



BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

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

Are you on the grid or gridlocked?

Our customers are using technology to research and communicate with us online; our suppliers are using technology to make more efficient equipment; and many of us are managing our businesses, irrigation programs and operating strategies with cloud-based programs.

Everywhere you look the strategic use of technology is driving improved performance. It's safe to say technology has opened up new ways of driving growth for landscape contractors.

Yet, not everyone is on board. Some companies are moving faster than others, some are pushing back and some are doing business as usual. This is not surprising to me.

Throughout my career I've noticed the landscape industry is very slow to embrace change. There's a prevailing attitude that companies don't want to adopt change until they're sure change works. This is true with equipment, fertilizers, chemicals and programs like H-2B and social media.

While there's consensus on technology's transformative potential, the process to learn how to use it can be frustrating, complex and slow. By the time programs are mastered, the technology has changed and training begins anew.

The pace of technology is nearly too fast for everyone to keep up. It evolves so quickly that by the time you finally decide to take the plunge, the programs may already be obsolete.

I share a vision with many who believe social media, mobile and web-based business programs enable major improvements. I also share a frustration with nearly everyone about how to actually use technology to get the best results. Most of us want results as fast as we think technology will deliver them. But it takes time, investment and discipline—and the willpower to embrace continuous learning—to get measurable benefits.

Employees are often your best resource. I know owners who lack experience with emerging technologies but have employees better informed and using

selected apps to make their work easier. Their co-workers could use these apps but are unaware of them.

Committing to technology

It's time for our industry companies to commit to technology as a permanent fixture on their financial and organizational agendas and as a strategic consideration in yearly line-item budget planning.

For larger companies, this commitment may require retaining a full-time technology professional in-house. In peer groups I facilitate, member CEOs share knowledge about technology products, but the learning is slow. Owners hear about something another owner's company is looking into or starting to use, but they're usually too busy to do anything with it. Having an IT professional on-hand to train and troubleshoot is essential.

Smaller, budget-conscious companies could seek to outsource professional technology support via independent contractors, part-time telecommuting consultants or in computer science students with familiarity in web development, IT, data storage, cloud-based applications and social media. Whether your technology person is in-house or is an outside resource, the bottom line is you need one.

Technology comes in all styles and shapes. Over the last few years, more and more companies have switched to electronic time capture. And companies using Green Industry business software are further along because the software companies make learning available.

A lack of vision, sense of urgency, fear of cost or complacency can affect companies' willingness to adopt these new tools. When technology does succeed, it's because the vision and road map came from the top.

My enthusiasm for technology's transformative potential is evident by the apps that promise to make my life easier every day. On my Launchpad are: productivity apps, social apps, cloud-based calendars and virtual-collaboration tools, travel apps, photos, file-storing and document-sharing tools.

What's on yours?