

Bergenfield, N.J.-based Kindergan Landscaping has successfully built a strong base of residential design/build and maintenance clientele in its 25-plus years of business. Now there are plans to expand even more, getting into the commercial segment and continuing to grow the maintenance division by converting every new design client into a maintenance customer. The key is: “Don’t forget to ask for that sale,” says **Chris Hricik**, account manager and manager of the landscape maintenance division, who also serves as vice president of the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association. He recently shared his outlook with *Landscape Management*.



Chris Hricik says homeowner spending is finally coming back.

## INSIDE INFO

**Company:**  
Kindergan Landscaping

**Headquarters:**  
Bergenfield, N.J.

**Employees:** 30

**Key to being a maintenance leader:** Communication. Be proactive on a customer’s property and make sure they know you’re there and you’re finding problems before they do. Help make them aware of their property needs and help them to protect their investment.

local functions and getting involved in the community. Participating in service activities, such as donating a project to a school or a non-profit community organization, also helps.

» **Keeping employees focused on the customer.** It’s a challenge here, and I’m sure for a lot of other companies as well, to keep the employees focused on just how important our customers really are. The truth is that without our customers, we don’t have a business. The customer does need to come first. That means putting the focus on giving them top quality and not overlooking that one weed. It may sound small, but that one weed could be the reason behind the negative

phone call or even losing the job. We try to drive that point home with employees.

## TOP OPPORTUNITIES

» **Expanding markets.** A short-term goal for us is to become more involved with the commercial and industrial market. Right now we’re a residential company for the most part, but we’re looking to expand our business into commercial landscape maintenance. We’re also looking to get into snow removal.

» **Technology.** GPS truck- and equipment-tracking and routing software provide a great opportunity. Competition is ramping up and rates are coming down. To know where your equipment is at any given moment and to get it to the job efficiently is just smart. Fuel savings alone can pay for each tracking unit.

» **Continuing education.** We emphasize continuing education for all employees on best maintenance practices, safety regimens and offering them opportunities to further their career with our company. Smart employees are efficient and profitable.

Payton is a freelance writer with seven years of experience covering the landscape industry.

PHOTO: CHRIS HRICK

## TOP TRENDS

» **Investing is back on track.** The single-family homeowners are finally starting to invest in their homes again. It had slowed down a good bit and for a while we weren’t sure when it would come back. But now people want to redo their 15-year-old patios or renovate their yards. They see work going on in their neighborhood again and they want to keep up. It may not be as much work as it once was, but things have turned around.

» **Controlling costs.** We’re finding a trend toward controlling more costs, not only on supplies but on fuel, insurance and even controlling the salaries and hourly wages of our employees. We’re also looking for ways we can reduce costs for health benefits. The idea is to find opportunities to stay competitive, and controlling costs has been part of that solution. One of the things I’ve focused on these past few years is price checking on long-term vendors. We’re not just assuming we got the best price but going out there and finding out. We’ll go out for that second or third quote on plant or hardscape material.

## TOP OBSTACLES

» **Staying current.** Being able to keep up with all of the new products and education is always going to be a challenge, since our industry changes so quickly. There’s always something new to learn. But we really value continuing education and believe that’s the solution.

» **Getting bogged down by price checkers.** It’s always a challenge to put your business out there but not get too overwhelmed by fielding calls from the price checkers. Price checkers do help support the business, so it’s not like we won’t take any of those calls, but there’s only so much time that any one company has to invest in that. We’re not saying we only want the slam-dunk jobs, but we’re looking for elevated clientele who are willing to pay a little more for the better product and the better service. We find that type of clientele by attending