

What consumers want

Green Industry marketing experts translate the results of PLANET/Harris Interactive's consumer survey.

IN DECEMBER, Harris Interactive conducted an online survey on behalf of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) to discern homeowners' landscape priorities. The study was conducted among more than 2,800 U.S. adults. ■ To learn how some of the study's results can be used by landscape professionals to improve their messaging, we tapped three Green Industry marketing pros to give us their take. Here's how they broke it down.

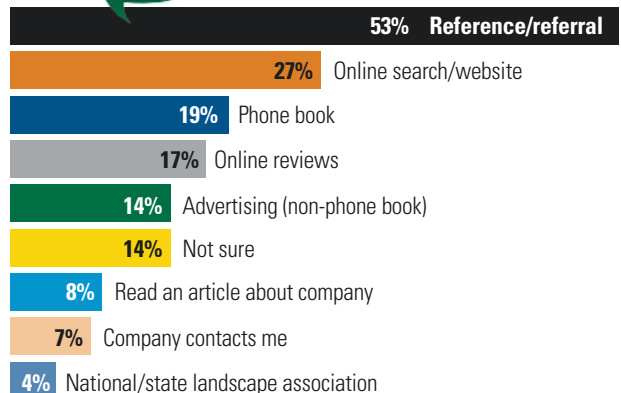
—MARISA PALMIERI

HOW THEY FIND YOU

Most common sources for finding a landscape company

(among U.S. adults who have a yard/landscape; respondents could select all that applied)

RESEARCH SAYS



continued on page 10

CONTROLLING THE TOUGHEST WEEDS REQUIRES A POWERFUL PUNCH!

Particularly stubborn weeds – such as wild violet, ground ivy, black medic, clover and other species found in cool-season turfgrasses – call for tough weed control products. That is the constant challenge of herbicide producers, who are leveraging the latest field research and chemistry to develop formulations that pack a punch against these particularly hard-to-control weeds.

A formulation with active ingredients including sulfentrazone, a phenoxy and triclopyr creates a potent, fast-acting solution for tough weeds, says Jim Goodrich, product specialist for Kansas City, Mo.-based PBI-Gordon Corp. Sulfentrazone is a protox inhibitor, which works by preventing a key enzyme required for chlorophyll production, and it provides enhanced speed as well as yellow nutsedge suppression. Triclopyr provides an extra kick for controlling problem weeds such as wild violets.

One product that includes this formulation and provides a precision performance tool for turf managers is T-Zone™ Broadleaf Herbicide for Tough Weeds. Even hard-to-control weeds show visible injury within a few hours, and weed death can occur within 10-14 days.

The low-odor, oil-based formula opens up more application opportunities than most herbicides. Improved cool-weather activity allows for a wider span of applications in the growing season. And because T-Zone is rainfast in just three hours, weather interference is less of a concern.



As shown in this before and after treatment photo, wild violet was eliminated from the treated area after 14 days.

T-Zone™ is a trademark of PBI-Gordon Corp.
Always read and follow label directions. 2/13 02443

NEWS+VIEWS

continued from page 8



“ These survey results are consistent with others that suggest the two most trusted sources of information for making buying decisions are the web (online search and reviews equal 44 percent) and recommendations of friends (referrals at 53 percent).

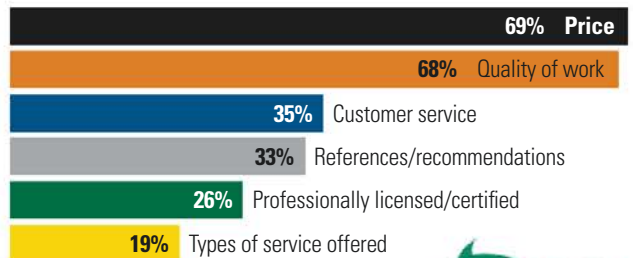
While the recommendations of trusted influencers will always be powerful, the truth is people make choices based upon a number of criteria. We have access to data and opinions like never before, and we use that information from signage, print media, traditional websites and now social media to make better decisions.

So, whether one first goes to a friend for a referral or starts by doing research online, the truth is people will use one to vali-

WHAT THEY THINK OF YOU

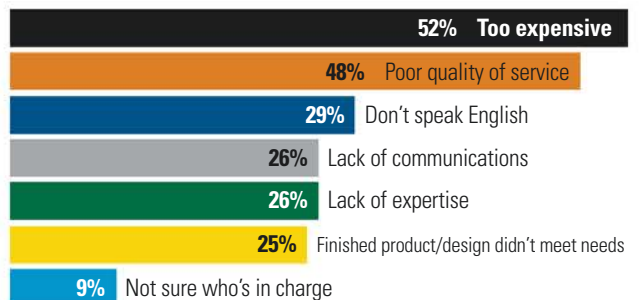
6 most important attributes for a landscape company

(among U.S. adults who have a yard/landscape; respondents could select up to three)



Top 7 frustrations with landscape company/professional

(among U.S. adults who have a yard/landscape and have dealt with a landscape company/professional; respondents could select up to three)



date the other. Therefore, if your business has a thin online presence, the likelihood of those personal referrals holding up is nearly cut in half, according to the data from this survey.

Professional landscape services are a significant investment, and consumers will seek businesses that measure up in multiple categories: trusted by friends, professional in their online appearance and, of course, active in their local communities, which is another measure of trust.

If the majority of consumers make their buying decisions based upon recommendations and online search, it stands to reason landscape professionals should focus on two things: Do good work to earn referrals and learn to use social media and other forms of online marketing to amplify that.”

JEFF KORHAN / *Author of Built-In Social: Essential Social Marketing Practices for Every Small Business* / JeffKorhan.com

EXPERT
SAYS

“ Research is one of the most valuable tools in business when designed, analyzed and leveraged correctly.

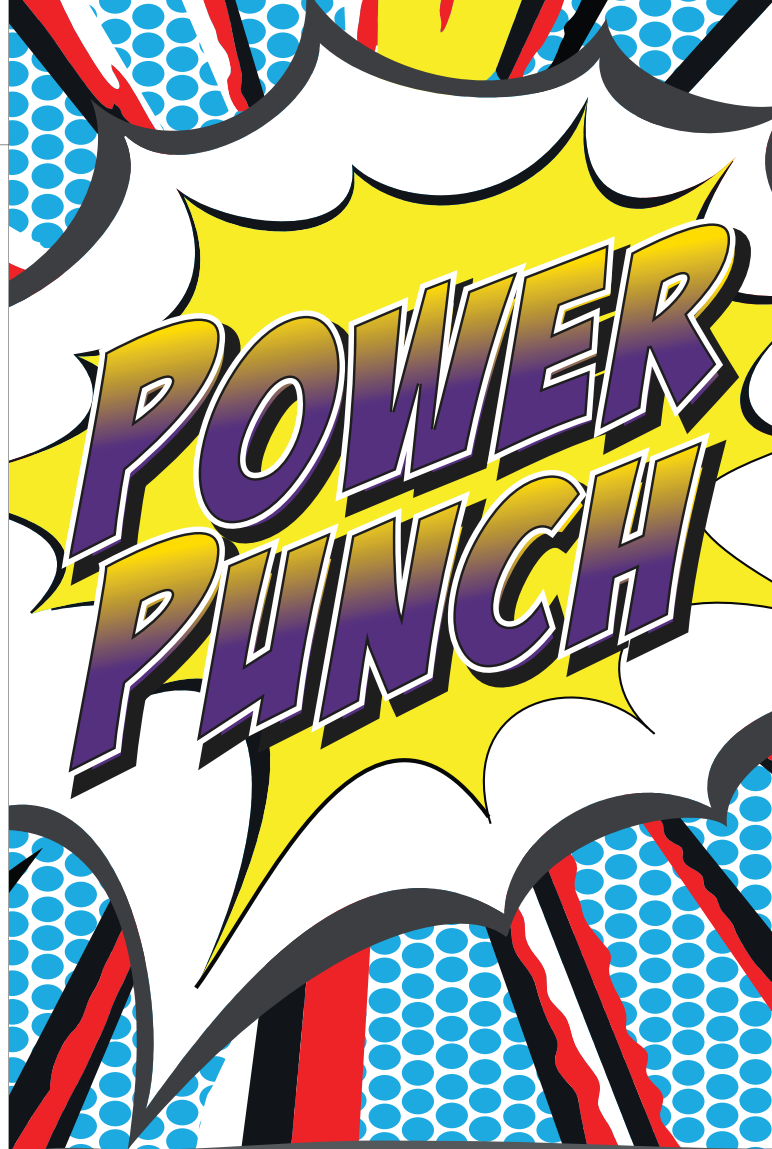
Looking at this research, you see that price and quality of work are rated No. 1 and No. 2 for both questions. Therefore, in order to be successful you’ll need to market and sell value and risk, not price, since value is defined as benefits divided by price.

What you want to communicate to customers is everything they’d lose by not buying from you (risk), and, conversely, everything they’ll gain by hiring you. You must clearly identify all of the benefits they’ll gain by using your products, services and team. Things that go a long way in communicating value and validating price include credentials, warranties and guarantees, sustainable practices and/or innovative payment plans. Sell opportunity not price.

Quality of work issues can be handled by the presence of a reputable list of references, strong warranties, a checklist of daily site activities performed, a map or personal tour of completed work and/or by providing product samples. All employees should be in uniforms with your company name clearly visible. Also consider having an English-speaking account manager with 24/7 accessibility, regularly scheduled walk-throughs and an easy-to-use feedback mechanism.

Don’t forget, these value and risk proof points need to be embedded into all of your communications—everywhere you connect with your customers and prospects.”

JUDY GUIDO / *Guido & Associates*
GuidoAssoc.com



T-ZONE™ PACKS A POWERFUL PUNCH!

- Fastest triclopyr combination product
- Proven cool-weather performance
- Effectively controls winter weeds including:
 - Henbit
 - Chickweed
 - Ground ivy
 - Violets
- Also controls traditional weeds including:
 - Dandelions
 - Clover
 - Spurge
 - Nutsedge (Suppression)



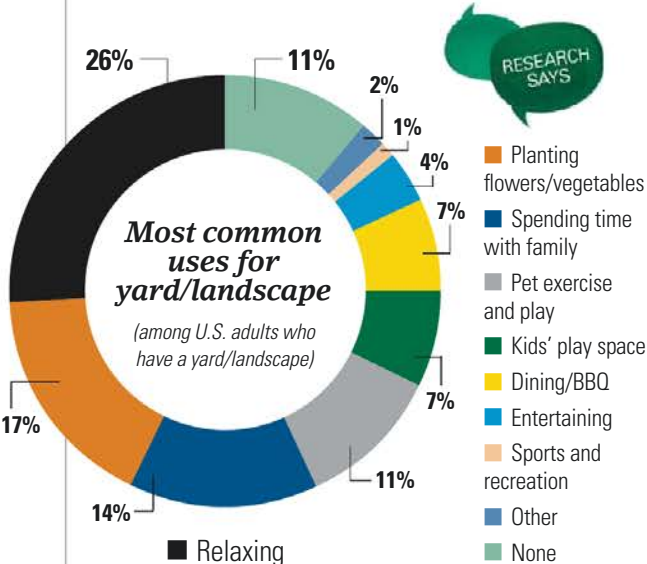
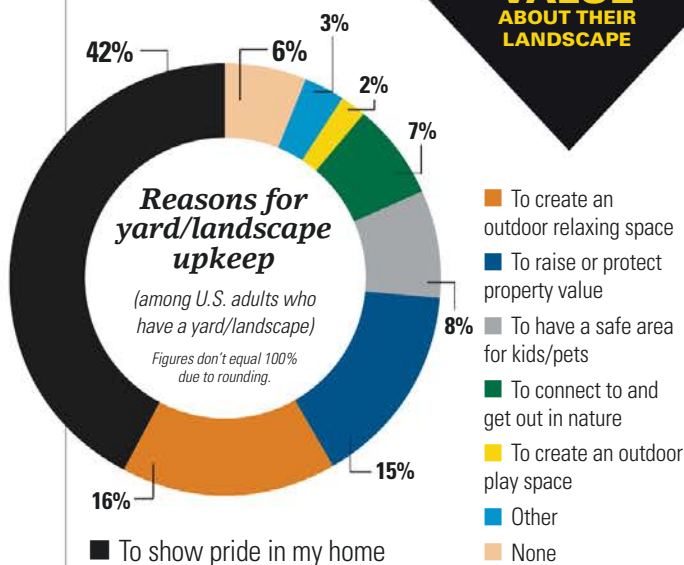
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WHAT THEY VALUE ABOUT THEIR LANDSCAPE



RESEARCH SAYS

EXPERT SAYS

“Looking at your communications, are you targeting these themes (homeowner pride, property values and relaxation) when you market? If not, it's time to make adjustments to your messaging. Think about your elevator speech and ensure your wording paints a clear picture of your work to a prospect. For example, 'The gardens my team and I create complement our clients' beautiful homes, enriching their lifestyles and giving them more time to relax with family and friends.'”

In reviewing images for future materials, which ones speak to pride, relaxation and property values while mirroring your sales messaging? Clients often don't know what they want, but they do know what they don't want. Plan your marketing well and help them make educated decisions.”

LARA MOFFAT, ASLA / LM Creative Consulting
LMCreativeConsulting.com

The power of youth

Every Thursday at 1 p.m. Professor McCafferty sat in her office, gazing out the window. She wasn't daydreaming. She was waiting for me. But I'd just pulled an all-nighter at the college newspaper.

While Professor McCafferty was waiting for me in her office, I was halfway across campus, oversleeping my independent study in fiction writing.



Hear Me Out
BETH GERACI
Senior Editor

Today, I'm feeling much more inspired. Not because I'm especially energized. Or because I woke to the sun streaming through my window. But because I've spent a good deal of time interviewing sources for this month's cover story.

They're all landscape business owners who launched their companies while full-time students. They're all much more disciplined than the stereotypical college student—and they're all quite inspirational.

"I had a lawn mower and figured if I worked hard I could succeed," reasons Craig Ruppert, CEO and founder of Ruppert Landscape, Laytonsville, Md., who launched his business as a high school student.

In interviewing such former and current student business owners, I was struck by their wisdom, their foresight and above all, their determination. They attended class during the day, worked until dark and studied at night. They took the train home from college to work weekends. And they sacrificed much of their social lives for the sake of financial independence.

What stands out most about these men is the value they place on a college degree. They recognized that a degree would empower them. They took what they learned in class and used it to strengthen their businesses. They also kept in touch with their professors, relying on them later to expand their networks.

When I was in college, I didn't work during the school year. I suppose it would have been nice to have had additional spending money, but the thought of getting a job—much less running a business—didn't even cross my mind. It was hard enough writing my senior thesis, surviving chemistry and rising for an 8 a.m. gym class.

By waiting for me to arrive every week, Professor McCafferty taught me as much about patience as she did about fiction writing. The people in this month's cover story, however, taught me much more than that.

For a valuable lesson from them on how to run a business well, see "The old college try" on page 50. Reach Geraci at bgeraci@northcoastmedia.net.