeks, months or up to an entire season.

The key to the steady release is an advanced generation polymer coating technology that gradually meters nutrients for as long as needed to meet the plant's needs. Thanks to DURATION CR's enhanced efficiency,

you can use up to 40% less nitrogen per year, which is good for the environment and your bottom line.

**DURATION CR delivers:**

- ▶ Minimized growth flushes
- ▶ Lower potential for leaching even under the wettest conditions
- ▶ Reduced applications for time and money savings
- ▶ Healthier turf
- ▶ Blends and sizes for every application and budget

There are a variety of fertilizer brands that are Driven by Duration. The Driven by Duration icon on the fertilizer bag is your assurance that it contains DURATION CR and will deliver as pledged. While other coated fertilizers are available, their coatings have been known to crack or break down prematurely, which means they don't perform much better than uncoated fertilizers.



**There's only one Spread it & Forget it™**

For lawns, parks and professional turf, *Spread it & Forget it™* is the ultimate blend that's Driven by Duration. Depending on your climate, *Spread it & Forget it* can feed turf for up to six months or more with just one application. Just one application keeps turf lush, green and healthy for a full growing season. In some cases it's been confirmed to help municipalities meet shrinking maintenance budgets without sacrificing upkeep of green spaces and sports fields, and increase LCO customer satisfaction and crew productivity. It simply helps accomplish more with less: less energy, less nitrogen and less environmental impact.



**Paul Syracuse**  
General Manager

**Mission Statement**

For more than 67 years, Buffalo Turbine has manufactured high-velocity, high-powered turbine-style blowers for spraying and debris blowing that have been proven to save time, labor and money.

# Buffalo Turbine Debris Blowers



Cyclone Squared "Twin Turbine" Debris Blower – the most powerful blower available



Cyclone 8000 Debris Blower – the most cost-effective turbine-style blower available

Buffalo Turbine, utilizing turbine blower technology, provides the most powerful debris blowers available worldwide since 1945. Buffalo Turbine Debris Blowers are the blowers of choice for landscapers, sports turf managers, golf course superintendents, parks, airports and municipalities worldwide.

Available in diesel, PTO, hydraulic, skidsteer mount, and four different gas engine models all MADE IN THE USA. Buffalo Turbine offers more than 15 models of debris blowers and sprayers that will allow any size organization, big or small, the ability to afford the time and labor saving

benefits of a Buffalo Turbine.

Utilizing state-of-the-art engineering and high-quality components, we have designed blowers for the U.S. military to help find and destroy roadside bombs in Iraq and Afghanistan, and developed the official blower of the IHRA and the Preferred Track Blower of the NHRA. Buffalo Turbine Debris Blowers have allowed landscaping companies around the world to save time and labor while increasing profitability.

**Major Product Lines:**

High-Powered Debris Blowers and Sprayers available in Gas, Diesel, Hydraulic, Skid Steer Mount, PTO and Electric

**Manufacturing Facility:**

Springville, N.Y.



**Buffalo Turbine Debris Blowers**  
180 Zoar Valley Road  
Springville, NY 14141

**Phone:** 716-592-2700  
**Fax:** 716-592-2460  
**Website:**  
www.buffaloturbine.com  
**Email:**  
info@buffaloturbine.com



# Cat<sup>®</sup> Building and Construction Products

For more than 85 years, Caterpillar Inc. has been making sustainable progress possible and driving positive change on every continent. With 2011 sales and revenues of \$60.1 billion, Caterpillar is the world's leading manufacturer of construction and mining equipment, diesel and natural gas engines, industrial gas turbines and diesel-electric locomotives.

**Cat Building and Construction Products** offers advanced machinery and accessories that reduce customer costs and increase work efficiency for landscaping professionals. We are backed by the Cat<sup>®</sup> Dealer network, with 1,600 locations, providing unmatched support in the industry. Our company is dedicated to supplying our customers with financial, rental and training services to ensure they get the most out of their Cat machines.

Our landscaping products include compact track loaders, skid steer loaders, mini hydraulic excavators, compact wheel loaders, multi-terrain loaders and backhoe loaders. These Cat products have been specifically crafted to tackle all landscaping jobs including design and build, irrigation, soil preparation, sod installation, tree installation and nursery, and snow and ice management. These machines

can be individualized with a wide variety of Cat Work Tool attachments and design options for increased versatility and productivity.

## Cat Work Tool Attachments

The 44 available Cat Work Tool attachments tailor Cat machines to the specific requirements of a customer's working needs. Cat Work Tool attachments enhance the productivity and utility of Cat machines, equipping them for a wide range of tasks and operating requirements and providing total system solutions for any job application.

## Snow and Ice Management

Cat machines can be easily paired with snow blowers, angle blades or brooms to create the ideal winter workhorse for snow and ice removal. For residential or commercial landscapers, using the same machines in summer to remove snow in the winter means they can keep their crews working year-round to maximize productivity and profits.

## Equipment Rental

The local Cat dealer will design a solution to help the customer's business grow while managing risk and controlling costs. Renting from the global Cat dealer network combines the



benefit of a large equipment inventory with an exceptional level of skilled support. Whether our customers need additional equipment for the busy season, a specialized Work Tool attachment or jobsite-specific tools and supplies, Cat rentals are a cost-efficient solution.

## Financial Services

Cat Financial supports customers with total financial solutions through complementary products and services. We are uniquely structured to support the distinctive needs of customers financing Cat equipment. Cat Insurance provides insurance and risk management products and services that help Caterpillar, its dealers, their customers and original equipment manufacturers manage their business risks.

## Safety Services

With our operator training programs and safety e-learning, we help elevate operators to higher proficiency levels to increase efficiency. Video demonstrations and multi-language safety manuals provide information and tips on how to operate the equipment properly while avoiding unnecessary wear and tear.

**CATERPILLAR<sup>®</sup>**

**Cat<sup>®</sup> Building and Construction Products**

**YouTube:**  
[www.youtube.com/user/catconstructiontrade/](http://www.youtube.com/user/catconstructiontrade/)  
 featured

**Facebook:**  
[www.facebook.com/CatConstructionTrades](http://www.facebook.com/CatConstructionTrades)

**Cat BCP:**  
[catresourcecenter.com/LM](http://catresourcecenter.com/LM)

**Blog:** [caterpillar.lithium.com](http://caterpillar.lithium.com)



# ClearSpan Fabric Structures

ClearSpan Fabric Structures is the industry-leading manufacturer of tension fabric buildings, offering American-made structures with in-house engineering, manufacturing, financing and installation. ClearSpan Hercules Truss Arch Buildings are the ideal design-build solution for warehousing, materials and equipment storage, sand and salt storage and more.

Hercules Truss Arch Buildings feature abundant



to the look of our landscape supply business. It also visually tells our customers we are serious about maintaining a quality product by properly storing it.”

Every Hercules Truss Arch Building is custom-engineered to fit the requirements of the specific location such as snow load or foundation type and is constructed in conformance with the International Building Code. With minimal foundation requirements, the structures can be permanent or temporary, and are easy to relocate as needs change. Structures can be built to any length and up to 300' wide.

For more information on ClearSpan Fabric Structures, visit [www.ClearSpan.com/ADLM](http://www.ClearSpan.com/ADLM) or call 1.866.643.1010 to speak with a ClearSpan specialist.

natural light, decreasing the need for artificial lighting and reducing energy costs. With no internal support posts and high clearances, these buildings boast spacious interiors perfect for maneuvering heavy equipment, including forklifts, dump trucks, skid loaders, conveyors and other machinery inside the structure. Constructed from USA-made, triple-galvanized structural

steel, they hold up strong in corrosive environments and feature a 15-year warranty.

For green industry and landscaping professionals, Hercules Truss Arch Buildings are becoming increasingly popular for a variety of needs, from sand and salt storage to equipment storage. Says Dave Bonk, owner of Bonk Brothers Supplies, Inc., “The building is visually attractive and adds



**ClearSpan Fabric Structures**  
1395 John Fitch Blvd.  
South Windsor, CT 06074

**Phone:** 1-866-643-1010

**Fax:** 1-860-760-0210

**Website:**

[www.ClearSpan.com/ADLM](http://www.ClearSpan.com/ADLM)

**Jean Hlay**  
President and COO

Better Products.  
Better Experience.  
Better Results.

## Cub Cadet

A leader in the outdoor power-equipment industry, Cub Cadet engineers innovative, premium-quality products.

Through a dedicated and extensive network of dealers and retailers, Cub Cadet delivers a full line of high-performance power equipment and services that cover all aspects of grounds care for professionals and homeowners – including the world’s only four-wheel-steer, zero-turn riders; lap bar zero-turn riders; utility vehicles; lawn and garden tractors, lithium ion- and gasoline-powered handheld and chore products; snow throwers and more.

Cub Cadet offers the first and only four-wheel steer, zero-turn riders with steering wheel technology. The TANK SZ commercial zero-



TANK SZ zero-turn riding mower with four-wheel steering and steering wheel control.

turn rider delivers incredible maneuverability, turf protection and remarkable traction – even on steep inclines – due to Cub Cadet’s exclusive 4-wheel steering technology (patented as Synchro Steer Technology®). The TANK LZ features the industry’s most intelligent and responsive lap bar system – the only lap bar system that

allows for a full range of adjustability and rider egress regardless of position.

A global company based in the U.S., Cub Cadet is recognized worldwide for its legacy in engineering excellence and its progressive dedication to exceeding owner expectations by delivering on its promise of better products, a better experience and better results.



TANK LZ zero-turn riding mower with the industry’s most responsive lap bar controls.

**Cub Cadet**

**Cub Cadet**  
5903 Grafton Road  
P.O. Box 368023  
Valley City, OH 44280

**Toll-Free Customer Service**  
**Number:** 1-800-965-4282  
**Website:** www.cubcadet.com

### Major Product Lines:

Four-wheel-steer, zero-turn riders; lap bar zero-turn riders; utility vehicles; lawn and garden tractors, lithium ion- and gasoline-powered handheld and chore products; snow throwers and more.

### Manufacturing Facilities:

Cub Cadet is a global company based in Valley City, Ohio, U.S.A., and operates U.S. manufacturing facilities in Streetsboro and Willard, Ohio; Tupelo, Miss.; and Martin, Tenn.



**Antonio Galindez**  
President and CEO

**Mission Statement**

As part of The Dow Chemical Company, we share a common mission to discover, develop and bring to market solutions to meet the challenges of the growing world while working to improve the lives of its inhabitants. Our commitment to address the world's need for food, feed, fuel and fiber fosters intense collaboration of diverse perspectives, empowering our people to create innovative solutions that continue to reshape the world around us. Together with The Dow Chemical Company, we provide sustainable solutions to the growing world.



**Dow AgroSciences**  
9330 Zionsville Road  
Indianapolis, IN 46268

**Phone:** 800-255-3726  
**Fax:** 800-905-7326  
**Website:**  
[www.DowProvesIt.com](http://www.DowProvesIt.com)  
**Email:** [info@dow.com](mailto:info@dow.com)

# Dow AgroSciences

Dow AgroSciences delivers innovative technology that exceeds market needs and improves the quality of life of the world's growing population. This is evident in the Turf & Ornamental products we recently have introduced, and several new products and technologies in our pipeline. That's our commitment to the industries we serve and, most important, that's our commitment to you.

**Major product lines:**

- ▶ **Dimension®** specialty herbicide provides premium season-long preemergence control of crabgrass, spurge, oxalis and other grassy weeds, along with early postemergence control of crabgrass. With multiple formulations, including water-based Dimension 2EW specialty herbicide, Dimension can be used over the top of field- and container-grown nursery and landscape ornamentals, and on established lawns, golf courses and commercial sod farms without staining surroundings.
- ▶ **Gallery®** specialty herbicide is the most effective preemergence herbicide for broadleaf weeds labeled for cool- and warm-season turf. It can be applied in spring or fall; helps minimize costly callbacks due to weed breakthrough; and provides control for up to eight months.



- ▶ **LockUp®** specialty herbicide is available through distributors as a formulated product for superior control of dollarweed in the South and clover and ground ivy in the North. It offers postemergence weed control to lawn care professionals, golf course superintendents and sports turf managers. It provides activity at extremely low use rates (0.02 to 0.06 lb. a.i./A) and can be applied to moist cool- or warm-season turf.
- ▶ **Eagle® 20EW** specialty fungicide is a liquid systemic fungicide for preventive and curative control of roughly 20 turf-destroying diseases, including dollar spot and brown patch. Available in convenient, easy-to-use containers ideal for use on home lawns and backyard fruit trees. It won't harm popular turfgrass and ornamental species.

**Support:**

We have dedicated individuals serving as sales representatives, technical account managers, sales managers and field scientists providing training, stewardship and solutions to formulators, distributors, university researchers and end users nationwide. Labels and MSDS are available at [www.DowProvesIt.com](http://www.DowProvesIt.com).

The Power of MORE™ earning program allows companies to earn cash rebates on Dow AgroSciences product purchases. Visit [www.PowerOfMORE.com](http://www.PowerOfMORE.com).

®™Trademark of The Dow Chemical Company ("Dow") or an affiliated company of Dow. State restrictions on the sale and use of Dimension specialty herbicide products, Eagle 20EW and LockUp apply. Consult the label before purchase or use for full details. Consult the labels of products containing LockUp before purchase or use for full details. Always read and follow label directions. ©2012 Dow AgroSciences LLC



**Dave Polisky**  
Director of Sales  
and Marketing

## FLEX-Drain®

The complete drainage solution system.

### PRODUCT FOCUS:

Originally a division of parent company Cleveland Tubing Inc. (CTI) in Cleveland, Tenn., FLEX-Drain® is now owned by Amerimax®, a leading manufacturer of rain-carrying systems in the United States and a subsidiary of Euramax®.

Launched in 2007, FLEX-Drain® quickly became CTI's flagship line and its largest product offering. Its innovative design as a complete drainage solution system offered users

a revolutionary alternative to ordinary corrugated pipe.

This product line has received numerous accolades, including a Do It Best Members' Choice Award (two-time recipient) and the Kruesi Award for innovation. Most recently, a brand new extension to the line, the FLEX-Drain® flexible T/Y fitting,

won the National Irrigation Association award for Best New Special Product.

### THE FLEX-Drain® SYSTEM:

Developed to meet the needs of do-it-yourselfers and professionals alike, flexible, expandable FLEX-Drain® is made using advanced no-break



co-polymers for superior contractor grade performance. Only 100% pure "virgin"- grade material is used. In addition, seamless extruding technology offers advanced strength and integrity. The product's patent-pending "peak and valley" design offers greater surface area for weight disbursement, tested and proven to exceed all applicable ASTM standards. FLEX-Drain fittings also exceed all ASTM standards.

Widely compatible with 3" and 4" corrugated pipe and 4" PVC, FLEX-Drain® flexes and bends to hold virtually any shape and installs approximately 20% faster than standard corrugated pipe. It also requires 1/5th the space for transport and storage, saving time and money. And because of its flexible, expandable design, with FLEX-Drain® retailers can stock more

corrugated drain pipe in less space than ever before.

### FLEX-Drain® PRODUCTS AND ACCESSORIES:

- Solid FLEX-Drain® is a solid pipe ideal for applications that involve diverting water from one point to another. Available in 8-, 12-, 25- and 50-foot lengths.
- Perforated FLEX-Drain is a pipe with spaced slits ideal for ground water drainage. Available in 8-, 12-, 25- and 50-foot lengths.
- Perforated FLEX-Drain® with Sock is a pipe with spaced slits, covered with a removable polyester sock. Available in 8-, 12-, 25' and 50' lengths.
- Couplers and adaptors are also available.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact FLEX-Drain® at 800-257-1722 (Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. ET)

**FLEX-Drain®**  
Professional Grade Drainage Solutions

FLEX-Drain®  
799 Industrial Drive, SW  
Cleveland, TN 37311

Phone: 800-257-1722  
Website:  
www.flex-drain.com



**Joe Shooner**  
Vice President of Sales

**Mission Statement**

Our mission is to make it easy for landscape and lawn care professionals to grow their businesses. Our marketing solutions improve our clients' image and results.

# Focal Point Communications

**Product focus:**

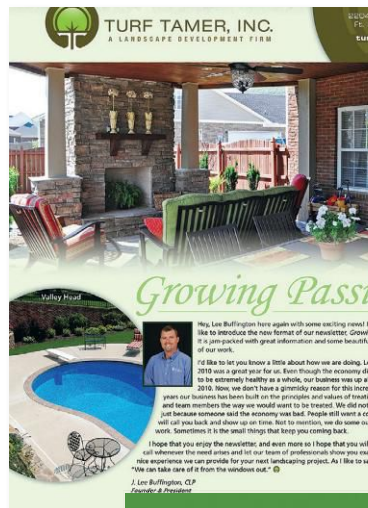
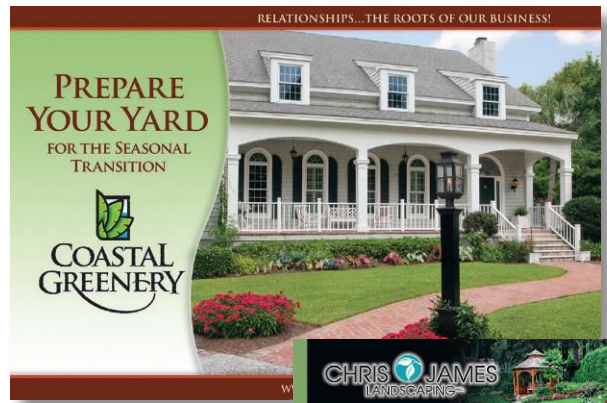
Focal Point is a marketing company serving landscape and lawn care professionals exclusively. We focus on getting results for our clients by generating more leads, helping to close more sales, retaining more clients and utilizing new media to improve credibility and success. We've been serving the green industry since 1987, providing effective marketing solutions with our dedicated and talented team of professionals.

**Support, sales and service:**

We pride ourselves on exceptional customer service, and when you work with us, you can expect a smooth, trouble-free and friendly experience. Our website at [www.growpro.com](http://www.growpro.com) enables our customers to learn about our products, send inquiries and shop for marketing materials at any time.

**Product lines:**

Focal Point creates and manages newsletter, e-newsletter and direct mail programs. We provide website design and custom graphic design, in addition to our catalog of postcards, presentation folders, educational materials and client communication tools. We develop marketing plans for our clients and offer full rebranding services.



**Focal Point Communications**  
61 Circle Freeway Drive  
Cincinnati, OH 45246

**Phone:** 800-525-6999  
**Website:** [www.growpro.com](http://www.growpro.com)  
**Email:** [joeshooner@growpro.com](mailto:joeshooner@growpro.com)

**Scott Conner**  
Vice President, American  
Honda Power Equipment

**Mission Statement**

Honda is the world's largest manufacturer of engines, producing and marketing models for a diverse array of automotive, motorcycle, marine and power equipment products.

Honda Engines offers a complete line of small, general purpose engines that supply smooth and dependable power for commercial, rental industry and consumer applications. These engines are some of the quietest and easiest to start of their kind, even in harsh commercial and construction environments. Such attributes have made Honda engines the popular choice for original equipment manufacturers looking to add value to their own brands.

Honda continuously works to meet future, lower EPA and CARB standards regarding the performance of its products. Investing in meeting the strictest of environmental requirements reflects the company's forward thinking on emission regulations, air quality and customer needs.

**HONDA  
ENGINES**

**Honda Engines**  
4900 Marconi Drive  
Alpharetta, GA 30005

**Phone:** 678-339-2600  
**Website:**  
www.engines.honda.com

# Honda Engines



**Honda Engines: Spotlight on V-Twin Models**

Honda GX OHV V-Twin engines offer exceptional power, adaptability and fuel economy in a compact package. Six V-Twin models (GX/GXV630, GX/GXV660 and GX/GXV690) are available in both horizontal and vertical shaft configurations and are well-suited for light-utility vehicles as well as demanding, power-hungry commercial turf, construction and rental equipment applications.

The engines are ideal for commercial turf equipment (zero-turn radius mowers, lawn tractors, trenchers, stump grinders and chipper/shredders); construction equipment (concrete saws, vibratory rollers, ride-on cement trowels and generators); and pressure washers and floor buffers.

A hemispherical combustion chamber, an integrated cylinder and cylinder head, forged steel connecting rods, a 9.3:1 compression ratio, a digital CDI with variable ignition timing, and twin barrel inner-vent carburetion contribute to the enhanced, fuel-efficient performance of the Honda V-Twin.

**Manufacturing Facility:**

Honda engines are produced at six manufacturing facilities throughout the world.

**Sales and Marketing, Technical Support, Training and Customer Service:**

Alpharetta, Ga.

**Major Product Lines**

Honda produces 29 engines models in six basic series:

Mini Four-Stroke Series	Hand-held portable equipment
GX Series V-Twin Series iGX Series	Commercial and rental equipment
GS Series	Premium residential and light-duty commercial markets
GC Series	Premium residential power equipment



**Mona Haberer**  
President and CEO

**Mission Statement**

To guide and provide the green industry with superior, cost-effective insurance solutions.



**Hortica Insurance & Employee Benefits**

1 Horticultural Lane  
P.O. Box 428  
Edwardsville, IL 62025

**Phone:** 800-851-7740

**Fax:** 800-233-3642

**Website:**

[www.hortica-insurance.com](http://www.hortica-insurance.com)

**Email:**

[sales@hortica-insurance.com](mailto:sales@hortica-insurance.com)

# Hortica Insurance & Employee Benefits

**Product focus:**

Founded in 1887, Hortica is the only U.S. insurance company solely dedicated to landscape professionals, nurseries, greenhouse growers, garden centers, interior plantscapers, retail florists and wholesale floral distributors—the entire green industry. We realize the industry is unpredictable and ever-changing. Rest assured our focus is, and will remain, dedicated to protecting you.

Hortica will guide you in designing an insurance plan to provide protection for equipment at job sites, on-the-job employee injuries, chemical application, landscape design/architecture errors and omissions, your employees and other risks unique to your business. With the right coverages at competitive prices, Hortica can help your business improve its bottom line.

Hortica actively participates and supports many national and state industry associations including Professional Landcare Network, Association of Professional Landscape Designers, American Nursery & Landscape Association, OFA—an Association of Horticultural Professionals, Master Nursery Garden Centers and Society of American Florists.



**Facilities:**

Hortica is a national company with its corporate office located in the St. Louis metropolitan area in Edwardsville, IL. The company has branch offices in California, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Virginia. Hortica has approximately 80 account executives throughout the country.

**Support:**

When you call Hortica's toll-free number, a real person will answer your call. Our knowledgeable insurance experts will help you stay abreast of your insurance program. Hortica provides cost-saving services to our clients such as loss control training programs, safety resource materials and proactive claims handling. We will even help you

avoid unreasonable liability by reviewing legal contracts. In the event of a loss, a professional on-staff adjuster will guide you through every detail and provide a prompt, fair and hassle-free claim settlement.

**Major product lines:**

Hortica is the green industry advocate that is a trusted partner for all business insurance, employee benefits and personal insurance. We provide a full range of products and services including business package policies, business automobile, workers compensation, bonds, errors and omissions, umbrella, employment practices liability, flood and earthquake, health insurance, long-term care, disability and a variety of personal lines coverage.



**Richard Hunter**  
CEO

**Mission Statement**

Our mission is to deliver innovative products and services of the highest quality to the industries we serve. We will achieve this mission without compromising our core values of customer satisfaction, innovation, family and citizenship.



**Hunter Industries**  
1940 Diamond St.  
San Marcos, CA 92078

**Toll-free Customer Service:**  
760-744-5240

**Website:**  
www.hunterindustries.com

**Email:**  
info@hunterindustries.com

# Hunter Industries

**Major Product Lines:**

Hunter Industries is a family-owned global company that provides high-quality, efficient irrigation solutions. The product line now includes products ranging from rotors that throw between 10 and 160 feet, the water-saving MP Rotator, a full line of AC-powered controllers with smart weather-sensing capabilities including the fully modular I-Core and highly popular X-Core controllers, valves built to withstand 220 PSI, the subsurface irrigating Eco-Mat, Professional Landscape Dripline with built-in check-valves, and robust central control options.

**Manufacturing Facilities:**

Our infrastructure as a corporation is built to minimize resource use as well. From our LEED-certified factories and facilities, to our extensive material waste-reduction efforts, every aspect of our business was developed to use as little natural resource as possible.

Beyond irrigation, Hunter has also increased our investment in Hunter Golf, our line of golf course irrigation products, acquired the innovation-driven FX Luminaire brand of outdoor lighting, and formed Hunter Custom Molding, which offers our extremely efficient manufacturing services to industries beyond irrigation.



While we couldn't be more proud of the products we've introduced over the years, we're most proud of what the Hunter name has come to signify. Throughout all of our interests, Hunter has grown to mean more. More support, more technical resources, more product training, market-stabilizing prices and generous warranties. Because we understand our customers

don't just need a manufacturer, they need a partner. And that's exactly what we strive to be on every level.

Today, with four brands under our corporate banner, sales, service and support on every inhabited continent and more than 100 unique product lines, the Hunter promise of partnership stands as strong as ever.







**Michael Jones**  
President

**Mission Statement**

Husqvarna Group's business mission is to develop, manufacture and market mainly power products for forestry, lawn and garden maintenance, as well as cutting equipment for the construction and stone industries. The product range includes products for both consumers and professional users.



**Husqvarna Group**

**Husqvarna Group**  
9335 Harris Corners Pkwy.  
Suite 500  
Charlotte, NC 28269

**Toll-free Customer Service Number:** 704-597-5000  
**Fax Number:** 704-597-8802  
**Website:** [www.husqvarna.com](http://www.husqvarna.com)  
**Email:** [press@husqvarnagroup.com](mailto:press@husqvarnagroup.com)

# Husqvarna Group



Husqvarna has a complete range of outdoor power equipment.

The Husqvarna Group is the world's largest producer of outdoor power products including chainsaws, trimmers, lawn mowers and garden tractors. The Group is also the European leader in consumer watering products and one of the world leaders in cutting

equipment and diamond tools for the construction and stone industries. The product offering includes products for both consumers and professional users. The Group's products are sold via dealers and retailers in more than 100 countries.

**Major Product Lines**

- Husqvarna
- RedMax
- Poulan
- Poulan Pro
- Dixon
- Bluebird
- Jonesred
- Weedeater
- McCulloch
- Gardena

**Product Focus**

- Outdoor Power Equipment

**Manufacturing Facilities**

- Orangeburg, SC
- McRae, GA
- Nashville, AR



**Samuel R. Allen**  
Chairman & CEO

# John Deere



### Product focus:

In 2012, John Deere is celebrating 175 years of innovation with the highest-quality products and product operator safety initiatives. John Deere manufactures and distributes a full range of products and services designed for the commercial customer.

From commercial riding mowers and compact tractors

to skid steers and utility vehicles, John Deere offers an extensive equipment line to address landscaping needs, from design to daily maintenance.

Creating a total solution for the commercial customer, John Deere also offers a wide range of soft goods and landscaping materials from John Deere Landscapes, competitive

finance options and seasonal payment plans to optimize cash flow through John Deere Credit, superior parts and service, and the support of a strong national dealer network.

### Manufacturing facilities:

John Deere manufactures commercial products in Fuquay-Varina, NC; Horicon, WI; Augusta, GA; Alpharetta, GA; and Dubuque, IA.

### Technical support and training:

At [www.JohnDeere.com](http://www.JohnDeere.com), customers can find information on a variety of support functions, including online product operator manuals and training modules, warranty information and product selector tools.



**John Deere**  
1 John Deere Place  
Moline, IL 61265

**Phone:** 800-537-8233  
**Website:**  
[www.JohnDeere.com](http://www.JohnDeere.com)



**Tom Cromwell**  
President

**Mission Statement**

Kohler Engines, along with Italy-based Lombardini, represent a global engine concern in business since the 1920s. Together, Kohler Engines and Lombardini manufacture a wide range of gasoline, gaseous, and diesel engines, from 4 to 74 hp, which are supplied to equipment manufacturers worldwide in the lawn and garden, commercial and industrial, agricultural and construction markets.

**KOHLER ENGINES**

**Kohler® Engines**  
444 Highland Drive  
Kohler, WI 53044

**Phone:** 800-544-2444  
**Website:**  
KohlerEngines.com

# Kohler® Engines

Since its beginnings in 1920, Kohler® Engines has earned a reputation for manufacturing the highest-quality engines with superior performance. Today, this legacy is advancing as more than 90 years of innovation continue to drive Kohler Engines to expand its product offering and market presence around the globe.

**KDI Diesel Engines**

The company’s latest major product innovation is a Tier 4 Final emission compliant diesel engine line developed with Italy-based Lombardini, a KOHLER Company. This new, heavy-duty diesel line offers optimized fuel consumption, limited emissions and remarkable performance without the use of a diesel particulate filter (DPF).

The power and torque of these engines in relation to their compact size and reduced fuel consumption offers significant advantages to construction, industrial and agricultural end-users.

Achieving Tier 4 Final emission compliance without a DPF was possible through the efficient use of the engine’s components, including Kohler’s direct injection system, cooled

exhaust gas recirculation (EGR) and diesel oxygenated catalyst (DOC). An Electronic Control Unit (ECU) with fuel mapping program also is incorporated to manage the engines’ power output.

**EFI Technology**

Of course, another opportunity from Kohler Engines offering unmatched efficiency is the closed-loop EFI (electronic fuel injection) engine, which is incorporated into the company’s Command PRO EFI commercial line. These engines have been shown to save up to \$600 a year on fuel and are designed to provide reliable starting and unequalled performance.

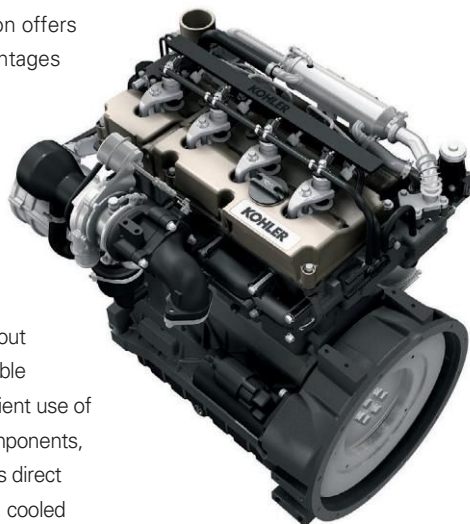
Only Kohler EFI engines include an oxygen sensor that analyzes the air/fuel mixture in the muffler. If the oxygen level strays from the ideal air/fuel mixture, the sensor triggers

adjustments to the amount of fuel injected into the system. Kohler EFI engines then “close the loop” between the air/fuel intake and the exhaust output to provide a constant stream of critical feedback, which helps deliver optimal fuel efficiency and a variety of other benefits, including easier starting, fuel adaptability, improved power, and increased life span.

Based on strong marketplace response, Kohler Engines is also set to release its Command PRO EFI Propane Engine. This new option is ideal for those seeking the advantages of the company’s closed-loop EFI technology in tandem with the clean-burning and eco-friendly benefits of propane.

**Connect with Kohler**

To learn more about these and other recent innovations from Kohler Engines, or to view the company’s complete product offering, visit KohlerEngines.com or facebook.com/kohlerengines.





**Tim Smith**  
President & CEO

### Mission Statement

LandOpt identifies and partners with the most highly qualified, independent landscape contractors in exclusive territories throughout the U.S., empowering them with the best processes, systems, technology and support services in the areas of human resources, sales, business management and operations management. The result of this long-term relationship is profitable growth, improved productivity, and defined career paths for team members, as well as the ability to be part of a national network of landscape contractors who operate in the same manner.



**LandOpt**  
650 Smithfield St.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

**Phone:** 412-567-4328  
**Fax:** 866-508-2472  
**Website:** [www.landopt.com](http://www.landopt.com)  
**Email:** [info@landopt.com](mailto:info@landopt.com)

# LandOpt

LandOpt works exclusively with independent landscape contractors, providing proven systems and process in ALL areas of your business – sales/marketing, operations, human resources and business systems. We help you achieve your financial goals through a long-term relationship that includes regular coaching visits as part of a whole-business approach to improving productivity in all areas.

After implementing LandOpt, contractors within the LandOpt Network report having greater control over their business while reducing the number of hours they work to achieve that success!

To learn how the LandOpt business model can elevate your company to the next level of success, contact Partnership Coordinator Teri McGuinness for a complimentary evaluation to determine if your company might qualify to be a Powered by LandOpt Contractor.

### Major Product Lines:

The LandOpt System is a complete business improvement approach

LandOpt Network principals and sales professionals pose for a photo during the annual Principals Meeting & Success Celebration.



LandOpt Success Coach Steve Bach conducts a coaching visit at an Atlanta-based contractor location

that includes systems, processes, training and business coaching.

### Product Focus:

LandOpt works with successful, independently-owned landscape contractors on whole business improvement with the goal of creating profitable growth, improved productivity, defined career paths and an opportunity to be part of a National Contractor Network.

### Manufacturing Facility:

Based in Pittsburgh, Pa., LandOpt supports a national network of independently owned landscape contractors.

### Technical support:

LandOpt provides continuous learning opportunities via role-specific training events, webinars, and annual network-wide events in addition to in-person coaching visits and weekly coaching support calls.



**Tom Rich**  
President

# L.T. Rich Products

**Product focus:**

L.T. Rich Products is a manufacturer of stand-on fertilizer/spray systems, aerators and turf renovators for the commercial lawn care industry. All units are zero-turn and feature a pump/wheel motor transmission. We use only state-of-the-art laser-cutting equipment and CNC fabrication machinery.

Sprayers feature all stainless

steel construction with large fertilizer and liquid spraying capacity. Sizes range from 100 to 300 pounds for fertilizer and eight to 50 gallons of liquid.

Aerators feature 36-in. or 46-in. tine width and 95,000-sq.-ft.-per-hour productivity.

Several attachments are available for the aerators, including a spray system, fertilizer spreader, de-thatch rake, slit seeder and even

a snow plow. Custom and purpose-built units are also available. All products are sold direct or through a dealer base depending on location.

**Manufacturing facility:**

22,000-sq.-ft. facility in Lebanon, IN.

**Major product lines:**

- Z-SPRAY
- Z-PLUG



**L.T. Rich Products**  
920 Hendricks Drive  
Lebanon, IN 46052

**Phone:** 877-482-2040  
**Fax:** 765-482-2050  
**Website:** [www.z-spray.com](http://www.z-spray.com)  
**Email:** [sales@z-spray.com](mailto:sales@z-spray.com)

Allan Hansen  
President

**Mission Statement**

The goal at Master Route is to be a valuable partner by providing cost-effective GPS fleet-tracking solutions that help to improve your bottom line.

# Master Route



When your industry involves using vehicles and equipment, you should have a way to keep track of them. Master Route is not just one solution. We represent multiple companies, so we are able to provide the right solution for a variety of industries and from a choice of systems.

GPS tracking software provides the ability to validate time worked and reduce fuel



costs by eliminating out of route and the unauthorized use of vehicles and equipment. In fact, customers have reported a 12% reduction in operation costs within as little

as 2 months! One customer recovered approximately \$400,000 of their stolen vehicles and equipment, which equaled the cost of their entire solution.



**Master Route**  
344 Acoma Blvd. South  
Lake Havasu City, AZ 86406

**Toll-Free Customer Service Number:** 1-855-832-4312  
**Fax:** 928-505-3100  
**Website:**  
www.masterroute.com  
**Email:** info@masterroute.com



**Major Product Lines:**  
GPS Tracking Systems

**Product Focus:**  
We provide GPS Tracking Systems to all sizes of landscape companies.

**Technical Support:**  
We provide personal pre- and post-sales support.

**Jim Jackson**  
President

**Mission Statement**

MistAway® Systems is the leading manufacturer of outdoor misting systems that control mosquitoes, spiders, no-see-ums and other annoying insects. We are committed to providing our dealers with the best business opportunity in misting.

# MistAway Systems



**Product focus:**

MistAway manufactures a system that sprays a very fine mist of a dilute botanical insecticide through a nozzle circuit that is installed around the perimeter of a backyard or other area where people want to spend time outdoors. The mist settles on the grass and landscaping and as mosquitoes and other pests come into contact with the insecticide, they are killed. The systems are both very effective and safe.

While the margins from installation of the systems are attractive, our units make an ideal platform for our dealers to operate a highly profitable recurring service business.

**Technology, support and training:**

MistAway is committed to innovation, and our products are the most advanced and reliable in the industry. Our design and engineering is primarily driven by the ideas, experiences and feedback of our dealers, who have installed more than 15,000 of our systems in the U.S. and abroad.

We offer unmatched technical and sales support and reliable, quick, friendly service.

We also offer comprehensive, practical training at MistAway University, conducted monthly in our offices in Houston.

**Dealer opportunities:**

We are very excited about the opportunity to introduce this new application of misting technology to every market where property owners seek relief from mosquitoes, no-see-ums and other outdoor pests; and we are actively seeking entrepreneurs to act as dealers for our products.

We offer a chance to “get in on the ground floor” of a great business opportunity and build a lasting relationship with a leader in the industry. If you would like to learn more, please don’t hesitate to call us at 866-485-7255 or e-mail [info@mistaway.com](mailto:info@mistaway.com) and we’ll contact you.



**MistAway Systems**  
2121 Brittmoore, #5200  
Houston, TX 77043

**Phone:** 866-485-7255  
**Fax:** 713-255-5055  
**Website:**  
[www.mistaway.com](http://www.mistaway.com)  
**Email:** [info@mistaway.com](mailto:info@mistaway.com)



**Loren Olson**  
President

### Mission Statement

Our mission is to provide proven cost-reducing software tools to the service industry and to partner with our clients to integrate these tools into the way they currently do business.

Modeco provides our customers with the ability to automate their business process of tracking field time and production data to produce additional profit on the bottom line. To be ahead of the competition, to become lean, streamlined and more efficient, TimeScape™ from Modeco is a perfect solution.

Our goal is to obtain that confidence that we are committed to the improvement in this business critical process through a dedicated partnership between our customer and Modeco Systems.

### Modeco Systems

W208 N16975 N. Center St.  
Jackson, WI 53037

### Toll-Free Customer

**Service:** 866-677-8184

**Fax:** 262-677-8186

### Website:

[www.modecosystems.com](http://www.modecosystems.com)

### Email:

[sales@modecosystems.com](mailto:sales@modecosystems.com)

# Modeco Systems

Introducing **TimeScape™ LIVE** the new phone app for **TimeScape™** our mobile time and production tracking solution that streamlines the collection and flow of field information in real time. Learn how live feed and GPS points are sent from the field back to the office in real time.

With the use of barcodes and pocket-sized scanners or smart phones, each crew tracks properties served, tasks performed, and materials consumed as it occurs in real time. The information is then uploaded into **TimeScape™** via a PC or smart phone which makes it easy for branch offices, field offices, direct-reports, and subcontractors. No more

manual data entry! Better yet, no more illegible log sheets or time cards. TimeScape has over a hundred reports instantly showing precise field data and passes this information into your accounting/billing/payroll systems.

Imagine for snow and ice management work, how great it would be to have every piece of information you need for invoicing and payroll after a snow event, by the time the last snowflake falls. **TimeScape™** can do that and much more.

In addition to **TimeScape™** our Software Solutions from Modeco offer asset management and inventory management.

Modeco provides the perfect solution for the Green Industry to increase profits while striving to become more lean and streamlined. **TimeScape™** is an excellent business tool, just as important as the proper truck or the best mower.

Why not put **TimeScape™** and **TimeScape™- LIVE** to work for you today? Contact us at **866-677-8184** for further information plus check out our website at [www.modecosystems.com](http://www.modecosystems.com) for a new video narrated by Terry Bradshaw describing **TimeScape™**, filmed on location at one of our largest clients.

Modeco works hard to make your job easier.

**TimeScape™ LIVE**

**It's About Time!**





**Douglas Weichman, CAFM**  
President

**Mission Statement**

NAFA is the association for the vehicle fleet management profession. Our purpose is to promote the highest levels of professional management of vehicles, enabling all members to improve their ability to contribute to an employer's success. We seek to accomplish our goals through quality educational endeavors, sharing of fleet expertise, government and industry relations, and a broad range of direct services to members.



**NAFA Fleet Management Association**  
125 Village Blvd., Suite 200  
Princeton, NJ 08540

**Phone:** 609-720-0882  
**Fax:** 609-452-8004  
**Website:** [www.nafa.org](http://www.nafa.org)  
**Email:** [info@nafa.org](mailto:info@nafa.org)

# NAFA Fleet Management Association

NAFA Fleet Management Association is the world's premier not-for-profit association for professionals who manage fleets of sedans, public safety vehicles, trucks and buses of all types and sizes, and a wide range of military and off-road equipment for organizations across the globe. NAFA is the association for the diverse vehicle fleet management profession regardless of organizational type, geographic location or fleet composition.

NAFA provides its members a full range of products and services, including statistical research, publications, regional chapter meetings, government representation, seminars, online information and an annual Institute & Expo.

The association has several thousand full and associate members in 33 regional chapters in the United States and Canada. NAFA's members manage fleets for corporations covering a wide range of manufacturing and service organizations, governments (whether local, state and federal), or public service entities (public safety, law enforcement, educational institutions, utilities, etc.); still other members serve financial institutions, insurance companies, non-profit



organizations and the like.

Whether a commercial industry or public service, NAFA members play an integral part in today's business environment. The more "traditional" fleet vehicles of passenger cars, vans and SUVs managed by our members total 1.4 million and account for \$45 billion in assets. This number doesn't even account for the additional 180,000 police sedans; 43,000-plus emergency vehicles; and 460,000 pieces of specialty equipment used by public service fleets, as well as commercial ones!

NAFA's full and associate members are responsible for the specification, acquisition, maintenance and repair, fueling, risk management and remarketing of more than 3.7 million vehicles including more than 1.2 million trucks! In fact, NAFA members across the North American continent have



more than 420,000 medium- and heavy-duty trucks in their fleets, totaling for more than \$21 billion in assets for medium- and heavy-duty trucks alone.

The fleets that NAFA members handle are as diverse as the North American organizations they work for. These fleet managers are instrumental in keeping businesses and local governments moving! We think it's time for people to take a new look at fleet management.

Scott Lorch  
President

# Nu-Star Inc.



## Major Product Lines:

Nu-Star, PowerPusher

## Product Focus:

Battery Powered Material Handling

Headquartered in Shakopee, MN, NuStar Inc. is a privately held corporation specializing in the design, manufacture, marketing and sale of pedestrian-operated, battery-powered pushing and tug units for pushing, pulling and maneuvering an incredible range of wheeled and semi-wheeled



**PowerPusher®**  
*If it rolls... we can move it.™*

loads. With more than 23,000 units sold since 1964, we are ready to handle any type of material handling needs you have. For more information, visit: [www.powerpusher.com](http://www.powerpusher.com).

The Power Pusher® pedestrian-operated, battery-powered pusher designed to allow one person to move wheeled loads weighing up to 50,000 lbs. up a 5% grade

without forklifts or other more expensive ride-on equipment. It increases productivity by reducing the number of personnel needed to move heavy objects. It also creates a safer work environment by reducing the risk of injury. Power Pushers are less expensive and easier to store than forklifts or tractors, plus operators do not need a license.



**Nu-Star Inc.**  
1425 Stagecoach Road  
Shakopee, MN 55379

**Toll-Free Customer Service**  
**Number:** 1-800-800-9274  
**Fax:** 952-445-8295  
**Website:**  
[www.nustarinc.com](http://www.nustarinc.com)  
**Email:**  
[jadams@nustarinc.com](mailto:jadams@nustarinc.com)

**Rick McDowell**  
President

**Mission Statement**

Outdoor Supplies and Equipment and Outdoorboxes.com are committed to providing products that are integral to the success of our industry. We strive to serve consumers and the environment with a strong focus on sustainability. A customer is considered to be more, a business partner. We intend to maintain our achieved success of supplying top quality products in North America, with products that are **made in North America.**



**Outdoor Supplies and Equipment**  
25 Arrowsmith Road  
Hamilton, Ontario  
Canada L8E 2W4

**Toll-Free Customer Service**  
**Number:** 1-800-661-8708  
**Fax:** 905-578-2077  
**Websites:**  
Outdoorboxes.com  
Outdoorsupplies.ca  
**Email:**  
sales@outdoorboxes.com

# Outdoor Supplies and Equipment

**Product Focus:**

From personal to municipal and snow professionals' usage alike, Outdoorboxes.com is the preferred manufacturer for your outdoor storage needs. We are the producer of the *DuraBox*, a sustainable, rugged, multifunctional outdoor storage box. The *DuraBox* offers a molded in lid stop, reinforced lid, inner stackable design and sloped lid for added water resistance. Although it is manufactured for industrial strength, it is still stylish enough for the most upscale client.

Born from necessity, the *DuraBox* provides landscape

contractors and municipalities with a cost-effective, safe and secure salt or sand storage bin.

Outdoorboxes.com offers a competitive edge to the market by providing our customers the opportunity to customize their *DuraBox*. Not only can you have your company name and logo customized into the box, but also the option to choose the color of your boxes to harmonize with company colours.

Our clients needed a solution for a better, more affordable storage box and we came through. However, our market



for boxes has expanded into farms, factories, construction, safety and cottage industries to even the local school teams to store their gear. If you require greater security, the *DuraBox* is molded to accept a hasp for locking purposes. Uses for the *DuraBox* are endless.

After years of testing in the harsh Canadian winters, the *DuraBox* is ready for whatever you want to throw in it.

**Facilities:**

Outdoorboxes.com uses both a 43,000-sq.-ft. manufacturing facility along with a 2 1/2-acre

distribution facility. With many years of expertise on staff we welcome any opportunity or challenge.

**Sales and Support:**

Since the inception of the *DuraBox*, a two-step distribution network has been used. The *DuraBox* can be found at most equipment dealers and retailers of ice-melting products. Our long-term Canadian distributors and dealers are knowledgeable in their markets and districts. We are looking forward to establishing the same relationships in the U.S.



**Tom Jessen**  
Founder

# PermaGreen Supreme

**Company focus:**

PermaGreen Supreme, Inc. was founded in 1980 as a lawn care company, making its way by pulling hoses on lawns. It was not long before founder Tom Jessen developed innovative turf application technologies such as Low Volume (1 gallon/ thousand) spraying; the first commercially available Injection Gun System; and the first Ride-On Spreader Sprayer, which vastly increased



**PermaGreen Supreme**  
5609 Murvihill Road  
Valparaiso, IN 46383

**Phone:** 800-346-2001  
**Fax:** 219-476-7113  
**Website:**  
[www.permagreen.com](http://www.permagreen.com)

production numbers and reduced operator fatigue. More than 10,000 companies use PermaGreens, and the concept has always remained the same: a powerful mechanized rider, fast enough to treat 1 million square feet per day, yet small

enough to fit through 36-in. gates and treat tiny lawns.

The PermaGreen™ philosophy is: "One machine that you'll use every day on almost every lawn." It virtually eliminates walking and pushing, generates huge profits through increased production and gives employees very favorable working conditions. In today's market you can't compete using your feet.

**PermaGreen™ is more than a great machine.**

► **Knowledgeable and professional customer service:** Our Tech Support team includes former lawn care owners and technicians, in addition to former assembly line people, who know every nut and bolt of every machine we have ever built. Getting parts is fast and simple, thanks to our \$2 million

parts inventory and next-day air capabilities.

► **We stand behind you all the way:** We are certain you'll love your PermaGreen™. To prove it, we offer a 30-day buyback guarantee and a 1-year warranty. PermaGreen™ also offers the largest dealer and repair center network in the industry.

► **Ideas to help you thrive not just survive:** PermaGreen™ offers a free, comprehensive consultation to help you accomplish your business goals. Our Tactical Handbook (written by lawn care pros with 100+ years of experience) offers a wealth of business tips for maximizing the output and effectiveness of your operation.

**Call 800-346-2001 or visit [permagreen.com](http://permagreen.com) for a free handbook and dealer locations.**

**A.J. DiBianca**  
CEO

**Mission Statement**

To provide businesses and organizations cost-effective tools that communicate time-sensitive, personal information in order to benefit the recipient and our clients. Be successful by creating a customer experience that exceeds expectations every time.

# PhoneTree

**More Information:**

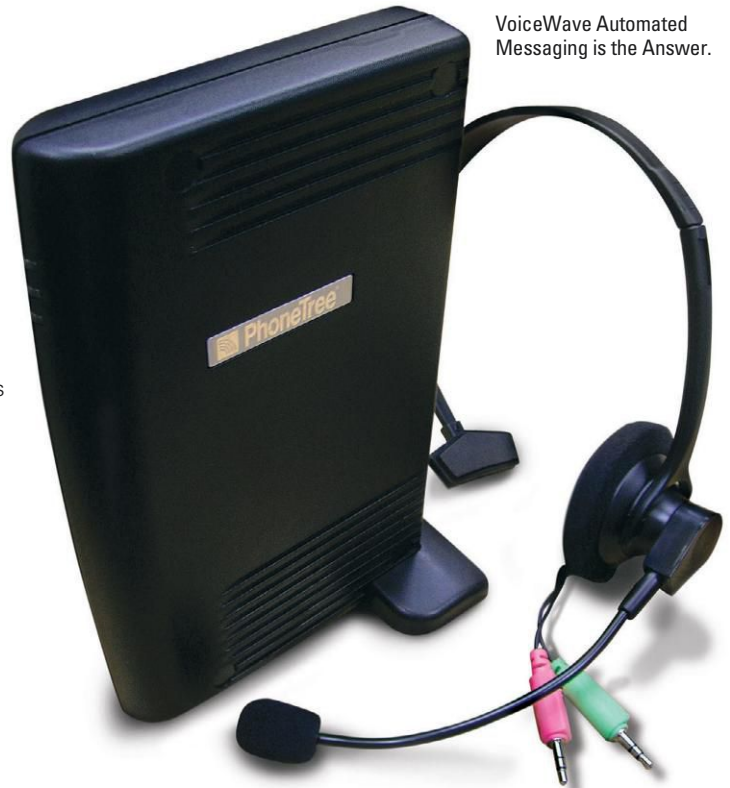
Business is unique. PhoneTree can help customize your specific communication needs using phone, text, email and social media messaging. Our VoiceWave solution saves valuable staff time and allows you to focus on what's really important – your customers.

**Major Product Line:**




VoiceWave

**Product Focus:**

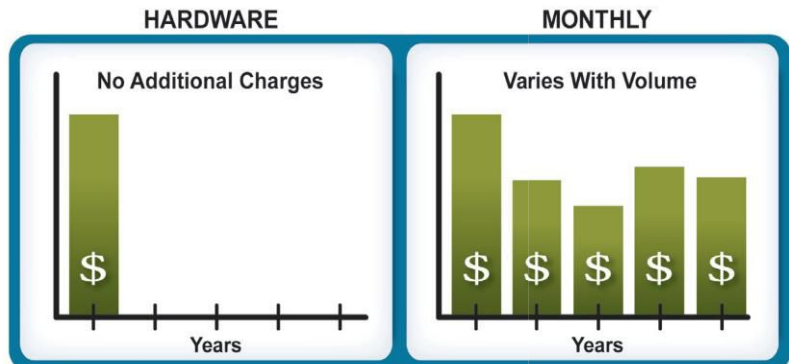
Automated Messaging via Phone, Text, Email and Social Media



**VoiceWave Solution Benefits:**

- Unlimited list capacity
- Operate remotely with voice prompts
- Compatible with   
- Longevity – our solutions are designed to last
- Contact information does NOT leave the organization

**Decrease costs with a VoiceWave hardware solution**



**PhoneTree**  
301 N. Main St., Ste. 1800  
Winston-Salem, NC 27101

**Toll-Free Customer Service Number:** 1-800-951-8733  
**Fax:** (336) 722-6877  
**Website:** www.phonetree.com  
**Email:** sales@phonetree.com

**Pete Lord**  
President

**Mission Statement**

Our mission is to always provide the landscape professional with the most innovative, feature-rich and easy-to-use landscape design software in the marketplace.



# PRO Landscape by Drafix Software

**Product Focus:**

Increase sales and improve design quality using PRO Landscape design software.

PRO Landscape is the most complete, easiest-to-learn and easiest-to-use professional

easy to plan, bid and sell your landscape designs.

► **Photo Imaging:** Use PRO Landscape’s photo imaging to create a realistic visual representation of what your proposed landscape design will look like. Simply start with a digital photograph of your customer’s house and then you can easily drag-and-drop your landscape items right onto the photograph. PRO Landscape’s library contains over 10,000 of the industry’s highest quality images of plants, trees, shrubs, grass, mulch, hardscapes, water features, night and holiday lighting, or easily add your own. Easily create visual designs that your customers can understand.

► **PRO Landscape Companion for iPad/Tablet:**

Go mobile with the first professional landscape design solution for your iPad or tablet. PRO Landscape Companion

landscape design software package you can buy. The software creates breathtaking visual landscape designs, 2D site plans, 3D representations and accurate estimates. PRO Landscape makes it fast and



allows you to easily create and edit designs right in the field using your iPad. Impress your customers and outpace your competition by designing, presenting and closing the sale right on the spot.

► **Easy-to-Use CAD:** PRO Landscape allows you to quickly create scaled 2D-site plans that accurately represent your proposed design elements including plantings, hardscapes and irrigation systems. PRO Landscape keeps track of all materials, calculates hardscape areas and material volume of items such as rock or mulch. With a single click you can create a title block, callouts or a plant legend.

► **Customer Proposals:** PRO Landscape generates an accurate bid directly from your photo imaging or CAD files using your prices and tax rate. Once you create your estimate, put together a professional-looking customer presentation including the cover sheet, estimate, material list and plant information with pictures in just seconds!

► **Free Technical Support:** PRO Landscape comes with a 60-day money back guarantee, tutorial/training DVD and free, lifetime technical support.



**PRO Landscape**  
by Drafix Software  
114A W. 3rd St., Suite #301  
Kansas City, MO 64105

**Toll-Free Customer Service**  
Number: 1-800-231-8574  
Fax: 816-842-5554  
Website:  
<http://prolandscape.com>  
Email:  
[sales@prolandscape.com](mailto:sales@prolandscape.com)



**Mission Statement**

The Propane Education & Research Council promotes the safe, efficient use of odorized propane gas as a preferred energy source.

# Propane Education & Research Council



**Product Focus**

The Propane Mower Incentive Program offered by the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) is a research and demonstration program that provides incentives to landscape contractors for providing feedback and documenting performance data about their real-world experiences mowing with propane. PERC uses this data in the research, development, and demonstration of new propane-fueled lawn care equipment.

New mower purchases and new mowers converted

to run on propane are eligible for the incentive. By participating, landscape contractors can receive \$1,000 on eligible new mowers and \$500 on converted mowers. This incentive can be combined with other manufacturer and state-level propane gas association rebates.

To qualify for the mower incentive on conversions, the equipment must be a commercial mower operated for less than 10 hours. It also must be a dedicated



propane-fueled mower and the conversion kit must meet Environmental Protection Agency or California Air Resources Board requirements. The conversion cannot void the original equipment manufacturer's warranty.

While participating in this program, landscape contractors can benefit not only from the monetary incentive, but also from the overall benefits of propane. Fuel costs have an enormous impact on landscape contractors' profitability, and the price of propane is competitive compared with other energy sources. And since propane is an approved alternative fuel, there's less downtime as a result of ozone action days.

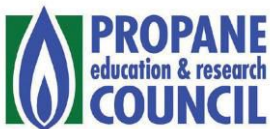
Landscape contractors who have switched to propane-fueled

commercial mowers have seen substantial results with cost and time savings. Denison Landscaping and Nursery, a large landscape contractor based in Fort Washington, Md., knows firsthand about these benefits.

Vice President Elbert Monroe said the company saves an average of \$20 to \$30 daily for each propane-fueled 72-inch riding lawnmower. Monroe also said that his customers support Denison's use of propane-fueled lawn equipment.

"It's environmentally friendly," he said. "Customers like it that we're using a clean fuel."

For more information about the Propane Mower Incentive Program and how propane can benefit your business, visit [www.poweredbypropane.org](http://www.poweredbypropane.org).



**Propane Education & Research Council**  
Suite 1075  
1140 Connecticut Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20036

**Phone:** 202-452-8975  
**Fax:** 202-452-9054  
**Website:**  
[www.propanecouncil.org](http://www.propanecouncil.org)

**Rick Grant**  
Business Director of  
Quali-Pro & Turf Technicals

## Mission Statement

As a part of the Makhteshim Agan Group, the world's leading alternate brand manufacturer and distributor of crop and non-crop products, Quali-Pro is dedicated to providing our customers with high quality, environmentally sound, and cost-competitive pest management solutions in the U.S. professional turf, ornamental and nursery markets, building market share and long-term partnerships with our customers by providing a competitive advantage through our registration, formulation and marketing capabilities and maintaining a corporate culture of integrity, accountability and respect.

# QUALI-PRO

Quality Turf & Ornamental Products

**Control Solutions Inc.**  
5903 Genoa Red Bluff  
Pasadena, Texas 77507

**Phone:** 281-892-2500

### Websites:

[www.controlsolutionsinc.com](http://www.controlsolutionsinc.com)  
[www.quali-pro.com](http://www.quali-pro.com)

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/qualipro>

# Quali-Pro

## New Generation Basic



### Major Product Lines:

- Herbicides
- Fungicides
- Insecticides
- Plant Growth Regulators

### Product Focus:

Quali-Pro is making "basic" even "better" by creating new and unique products to help keep your course looking and playing its best. Just what you'd expect from Quali-Pro, the New Generation Basic.

### Herbicides:

Get better protection against annual grassy and broadleaf weeds during overseeding this season with Quali-Pro's Prodiamine 65 WDG, 4L, Dithiopyr, Isoxaben and Oxadiazon 2G.

### Fungicides:

From university tests to commercial success, the Quali-Pro line has performed extremely well for both home lawn and landscape turf disease problems. Myclobutanil and Propiconazole are two powerful products that ensure protection all season long.

### Insecticides:

The new choice for quality and value from Quali-Pro, Fipronil 0.0143G Broadcast insecticide cuts the costs of fire ant and mole cricket control without cutting any corners. Featuring the latest formulation technology, Fipronil Broadcast is powered by the same active ingredient found in TopChoice®

insecticide. Get the same surefire, long-lasting control plus the value you've come to expect from Quali-Pro.

### Manufacturing Facility:

Quali-Pro products are manufactured in Pasadena, Texas, at Control Solutions, Inc.

### Technical Support:

Quali-Pro has technical specialists and sales representatives that provide product knowledge and technical expertise when you need help deciding which product will work best to remedy your problem. To locate your nearest technical specialist or sales representative, please visit [www.quali-pro.com](http://www.quali-pro.com).



**Walter K. Byrd**  
President

# R&K Pump & Equipment

**Product focus:**

R&K Pump & Equipment manufactures sprayers for the lawn care, pest control, aquatics, nursery and agricultural industries. With 30 years of experience in the spray equipment industry, we produce

more than 50 models with various pump, engine and hose reel options to meet every spraying need. Our exclusive all-welded aircraft-grade aluminum frames

allow us to produce a high-strength, lightweight piece of equipment that will never rust and never needs painting.

**Manufacturing facility:**

Located in Pompano Beach, FL, since 1980, R&K is proud to be an American manufacturer. All welding, fabrication and assembly is completed in-house to ensure quality control and on-time deliveries. Our shops are organized into work cells that can easily be adjusted to build a custom unit or 100 production units just as efficiently. We manufacture for some of the largest fleets in the lawn care and pest control industries and provide maintenance for more than 1,500 commercial spray units.

**Major product lines:**

➤ **Lawn/Turf Care Trucks.**



Truck-mounted spray systems are available from 200 to 1,600 gallons.

We offer complete turnkey body and chassis combinations, or we can custom build on your existing vehicle.

➤ **Pro-Series Skid Mounted Units.** Skid units range in size from 50 to 600 gallons with poly or fiberglass tanks and more

than a dozen pump and engine combinations. These units offer exceptional service at an economic price.

➤ **Portable Commercial Sprayers.** Our 50-, 100- and 200-gallon 4-wheel carts and 2-wheel trailers are available with boom spray options and hose reel accessories to match any spraying application.



**R&K Pump & Equipment, Inc.**  
1905 NW 40th Court  
Pompano Beach, FL 33064

**Phone:** 954-295-3144  
**Fax:** 888-229-4341  
**Website:**  
www.randkpump.com  
**Email:**  
ken@randkpump.com

**Stephen James**  
General Manager

**Todd Williamson**  
Sales  
Email: todd@reddick.cc

# Reddick Equipment Company of NC

**Product focus:**

Reddick Equipment Co. has been manufacturing sprayers since 1965. We produce sprayers for multiple markets, including lawn care, turf, pest control, deicing, tree care, nursery, agricultural and highway. Our equipment is available with frames built from mild steel, stainless steel or aluminum to carry poly or fiberglass tanks from 8 gallons to 1,650 gallons. With more than

\$1.2 million in sprayer parts inventory, we can build most equipment right off the shelf and provide replacement parts for most major brands throughout the industry.

**Manufacturing facility:**

Located in eastern North Carolina just east of I-95, we operate in 28,000 square feet of manufacturing space. The strong values of our rural community are reflected in the conscientious attitude of our employees and management staff.

**Technical support:**

Our customer service department is staffed by five senior technicians with a wide variety of expertise within the spraying industry, and they enjoy sharing their knowledge. The value to you is receiving the right parts and equipment for your job—the first time.

**Major product lines:**

➤ **Pest Control / Lawn**

**Care Skids.** Aluminum skid frames with poly tanks or our seamless fiberglass tanks with safety cross baffles from 30- to 500-gallon capacity to fit



ATV, UTV and truck applications. Diaphragm, centrifugal and 12V pump options, manual and electric hose reel options.

➤ **Deicing Skids.** Aluminum

or stainless steel frames and rear-mounted shielded spray booms with poly or our seamless fiberglass tanks with safety cross baffles from 100- to 500-gallon capacity.

➤ **Agricultural.** Three-point

hitch, utility tool bar and trailer sprayers up to 1,000-gallon capacity with spray booms available up to 72 feet.

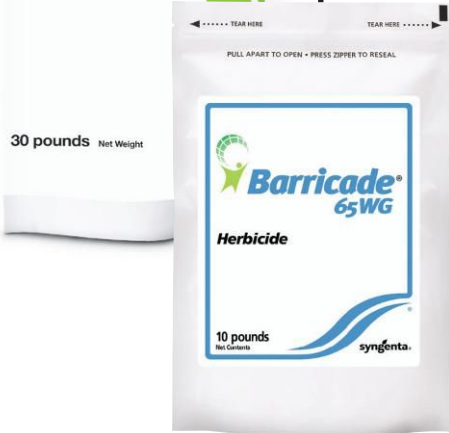


**Reddick Equipment Co.**  
1909 W. Main St.  
Williamston, NC 27892

**Phone:** 800-334-3388  
**Fax:** 252-792-4913  
**Website:**  
www.reddickequipment.com  
**Email:** stephen@reddick.cc

**Mission Statement**

The vision of Syngenta is to deliver the best products in the industry, provide strong technical field support, and give lawn and landscape professionals what they need to create better looking turf and a bigger bottom-line.



**Syngenta**  
P.O. Box 18300  
Greensboro, NC 27419

**Phone:** 866-SYNGENTA  
886-796-4368

**Fax:** 336-632-6135

**Website:**  
[www.greencastonline.com](http://www.greencastonline.com)

# Syngenta

**Major product lines:**

Syngenta offers some of the industry's most effective herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and plant growth regulators, including:

➤ **Barricade®**, a selective pre-emergent herbicide that offers low-rate, season-long control of more than 30 grassy and broadleaf weeds, including crabgrass, goosegrass and *Poa annua*.

Barricade offers a wide application window and two formulations (Barricade 4FL liquid and Barricade 65WG wettable granule) — both of which give professionals a high degree of flexibility.

➤ **Caravan™ G**, a multi-purpose insecticide/fungicide controls a broad range of insect and disease pests with a single visit; resulting in reduced labor and fuel costs. Caravan G delivers the disease control of Heritage® G fungicide and the insect control of Meridian® 25WG insecticide for truly better-looking turf.

➤ **Tenacity®**, a selective pre- and post-emergent herbicide that can be used at **seeding**, including bare-ground renovation seeding, or selective overseeding. It prevents weeds

from germinating and competing with new grass thus ensuring better establishment of desired turf. Packaged in convenient 8 oz bottles or larger 1 gallon jugs, Tenacity controls 46 broadleaf weeds and undesired grasses in most cool-season turf types.

➤ **Monument® 75WG**, a post-emergent, broad-spectrum herbicide that controls all major sedges plus other important weeds including dandelion, crabgrass (suppression), clover and spurge among other broadleaf and grassy weeds. Available in single-dose, 0.5-gram packages for spot treatments and larger 5 x 5 gram pre-measured water-soluble packets, Monument knocks out weeds for more beautiful turf.

**Customer support:**

Syngenta offers lawn-care operators:

- More than 30 territory managers, who consult with customers to solve problems and work in partnership with a nationwide network of full-service distribution partners;
- Field technical managers, located across the country, who are available to assist with issues that customers might face;
- A Customer Center, available at 1-866-Syngenta(a), which gives lawn care operators access to technical and product support as well as assistance with marketing programs;

➤ Innovative online tools such as GreenCast® ([www.greencastonline.com](http://www.greencastonline.com)), a web-based technology platform that delivers weather, pest and reference information directly to customers' desktops; and

➤ The GreenTrust™ 365 Lawn & Landscape Program, which allows customers to earn rebates for purchases of Qualifying Products throughout the year. Program Participants can lock in a yearlong rebate percentage with only \$5,000 worth of purchases of Qualifying Products during the Early Order Period. Lawn care professionals **can save up to 14% on all purchases of Barricade** during the market year (if they meet the \$5,000 minimum purchase requirement). Details are available at: [www.greentrust365.com](http://www.greentrust365.com).

To learn more about Syngenta products and services for the golf, professional turf management and aquatic businesses, visit [www.greencastonline.com](http://www.greencastonline.com) or call 1-866-SYNGENTA (796-4368).

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**Jerry Hunter**  
CEO

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US Fleet Tracking has the widest coverage area with the highest reliability of any GPS tracking product on the market.

Whether you're in the United States, Canada, Europe or the Middle East, Australia, South America or Africa, US Fleet Tracking covers you.

In addition to its experience tracking personal and commercial vehicles, the company provides tracking to numerous large-scale public venues including Super Bowls XLI, XLII, XLIII, XLIV, XLV and XLVI, the 2010 Pro Bowl, the 2011 NHL All Star Game, 2010 Winter Olympics,

2012 Summer Olympics and 2012 Republican National Convention.

**Major Product Lines:**

X5 GPS tracking products and technology

**Product Focus:**

Live GPS tracking devices and web-based software platform

**Manufacturing Facilities:**

Tracking platform engineered and GPS tracking devices assembled in Oklahoma

**Technical Support:**

Live technical support through the web-based tracking platform, email and by phone at 405-749-1105 (Mon-Fri 7a to 7p | Sat 9a to 4p | Central Time)

US Fleet Tracking OBD-X5 GPS Tracking Device



US Fleet Tracking AT-X5 GPS Tracking Device



**US Fleet Tracking**  
2912 NW 156th Street  
Edmond, OK 73013

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**Fax:** 405-749-1056  
**Website:**  
[www.usfleettracking.com](http://www.usfleettracking.com)  
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**Ken Hutcheson**  
President

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**U.S. Lawns**  
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Orlando, FL 32803

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**Bill Wright**  
Founder and CEO

**Mission Statement**

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**Wright Manufacturing**  
4600X Wedgewood Blvd.  
Frederick, MD 21703

**Phone:** 301-360-9810  
**Website:** www.wrightmfg.com

# Wright Manufacturing

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This commitment to quality and innovation reflects the vision and values of Bill Wright, founder and CEO of Wright Manufacturing. Wright focuses solely on manufacturing the



best commercial mowers available anywhere.

Since the introduction of the Stander, Wright has continually refined and enhanced its full line of standing mower designs, keeping them, literally, on the cutting edge of mowing technology. Today, professionals everywhere still recognize the Stander line as the industry leader in performance and quality—truly the **Stander of Excellence**.

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Stander mowers enable operators to easily shift their weight and positioning for optimal control over changing terrain and in tight spaces.

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- Stander X
- Stander ZK
- Stander RH

**Sit/Stand Mowers**

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- Sport
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- Velke Gear Drive
- Velke Hydro

**Accessories**

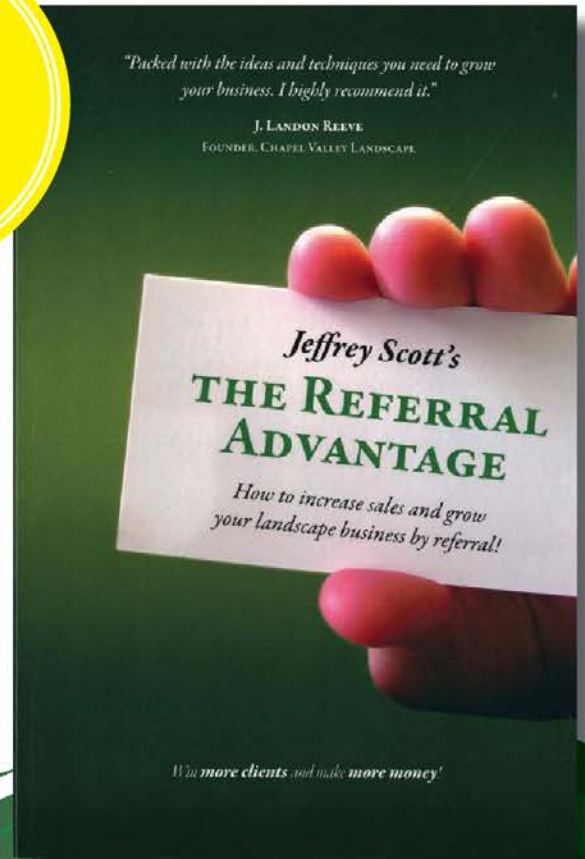
Wright accessories enhance the performance of Wright mowers and provide years of reliable performance.

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Author: Jeffrey Scott

## Landscape therapy

Monji Landscape Cos. finds a niche in healing gardens.



A hospital healing garden designed by Monji Landscape Cos.

**R**ESearchers say natural settings can lower stress, decrease blood pressure and heart rate and relieve muscle tension. That's the catalyst behind a growing trend toward adding healing gardens to hospital campuses, nursing homes and other health care settings. Monji Landscape Cos., a Bakersfield, Calif.-based firm, has gotten into designing and installing these gardens and has found it to be beneficial—not only financially but in terms of goodwill.

Dan Monji, senior designer and chief executive officer, says that he was moved by the story of a young patient who experienced the first healing garden his company designed at Mercy Hospital in downtown Bakersfield. A nurse told him that a 14-year-old boy who was being treated for terminal cancer watched the evolution of the garden from start to finish from his hospital window.

"When the garden was finished, he was anxious to go there," says Monji. "He would just sit there for almost an hour at a time in his wheelchair. And he ended up spending his last day there—a place to be away from the pain he was experiencing, to be out of his room and mentally escaping it all. I've done a lot of projects in my 37 years but nothing has impacted me that way."

That kind of impact is why Monji and his son Aaron Gundry-Monji, project manager and account representative, continue to design and build these gardens and view them as a growing niche for their company. Gundry-Monji says that the beautifully finished project has almost "sold itself" by helping land the company other jobs. "But it's been the overwhelming response from doctors, visitors, and patients that has really spread the word of how important these healing gardens can be," says Gundry-Monji.

That first healing garden ultimately turned into two separate projects. Then, Mercy Southwest Hospital brought Monji in for a third healing garden. Donations totaling \$300,000 funded the three gardens.

Monji says healing gardens are a smart complement to his business, which has always put its focus on taking an artistic approach.

"This niche gives us a great opportunity as a company that prides itself on being artistic designers," adds his son. "This is about creating living art for people at the hospital. And as a functional purpose it's about easing pain and bringing some peace."

Each job is completely custom, so the project costs differ greatly. It depends on the hospital's budget—which is typically determined by how many donations it receives—as well as the size of the project. "Even at the one campus where we did two separate jobs, those budgets were very different," says Gundry-Monji.

Though the company does see this as being a profitable niche, Gundry-Monji adds that it's much more involved than a standard design/build job.

"With a healing garden, you're dealing with the hospital and often also the fundraisers and the donors, making sure that you're designing something that everyone is happy with," he explains. "There are a lot more players involved and a lot of time before you ever see any money from it. We put a lot of time into the concept and the design alone."

But even if there isn't always a huge profit margin on the hospital project itself, Gundry-Monji says, the additional work and the positive press it's garnered for the company are worth more.

"I can't tell you how many jobs we've gotten from word of mouth because of having designed these healing gardens," he says. "Even just some of our standard residential work has come as a result of people seeing the healing gardens. Local media was there for the unveilings and that was big for us, too."

The author is a freelance writer with seven years of experience covering landscaping.

### » SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**COMPANY:**  
Monji Landscape Cos.

**HEADQUARTERS:**  
Bakersfield, Calif.

**YEAR FOUNDED:** 1953

**SERVICE BREAKDOWN:**  
90 percent design/build;  
10 percent maintenance

**CLIENTELE:** 90 percent residential

#### WHY HEALING GARDENS?

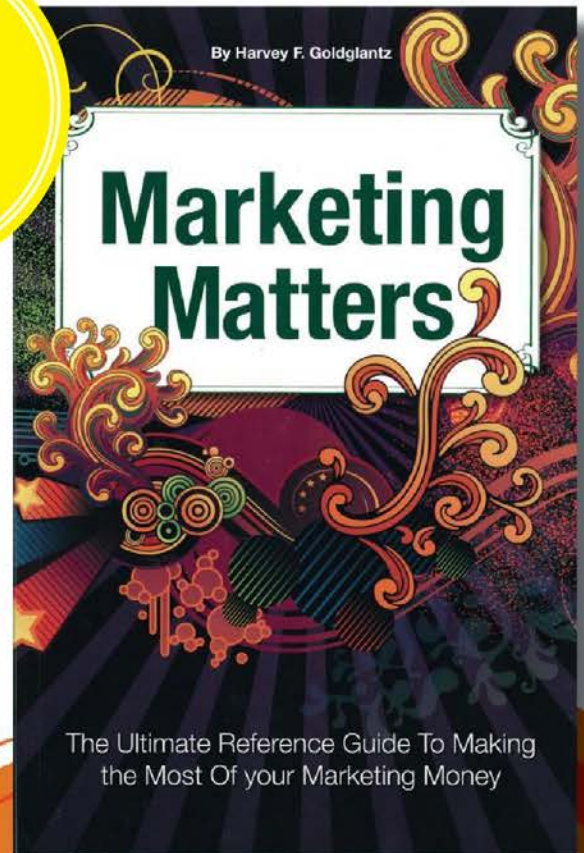
"It has grown out of all the years our family has been involved in creating beautiful gardens as our passion," says Dan Monji, chief executive officer. "Artistic designs have always been our specialty. A hospital can be a stressful place, but a beautiful garden can provide you an escape."



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Author: Harvey Goldglantz

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**LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT** (ISSN 0894-1254) is published monthly by North Coast Media LLC, IMG Center, 1360 East 9th Street, Suite 1070, Cleveland, OH 44114. **Subscription rates:** One year \$55, two years \$76 (U.S. and possessions), one year \$87, two years \$127 (Canada and Mexico) and one year \$165, two years \$246 (all other countries). Air expedited service is available in countries outside the U.S. and Canada for an additional \$75 per year. Current issue single copies (prepaid only) \$8 (U.S. and possessions) \$10 (Canada and Mexico) and \$15 (all other countries). Back issues (if available, prepaid only) \$16 (U.S. and possessions), \$20 (Canada and Mexico) and \$30 (all other countries) add \$6.50 per order shipping and handling for both current and back issue purchases. **Periodicals postage paid** at Cleveland OH 44101-9603 and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER: Please send address change to Landscape Management, PO Box 2090, Skokie, IL 60076.** Printed in the U.S.A.



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1. Publication Title: Landscape Management
2. Publication Number: 0894-1254
3. Filing Date: 9/20/2012
4. Issue Frequency: Monthly
5. Number of Issues Published Annually: 12
6. Annual Subscription Price: Free to Qualified
7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Not Printer): North Coast Media LLC, 1360 E. Ninth St., Suite 1070, Cleveland, OH 44114  
Contact Person: Antoinette Sanchez-Perkins  
Telephone: 216-706-3750
8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher (Not Printer): North Coast Media LLC, 1360 E. Ninth St., Suite 1070, Cleveland, OH 44114
9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor - Publisher: Jason DeSarle, North Coast Media LLC, 1360 E. Ninth St., Suite 1070, Cleveland, OH 44114; Editor: Marisa Palmieri, North Coast Media LLC, 1360 E. Ninth St., Suite 1070, Cleveland, OH 44114; Senior Editor: Beth Geraci, North Coast Media LLC, 1360 E. Ninth St., Suite 1070, Cleveland, OH 44114
10. Owner - Full name: North Coast Media LLC, 1360 E. Ninth St., Suite 1070, Cleveland, OH 44114
11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities:
12. Does not apply

13. Publication Title: Landscape Management
14. Issue Date for Circulation Data: August 2012
15. Extent and Nature of Circulation

	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)	53,591	60,024
b. Legitimate Paid and/or Requested Distribution (By Mail and Outside the Mail)		
(1) Outside County Paid/Requested Mail Subscriptions stated on PS Form 3541. (Include direct written request from recipient, telemarketing and Internet requests from recipient, paid subscriptions including nominal rate subscriptions, employer requests, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies.)	50,800	53,831
(2) In-County Paid/Requested Mail Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541. (Include direct written request from recipient, telemarketing and Internet requests from recipient, paid subscriptions including nominal rate subscriptions, employer requests, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies.)	0	0
(3) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid or Requested Distribution Outside USPS®	208	287
(4) Requested Copies Distributed by Other Mail Classes Through the USPS (e.g. First-Class Mail®)	0	0
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation	51,008	54,218

- Nonrequested Distribution (By Mail and Outside the Mail)
  - (1) Outside County Nonrequested Copies Stated on PS Form 3541 (Include Sample copies, Requests Over 3 years old, Requests induced by a Premium, Bulk Sales and Requests including Association Requests, Names obtained from Business Directories, Lists, and other sources)
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- Total Nonrequested Distribution (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3), (4))
- Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)
- Copies not Distributed
- Total (Sum of 15f and g)
- Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (15c divided by 15f times 100)
- Publication of Statement of Ownership for a Requester Publication is required and will be printed in the October 2012 issue of this publication.
- Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner Antoinette Sanchez-Perkins, Senior Audience Development Manager  
Date: 9/20/2012

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# MYBIGGESTMISTAKE

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



## Letting go of poor performers is tough, but it pays off.



Eric Bruss

**COMPANY:** Bruss Landscaping

**HEADQUARTERS:** Wheaton, Ill.

**NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:** 28

**CLIENTELE:** Entirely residential

**SERVICES:** 75 percent design/build; 25 percent maintenance

**2011 REVENUE:** \$3.1 million

**2012 PROJECTED REVENUE:** \$3.5 million

**H**ANGING ON TO the wrong employee was a mistake Eric Bruss made not once, but twice. Although he knew he didn't have the right person for the job, he says he tried to make it work because he wanted to be a nice guy. In the end, it would have been better for everyone if he'd followed his gut.

Bruss, the president of Bruss Landscaping, Wheaton, Ill., admits to first making the mistake seven years ago. He needed someone to do design/sales and help the production manager oversee the crews. At the time, the company was relatively small and needed a multi-talented person.

"Within the first couple of months there were red flags that it wasn't working," Bruss says. "This individual wasn't commanding respect from the labor force and on the design and sales side was becoming more of an order taker than a leader."

But Bruss wanted to make it work. First he tried changing schedules around so the person was handling different crews. When the same problems ensued, he moved him to solely design and sales work. But it still wasn't working.

"He was only producing at about 50 percent of his potential," says Bruss. "Although he was selling enough to cover his cost, he just wasn't producing

what he should. I started holding his hand constantly and telling him what to do, to the point where I was the puppeteer. I dragged this out for five years until I finally had to cut off the dead branch."

Unfortunately, when Bruss hired the replacement, he soon fell into the same trap. Although the new designer was highly skilled, the way she worked didn't quite fit into the very structured environment Bruss operated.

"I knew it wasn't a good match for either of us, but, like before, I let it drag on because I didn't have the heart to let her go," he says. "It went on through the winter and then mid-season in the spring I finally had to make some changes."

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**"YOUR GUT LETS YOU KNOW THE RIGHT DECISION PRETTY QUICKLY."**

He had good intentions, but Bruss acknowledges it was a mistake to hold off on letting the employee go.

"In the end, although I was trying to be nice by keeping her on, I ended up doing just the opposite," he says. "I left her without a job in the middle of peak season. It was a disservice to both of us. I was without a designer in the

middle of busy season and she was without a job at a time when it would be hard to find a new one. Frankly, it would have been much fairer to everyone if I had just handled it right away."

Bruss says these mistakes cost him a lot. In the first situation, the lack of production was a loss of potential earnings. And in both situations, the biggest loss was in growth.

Since committing these mistakes, Bruss says he's learned to follow his instinct. "Your gut lets you know the right decision pretty quickly," he says. "You just have to listen to it. The problem is we usually start overthinking things or we follow our heart."

Although Bruss says it's still always difficult to let an employee go, it's unfair to everyone when you try to force something to work.

"As much as you may think you're helping that person by continuing to keep them on even if they don't fit, you'd actually do yourself—and that employee—a favor by ending it," he says. "On the business side, it's obvious. You're now able to move forward. But for that employee, it's also an opportunity to move on with their life instead of staying in a position that isn't really working and is ultimately not going to work out. If I had followed my gut rather than my heart in both of these situations, I think everyone would have been better off in the end."

Payton is a freelance writer with seven years of experience covering the landscape industry.

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