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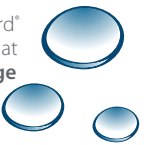
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FD2B Talk Radio Insight of the Night

As part of a new partnership between *Landscape Management* and FD2B Talk Radio, we post a tip from the show each week. To listen to the show, tune in to FD2B Talk Radio at FromDesign2Build.com. Here are a few recent gems.

» Instead of having prospective employees just submit a resume, ask them to answer open-ended questions, requiring well-thought-out answers, about a specific experience. Interviewing candidates this way will provide you with valuable insight into how they think and deal with specific situations. You're not going to get that kind of info from a piece of paper with their credentials listed on it.

—Bill Arman, *The Harvest Group, Southern California*

» Home shows and flower shows are a great opportunity for landscape contractors to touch their customers and promote their businesses, but they can get expensive. To help minimize these costs, ask vendors to donate the products to build your display. Naturally, you'll promote the products they donated as a way of thanking them.

—Kevin McLaughlin, *Mac Events, Spring Lake, N.J.*

» A great estimate is also a plan for the job. Give crews a "job planner," which provides the production team what they'll need to build the project, such as the number of man hours that are task-specific, material lists with estimated purchase prices and a list of the equipment needed to install the work.

—Mike Lysecki, *Landscape Management Network, Toronto*

WEB EXTRAS

» View additional photos from this month's Project Portfolio (p. 52).

» Get a link to download Andrew Pototschnik's lawn care marketing mistakes to avoid, referenced on p. 47.



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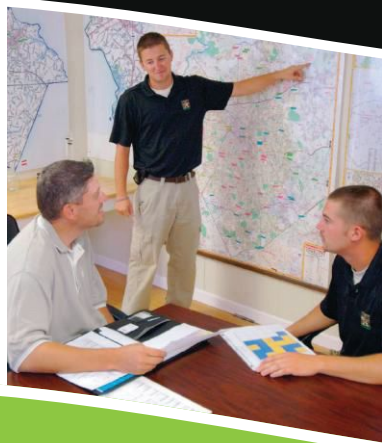


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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

Contact Marisa at 216/706-3764 or via email at mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net.

About us

This column isn't about us, as in *Landscape Management*. It's about you. Rather, it's about your website's About Us page and why you probably need to spruce it up. Marketing experts say About Us pages are some of the most frequently visited pages by potential customers; they're also some of the most poorly written. I know I always seek out companies' About Us pages when I'm perusing websites. Why? I like to *like* the people behind the company I'm buying from.

You may be thinking that well-crafted About Us pages are only important for the Apples, Zappos and Starbucks of the world. But that's not true. They're important for all companies wanting to appeal to their potential customers. For example, check out this inspiring About Us page from Austin, Texas-based Radiant Plumbing. It's not a national company with scores of marketing experts behind its efforts (although it likely worked with a video production company). The point is you should visit this page RadiantPlumbing.com/about-us/ and then try tell me you don't want to do business with them!

In my experience, Green Industry companies' About Us pages often commit these five mistakes. (No, I don't have empirical data here, but trust me, I look at a lot of landscape company websites.) If your site is guilty of these, why not spruce it up?

1. No About Us page whatsoever. Even if you don't have an actual page called About Us, you need to have

something that communicates your history, values and people.

2. A rambling, poorly written About Us page. I understand many companies have DIY websites when they're starting out, and that's OK. But it doesn't give you a pass on professionalism and grammatical correctness. If you're not confident about your writing skills, ask a few people to proofread for you or seek a marketing student to help you for a reasonable fee.

3. No owner or leadership team information. Your and your team's background and expertise are an important part of your unique service proposition. Display them proudly.

4. No photos or video. Nothing humanizes a business more than photos or videos of its people. At the least, have headshots taken of your leadership team and post an all-team picture in front of your shop or at a company event.

5. No credentials. The About Us page is the perfect place to list your team's and your company's certifications, awards and memberships. Obtain the logos of the organizations you belong to—whether it's your chamber of commerce or a local or national landscape association—and include them on this page with links.

P.S. I realize our About Us page (LandscapeManagement.net/about-us/) commits at least one of the infractions above (No. 5). I'll promise to improve it this year as we make other updates to our website if you resolve to do the same. Deal?

Landscape Management

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Eichenlaub Inc. nabs back-to-back honors

Three tips for success from LandOpt's two-time Contractor of the Year.

BY MARISA PALMIERI

As Dan Eichenlaub can attest, it's always possible for a solid company to run a tighter ship. He's the president of Eichenlaub Inc., a design/build and maintenance firm based in Pittsburgh with just under \$5 million in annual revenue.

In January the company was named the Contractor of the Year in the LandOpt network for the second year in a row. The back-to-back recognition is due to the culmination of hard work over many years to improve the company's outlook, plus impressive growth, such as a 30 percent year-over-year revenue bump from 2011 to 2012.

An engineer by education, Eichenlaub is always looking for tools and systems to help him improve efficiency. That's what appealed to him about joining LandOpt, a service organization that licenses the use of business systems for a network of landscape contractors. Eichenlaub Inc., founded by the six Eichenlaub brothers in the wake of Hurricane Agnes in 1972, was one of the original licensees in the network, which now includes more than 20 landscape businesses spread across the country.

Here are three contributing factors in Eichenlaub Inc.'s success.

1 Recurring revenue. Before joining the LandOpt system seven years ago, 20 percent of Eichenlaub Inc.'s business was recurring revenue, such as maintenance and irrigation services. Today that figure has nearly doubled to 38 percent. "That's by design," Eichen-



laub said. "Our goal is to get to 50/50. We see the value in landscape management, and we're growing it at about twice the rate of our project work."

2 Empowering people. "Most businesses will hit a threshold where your key staff—in my case it was myself and two other people—are carrying all the load," Eichenlaub said. "Now we don't have that. Now I've got the right people, we give them the right tools and training, and it's fun."

One thing Eichenlaub has been working on is engaging frontline employees so they always know if the company is "winning" or "losing." "The guys in the trenches need to know because most people want to contribute," he said. "We're learning how you pick the right indicators so on a routine basis they can look at the scoreboard and see if we're winning or losing."

What indicators are best to share? There's no easy answer, Eichenlaub said, noting you have to start by talking to the team about how their roles impact the whole company. Some metrics to consider are revenue per man-hour or for salespeople, the number of client introductions they make. "They have to mean something to the people using them," he said.

From left, LandOpt Director of Success David Gallagher; Eichenlaub sales professionals Ryan Johnson, Anthony Smith and Kevin Prall; Dan Eichenlaub; and LandOpt Success Coach Steven Bach accept their Contractor of the Year award in 2012.

3 Systemizing sales and marketing. "The key is to know what you're selling," Eichenlaub said, acknowledging that his company didn't always target the right client niche.

Another tip is properly handling prospect calls. "When people are calling to buy your services, they don't think, 'Am I walking into the wrong dealership?'" Eichenlaub said. It's the company's job to qualify customers and not be everything to everybody. "My company was like that, and LandOpt helped us get focused," he said. "You have to remember you're not a landscape company. You're a landscape company to a particular segment of the buyers."

"Everything really is coming together nicely now," said Eichenlaub. "We're meeting or exceeding our sales plan and always getting closer to what we ideally want to be. We owe it to the entire team. The general managers in the network will all tell you they're not doing it themselves. Everyone is empowered in their roles to make a difference."

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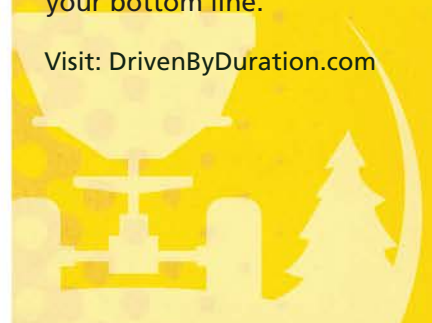
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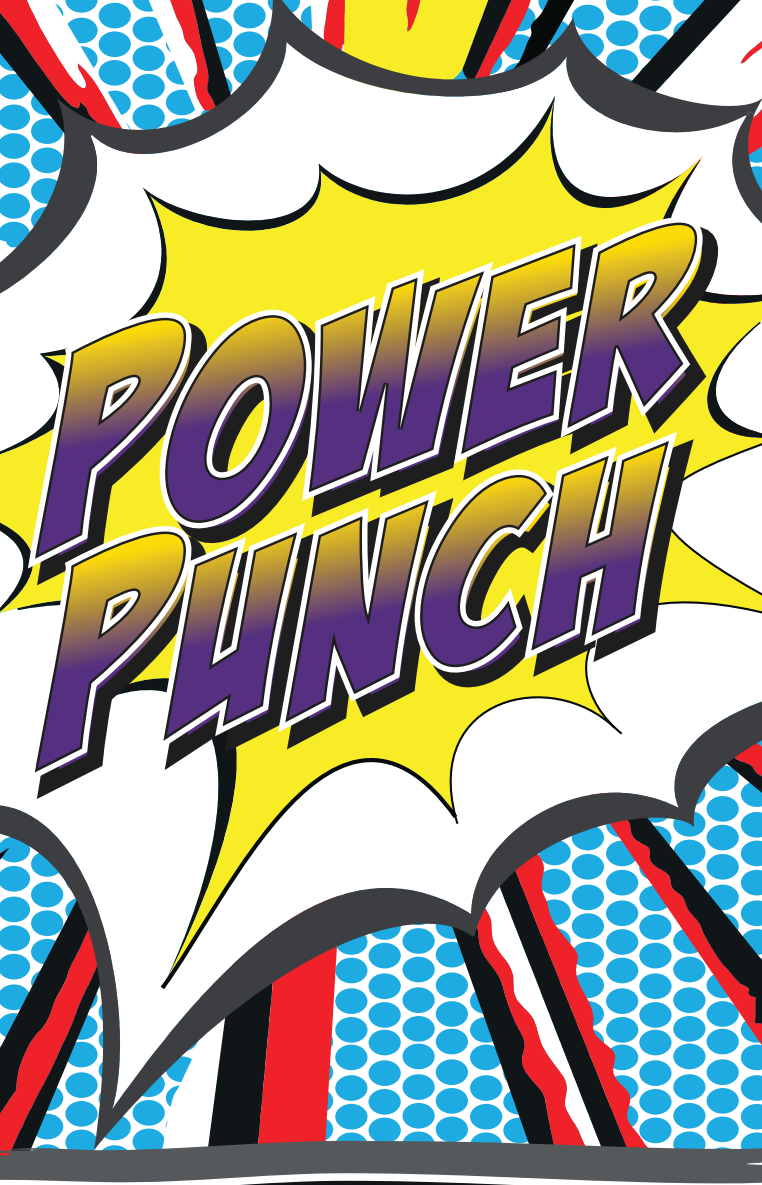
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An education

It was lunchtime. My plane was still on the ground in Chicago, where it would stay for a very long time. Suddenly, I had six hours to kill in a Lansing, Mich., hotel restaurant. And there's only so much you can eat and drink in that span.

As I passed hour upon hour working at a small table, the diners next to me came and went. They all had two notable things in common: They were Michigan State University undergrads. And they talked about internships and part-time jobs they had just gotten.

"It's in finance and it pays \$17 an hour," one student told his friend of his internship offer. "It's a good opportunity, but it's so many hours. I'm not going to have any free time." "Just take it," his friend said. "It's only for three months. You'll be done by May."



Hear Me Out

by
BETH GERACI

By the end of the lunch, the girl had talked her friend into taking it.

And so it went throughout the day. Even as I looked around the restaurant, the entire staff looked to be students. They were cordial and

fast and had it together.

I thought about my college days and had to laugh. I was too busy having fun and making it through the semester to worry about much else. I did have a summer internship, but it wasn't my idea. It was at a local radio station, and I spent more time at the mall buying the DJ soft pretzels than I did actually working.

But on this day, with each passing shift and each new twosome that sat down next to me, I was more and more impressed. Impressed by the students' ambition, their discipline, their maturity.

As 6 p.m. neared, a student and her mother dined over pulled pork sliders and a Caesar salad. "I had three interviews today, and they all went really well," the student told her mom. "And I have two more lined up for tonight."

Through the window behind me, I noticed out of the corner of my eye a sea of students streaming down the hall. The girl said they were all there for a career fair. Suddenly the common theme of the day's conversations made sense. It was a frigid, snowy night in the single digits, yet the lobby was crammed with hundreds of undeterred students. It was heartening to see so many of them with such promise.

The Professional Landcare Network's Student Career Days is about a month away. Will you be there? How's your internship program looking? These students will be graduating in a few short months. With an increasingly competitive environment for talent, what are you doing to attract them?

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McKinney grows landscape portfolio

Late last year McKinney Capital, a Birmingham, Ala.-based private equity firm, added to its portfolio of landscape companies when it bought Grounds Unlimited, also based in Birmingham. Terms were not disclosed.

The intent is to merge Grounds Unlimited with Landscape Workshop, which McKinney acquired in early 2012, by the end of the year, Sam Eskildsen, managing director of McKinney Capital, told *Landscape Management*. Memphis, Tenn.-based Environmental Landscape Service, acquired in September 2011, also was rolled into Landscape Workshop last year.

“We’re in the process of building a regional platform in the Southeast based around the Landscape Workshop brand,” Eskildsen said.

As is the case with ELS, Grounds Unlimited’s management will stay in place.



“We recognize that in the grounds management space, relationships drive the business,” he said. “We very much want to keep those relationships, that’s why we prefer to partner with the existing team, and we’ve managed to achieve that in most cases.”

For “add-on” companies like ELS and Grounds Unlimited, McKinney looks for those with 80 percent or so of revenue coming from commercial maintenance clients. Landscape Workshop has a construction division that services the other locations if necessary.

McKinney, whose portfolio includes many service-based businesses with

mobile workforces, hopes to grow the Landscape Workshop brand by adding one or two companies a year. Right now it’s targeting Memphis; Birmingham; Huntsville, Ala.; Tuscaloosa, Ala.; Jackson, Miss.; Nashville, Tenn.; and Chattanooga, Tenn.

Eskildsen says McKinney isn’t a “traditional” private equity firm, meaning it doesn’t operate with a highly leveraged model.

“That allows us more flexibility,” he said, explaining the company is completely funded by the McKinney family and doesn’t take on limited partners who need their investment back within a specified time period. “We’re a family-based private equity company. It’s private equity by any stretch of the imagination, but we take a longer view. Our charge is to build great businesses and we don’t ever have to exit these if they’re great businesses.”

PVB LOCK BOX

PVB LOCK BOX

The **P.V.B LOCK BOX** will come in one size 24x24x12 this will fit all wall mounted Pressure Vacuum Breaker units ranging from ¾" to 2 ½" as you may have seen at the 2012 irrigation show this product is professionally built in the U.S.A. The product is powder coated hunter green, it comes with the four security bolts and lead anchors it also comes with one security key unlocking bit. This unit wholesales for \$319.99 and the manufactures suggested retail price is \$499.00. Our contractors are installing these units at \$600.00 each and the unit installs in less than 20 minutes.



CLOCK BOX

The **CLOCKBOX** will come in one size 14x17x10 this will fit most outdoor irrigation controllers, this unit will also be powder coated hunter green and come with a removable front cover for access to the unit the locking mechanism will be (2) security hex pin locking bolts and will come with two unlocking bits one for the owner and one for the irrigation or maintenance tech. This unit wholesales at \$259.99 and the MSRP is \$439.00. Our contractors installed pricing is \$539.00 and this also installs in less than 20 minutes. By installing this product this assures that no unauthorized person or persons are tampering with the irrigation controller and will also protect it from being stolen.



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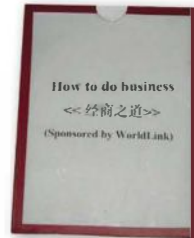
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Getting more than you give



Drake's 7 Dees focuses on helping neighbors—in its own backyard and abroad. BY MARISA PALMIERI

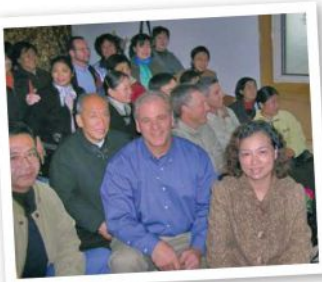
For Drake Snodgrass, owner and CEO of Drake's 7 Dees, corporate giving has three vital components: employees, community and self-improvement. It's his vision to weave all three together to benefit everyone involved. Thus far, he's had impressive results.

Why is service such a focus for Drake's? "We do it, first of all, because I believe in giving back and helping people," Snodgrass says. "We do find, though, that there's a

huge benefit for our company and the people who are part of our company in doing things for others out of love."

Opportunity to make a difference has presented itself over the last decade and a half, as the Portland, Ore., neighborhood where Drake's has been located for more than 50 years has experienced decline. Once a safe area to raise a family, it has since faced crime, drugs and gang-related activities. Wanting to be a part of the solution, Snodgrass has gotten involved with two nearby organizations, the Good News Community Health Center and the Salvation Army, which are working to provide free or low-cost resources for community members.

"The Good News Community Health Center is having a huge impact on the community," Snodgrass says of the 5-year-old, volunteer-run nonprofit clinic that's provided medical, mental and oral health care for nearly 4,000 uninsured people per year. Patients pay just \$10 per visit. The company helped design and install the clinic's landscaping, and Snodgrass has served on, as



Drake Snodgrass (center in blue) with Chinese business ethics students. Above right: a workbook created by Snodgrass and other ethics instructors.

well as chaired, the board. "We've helped grow it from the beginning to what it is today," he says, adding that the healing garden his firm created for the facility's mental health patients was a particularly special project. Snodgrass also has served on and chaired the board of the Salvation Army of Gresham, Ore. The organization provides services for 60 kids daily.

"Many times we'll do something as a company and we'll pay our people to do it, and they understand the company's donating their time," he says. "But people experience that feeling, and the company gains more in employee dedication and loyalty than it would ever take in wages to help out a nonprofit."

Similarly, Snodgrass says giving back breeds more giving back. "We all do things, whether we like to admit it or not, that are motivated by the feeling you get from doing it," he says. "It's such a great feeling that you do more of it."

For businesses looking for a way to begin a stewardship effort, Snodgrass says you just have to believe it's the right thing to do and find an opportunity. You often gain useful business skills, he adds, such as learning how to run a meeting, observing how people interact and gaining the opportunity to "get the heck out of your own business and come back fresh."

He adds, "It doesn't take much time, and you'll find you get more from giving than you ever give." LM

AT A GLANCE

Company: Drake's 7 Dees
Headquarters: Portland, Ore.
CEO: Drake Snodgrass

SELECT PROJECT LISTING:

▶ **Good News Community Health Center**—company provides ongoing landscape maintenance and installation services, such as creating a healing garden. As a board member and chair, Snodgrass expanded the volunteer board and purchased a facility.

▶ **Salvation Army of Gresham, Ore.**—as a board member and chair, Snodgrass led a capital campaign that raised more than \$1 million and built a new facility.

▶ **China business ethics mission trips**—from 2005-2008 Snodgrass recruited and led three annual trips of professionals to teach business ethics to multinational corporations' middle management teams and college graduates.

Landscape Management is the media sponsor of the Professional Landscape Network's (PLANET) Community Stewardship Award. We'll feature each of the program's winners January through June. For more information or to read about the other winners, visit landcarenetwork.org/awards/communityaward or landscapemanagement.net/givingback.

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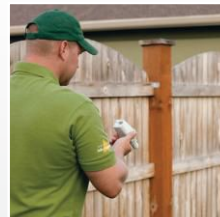
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A good habit

Knowing there's always someone in need has driven a Florida company to participate in an array of service efforts. BY CASEY PAYTON

Katy Harrell, vice president of Southeastern Outdoor Management, believes you don't have to look far to find someone in greater need than yourself. That's why the Panama City, Fla.-based firm makes a habit of volunteering.

One of Southeastern's primary efforts is Habitat for

Humanity. Building a home for a family is the type of project where you get a "direct and immediate sense of reward," Harrell says. "You don't always have the opportunity to see the final result and the impact that your time and service make, but with Habitat for Humanity, you do. It's incredibly gratifying."

Of the many service opportunities Southeastern has been part of, Harrell says the design and installation of a memorial at Surfside Middle School was among the most rewarding. Harrell's mother, the school principal, asked Southeastern to design a courtyard that would celebrate the life of Mary Lynn May, a teacher who lost her battle with cancer. Soon, the plan for the Mary Lynn May Memorial Courtyard was launched. The design included paver step stones, a fountain, plants and benches. And the teachers and students themselves raised the funds to buy the fountain and benches.

"We organized a work day with volunteers and staff to install the courtyard," says

Harrell. "We saw it from concept to completion and were honored to use our talents and resources for such an amazing cause."

In today's day and age, Harrell says she knows many companies are operating with less—less equipment, less manpower and often less revenue.

That reality may make some choose to forego community service work. But there's always a way, she says.

"If you're short on time, then pick a project you can get your spouse and kids involved in so you're not taking away from family time by

doing volunteer work in your free time," she suggests. "Or, if you're a small company, pick a small project. There's always a way you can help."

Southeastern's intent is never to perform stewardship to receive recognition, but rather for the personal satisfaction of knowing it gave to others who are less fortunate, Harrell says. However, the company's discovered that people do take notice, and it can drive new business.

"Twice we've actually received landscape jobs for a new business or residence because one of the organizers had seen us participating in service projects and felt they wanted to do business with a company that was community-service minded," she says. "Most importantly, recognize that whatever you choose doesn't have to be a long-term time or monetary commitment to make a big impact," she says. LM

AT A GLANCE

Company: Southeastern Outdoor Management
Headquarters: Panama City, Fla.
President: David Chapman
Vice President: Katy Harrell

SELECT PROJECT LISTING:

▶ **Habitat for Humanity**—provides landscape construction drawings, materials, labor and equipment. In 2011-2012 alone, provided resources for three projects and donated plant materials to be sold to raise money for building materials.

▶ **Surfside Middle School**—designed and installed the Mary Lynn May Memorial Courtyard; also provided equipment and labor for football field aeration and school ground plant installation and irrigation services.

▶ **Bay County, Fla., Middle and High Schools**—provides equipment, labor and plant materials for ball field clean-ups.

▶ **R. L. Turner baseball program**—provides equipment, labor and plant materials for ball field clean-ups.



Three Southeastern staff members pitch in at one of the firm's Habitat for Humanity projects last fall.

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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.

Coping with uncertainty

Landscape business owners find it difficult to plan as changes to familiar tax laws leave strategic decisions in limbo. Owners facing new tax challenges will either need to absorb the costs (which few can do and remain profitable), cut other costs to help offset them, change their business structure to meet different criteria or pass the costs on to their customers. Here's a look at each of those options.

Cost cutting: Of these options, the cost-cutting approach is tapped out. Everyone in business over the past four or five years has gotten leaner to maintain viability or is out of business. Profits have been hit hard over the same period, with some companies able to maintain profit levels that are, in most cases, barely satisfactory.

Restructuring: Changing a company's operating model and infrastructure—increasing its use of part-time employees, outsourcing and other measures—might work in certain circumstances, but these are not likely to be strategic or long-term solutions for most companies. That leaves the option of passing on some of the costs, if not all of them, to the customer.

Price increases: For the most part, prices have not increased much in the last five years—but costs have. And for commercial landscape maintenance customers, it's been a boon for lower-priced services. As property lease rates and property values have decreased, a case could be made that it's the time for a well-planned approach to increase your prices.

If you take the price increase approach, follow these dos and don'ts:

DON'T

1. Present a flat percentage increase based on higher costs. Asking for a 3 percent to 5 percent increase for inflation, cost increases, etc., is not compelling and can result in the client bidding out the work.

2. Present any request or announcement for a price increase through written correspondence. When customers read it in writing, they assume it's non-negotiable and may go out to bid.

DO

1. Do your homework. Explain your case well and have the right person deliver the message in person.

2. Present your increase months ahead of when you need it so the customer has time to adjust.

3. Be specific. For example, if you're claiming an increase for fuel, explain how much, what percentage of your cost is fuel and how exactly it impacts price and cost. Remind your client that fuel affects costs of all materials through shipping and transport; many of the raw materials in landscape are petroleum related.

4. Reinforce your track record. Remind the customer that you've done much to lower your cost and their prices over the years you've been under contract. List examples. Do the math and ensure your appeal is fact-based, a true cost—not a number pulled out of thin air.

5. Reiterate the value of the relationship and the assertion that you're raising prices only as a last resort.

6. Give them options. Value engineer specifications to help them. They're facing some of the same cost issues in their own companies.

7. Approach the discussion as a partner, keep your customer's perspective in mind, and make it a win-win.

Sustainable business models, like any well-run machine, require constant recalibration and upkeep to function optimally and profitably. The new palette of economic challenges due to changes in the tax laws offers as much to complain about as it does an opportunity to stay creative, nimble and proactive.

If there's good news in this scenario, it's that your customers—business people like yourself—are experiencing the same hand wringing you are and will share your pain. And who knows, it may make you better partners.

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THE BENCHMARK

JEFF HARKNESS

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

Plan now for 2014 health care reform

For employers who have adopted a wait-and-see approach with the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), the time to wait is over. This year is a critical planning year to strategize around cost containment and compliance for 2014. These areas should be a key focus for Green Industry employers to get a hold of before this fall.

Don't panic! I believe employers and employees don't have all the cost and plan design options yet, so this factor will drive decisions. Here are some facts and myth-busting ideas to consider.

First, get a handle on the elements of the legislation so you can formulate a plan to navigate the requirements. Under the law, businesses are considered a "large employer" and thus must provide health insurance to all full-time employees if they have 50 or more full-time employees. Employees are considered full time if they average 30 hours per week or more. As a large employer, you can be subject to penalties for not providing qualified health coverage to your employees at a rate of \$2,000 per year for each employee (minus the first 30).

For example, if you have 70 full-time employees and offer no coverage, you're liable for 70 less the minimum 30 requirement. That's 40 people times \$2,000 for a grand total of \$80,000—clearly a large number. If you have fewer than 50 employees, you get a pass from providing coverage. But beware of strategies like these to minimize head count:

▶ **Breaking up your company** (i.e., each branch or division will be its own company). Don't bother. The IRS is wise to this approach and you'll fail the control group regulations under IRC 414(b), 414(c) and 414(m). If employees of multiple businesses are deemed to fall under a master control group, the aggregate sum of employees will be totaled.

▶ **Reclassifying workers as seasonal employees or part-time workers.** Proceed with caution. The law addresses this loophole. Each month employers will be required to calculate total aggregate part-time service hours and divide the total by 120

hours. This is called the "full-time equivalents" (FTEs). Employers can be deemed large if the sum of full-time employees and FTEs breaks 50.

The key for most employers who are required to provide coverage is to understand plan design, minimum essential benefits and employee contribution limits. Employees cannot contribute more than 9.5 percent of their W-2 wages to total annual premiums.

The families of our production workforce may qualify for government subsidies for health insurance premiums (as will many people with household income below 400 percent of the national poverty level or about \$90,000 of household income) by bypassing the employer plan and going directly to the exchanges to get more affordable coverage.

Why is this important? The \$15-per-hour young foreman may opt out of the employer's plan, keep his or her \$247 per month and elect to get a better deal individually on the exchange with subsidies. The big individual coverage hurdle previously was pre-existing conditions. This is no longer the case under the new law. As long as the employer-sponsored plan has design and benefits that are in compliance with PPACA regulations the employer is not required to pay a penalty for employees who pass on the employer plan and pursue more cost-effective options on the exchange.

Many employees will pass altogether on taking coverage despite the individual mandate to carry health insurance (through your employer or individually). Why? The annual penalty is \$95, which is very little compared to what a monthly plan may cost them. It may become simply an economic decision for some workers.

Lastly, every employer should conduct a financial analysis and plan design offering this spring and summer. Work with your consultant, lawyer and insurance broker to create the right strategy for you and your team. Prepare information to share with your staff members so they're educated on options, both from a benefits and cost perspective. This is too big to screw up. Get it right.

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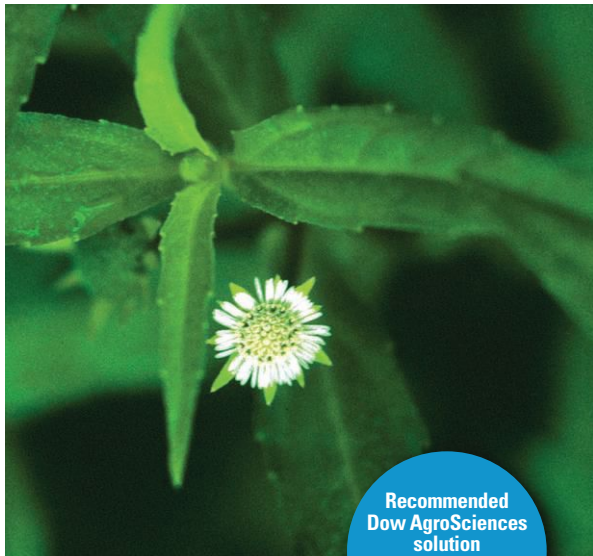
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ECLIPTA

Eclipta prostrata

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

› This prostrate annual, often called a false daisy, is typically found in the South, lower Midwest and along the East Coast.

› Stems below the cotyledons are light green to purple. Cotyledons are bald, slightly thickened and show a midvein on the lower surface.

› In mature plants, leaves are opposite, elliptic to lanceolate in shape and slightly thickened, with short, appressed hairs on both surfaces.

› Green to reddish-brown stems are freely

branched and can root at the nodes.

› Small white flowers grow on small stalks at the end of stems or leaf axils.

CONTROL TIPS

› Early control is necessary to prevent rapid Eclipta growth.

› Apply a preemergent herbicide containing isoxaben, followed by 0.5 in. of irrigation.

› A sequential postemergent herbicide may be needed with dense populations. It's most effective when applied to plants less than 2 in. tall.



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HAIRY GALINSOGA

Galinsoga ciliata

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

› This abundant seed-producing annual is found primarily in the Midwest and on the East and West Coasts.

› Young leaves are opposite and triangular, with slightly toothed margins. Hairy galinsoga is easily mistaken for eclipta as a young seedling, but the presence of hairs helps distinguish it.

› Stems reach 2 ft. in height; they are freely branched, green to maroon in color and covered in hairs.

› Yellow inner flowers are surrounded by white to light pink outer flowers that grow from terminal stems.

CONTROL TIPS

› Hairy galinsoga can produce many viable seeds. It lacks seed dormancy, and shoots cut during cultivation can root rapidly—even in semi-moist soils.

› Apply a preemergent herbicide containing isoxaben and trifluralin to control hairy galinsoga in the landscape.

* State restrictions on the sale and use of Snapshot apply.

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

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Avoid common workers' comp mistakes

MISTAKES, ESPECIALLY WITH SUBCONTRACTORS, CAN COST CONTRACTORS BIG.

PAYING FOR WORKERS' compensation is likely a large percentage of your overhead. Unfortunately for people who work in the horticultural business, they are more likely to get hurt on the job than people who work in other environments, such as in an office or retail store.

Falling down and heavy lifting on the job are two common workplace injuries; while employees of any industry are susceptible, horticultural and construction workers are particularly at risk. Because of that, workers' compensation is a critical form of coverage and important considerations need to be made to ensure your financial protection and prevent common mistakes.

Sub mistakes

A lot of small and even mid-sized landscape contractors go wrong in hiring subcontractors. Many big companies won't even let a sub onto their work-sites without first checking certificates of insurance, but smaller companies aren't as accustomed to going through this routine—or maybe they're just in a rush to get the job done. But failure to check that your subs are fully insured can be a big mistake.

"When you hire a subcontractor, if you don't have proof to your insurance company that they are insured for workers' compensation to the same level that you are, then you end up paying the premium for them just as though they were one of your employees," says Ken Von Forell,

CPCU, director of independent agents at Hortica Insurance & Employee Benefits.

Von Forell says this happens fairly frequently in the industry. "Hiring subcontractors is a real area of concern because a lot of landscape contractors do it on the fly and they don't get all the paperwork that's required," he says. "Whether it's because they just forgot to check the certificates of insurance or they didn't know they were supposed to, the liability still falls on them. Sometimes a manager who has the authority to hire subs will hire someone without good communication with the boss—and the boss finds out later he had an uninsured sub working. At that point it may be too late."

Don't miscategorize workers

Many times workers' comp mistakes are made unknowingly and certainly without malicious intent. In most of those cases, the biggest consequence will be a financial hit. In more serious cases, such as workers' compensation fraud, there can be legal repercussions such as jail time. For instance, some landscape businesses are knowingly using incorrect

employee classifications to save a buck.

"Putting your employees into the wrong category—such as claiming a field person is an inside salesman since the rate is so much lower—is a serious offense," warns Von Forell. "When it's

found out that you've falsely classified an employee, particularly when it's seen as an ongoing pattern, it will be reported as fraud. Any time there's a suspicion that you're trying to hide payroll or misclassify your employees, investigations will be done and authorities will be called in."

There's no doubt that workers' compensation is an area where businesses can easily run into trouble. Most of the time it's a simple mistake, but the consequences may be severe.

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

CERTIFICATE OF INSURANCE



A CLOSER LOOK AT CERTIFICATES OF INSURANCE

It's important to ensure subcontractors' certificates of insurance are current by carefully examining them. Follow these steps.

1 Check the date. "Make sure the coverage hasn't already lapsed," says Ken Von Forell, CPCU, director of independent agents at Hortica Insurance & Employee Benefits. "Some subs may try to use a certificate from last year's policy, assuming that it won't be carefully checked. But you absolutely need to check dates."

2 Verify the company name. If the sub has changed companies, the wrong company may be listed. "If you have to file a claim against them it can be a hassle trying to figure out who was the insurance carrier at the time," he says.

3 Keep it on file. "If you plan to use the sub again, go back to the file and make sure you still have an up-to-date certificate," says Von Forell. "It's important if you have an office manager handling those duties that he or she is well informed of the importance of always checking that file. It can be a matter of preventing serious financial or even legal consequences."

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OWN UP TO YOUR PERSONAL FINANCIAL PLANNING

SIX KEY FOCUS AREAS FOR GREEN INDUSTRY BUSINESS OWNERS.

BY BRIAN MARINO

Simply hoping that a potential sale of your Green Industry business will provide for your retirement needs is not an option. It's crucial for small business owners to spend time focusing on their long-term personal financial planning to ensure they have the leverage, flexibility and control to achieve financial independence. We're often reminded by experts to spend time working "on the business" and not just "in the business." This concept leads owners to focus on everything from profitability to employee retention to succession planning. Each of these areas and others are integral to grow as an organization, but the challenge becomes ensuring that you tie your business planning into your family's personal financial planning.

The reality is there's never a good time to do planning until it's too late. It's easy to put off your planning, only to wake up and realize that five, 10 or 15 years have gone by and now you have to play catch-up.

Fear not: Today is a great day to start. Here, we simplify financial planning into six focus areas: financial position, protection strategies, wealth accumulation, retirement planning, tax reduction strategies and estate planning.

1 ► FINANCIAL POSITION

Financial position is about finding the unique plan that fits within each family's goals, objectives and philosophies. It's all about efficiency; most people are unintentionally inefficient. To get your personal financials in order, you need a personal balance sheet, a family budget and an efficient debt management plan.

The balance sheet, or net worth statement, is as simple as listing all of your assets and liabilities with the values or balances tied to each.

Next comes a family budget. Most business owners and executives have great cash flow statements for their organizations, but getting them to put their personal spending on paper is like pulling teeth. This task usually gets delegated to the person in the family who does the spending or pays the bills. Regardless of who creates the

continued on page 26

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FINANCE REPORT

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draft, both spouses (where appropriate) must weigh in on the month-to-month cash outflows.

Part of a healthy balanced budget is managing your debt properly. From mortgage and car payments to your credit cards, lines and loans, it's important to be as efficient as possible with each piece of debt you have. Smart debt management is about leverage, i.e., maximizing monthly cash savings by balancing the payoff timeline with the interest you'll pay.

2 ▶ PROTECTION STRATEGIES

Once your financial house is in order, turn your attention to the “what ifs” that can derail planning. Even the best-crafted business or financial plan isn't worth the paper it's written on if it doesn't address potential roadblocks. To address these, we need to delve into the world of insurance. It's an imperative part of your planning with an undeserved stigma that most can't afford not to look into. Basic protection strategies include the following types of insurance: life, disability income, long-term care, home, auto and liability.

Many people buy life insurance because they “love someone” or “owe someone.” I've never had a client tell me a death benefit check was too big. Most of us will use life insurance for several different reasons. Some use it for business buy-outs; others use it for college funding or to ensure that should they pass away prematurely, their family won't have to compromise their quality of life. Some will even use it for cash accumulation on a tax-advantaged basis.

With disability income and long-term care, you're looking to protect both your working years (disability income) and your retirement years (long-term care). These types of insurance can be complicated. Having the right policy design is crucial.

Liability coverage has become a commodity today with everyone looking at price. Price is important, but ensuring you have the proper coverages, limits and deductibles is vital when one of your largest personal assets is your business—even if it means paying more for a better company or product.

Business owners should work with their tax and financial professionals to help structure these coverages to provide for tax efficiencies, when applicable. Regardless of the type of insurance, working with a seasoned professional will help you get it right and keep it right as you go through life.

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continued from page 26

3 ► WEALTH ACCUMULATION

Most of our working years are spent in wealth-accumulation mode, trying to stockpile enough dough to last through the long winter that is retirement.

Along the way we each have goals and objectives we strive to accomplish based on our standard of living and what we want in life. Each requires an individual strategy and an understanding of how the components of funding a goal tie together. For each objective consider the following:

► **Goal** – How much of the expense I want to cover?

► **Timeline** – When do I need the money by?

► **Inflation** – What's the total cost in future dollars?

“THE CHALLENGE IS TO TIE YOUR BUSINESS PLANNING INTO YOUR FAMILY’S PERSONAL FINANCIAL PLANNING.”

► **Growth** – What rate of return do I feel comfortable working to attain?

The parameters above will help you determine how much you have to save, but that's just the first step. Next, you'll want to figure out how to invest it and in what type of vehicle. This shouldn't be a one-and-done scenario for most people, as there are a multiple of ways to save for any given objective. Working with a financial planner and/or a registered investment advisor can help you determine the savings goals tied to each of your objectives, then help you create the investment strategy that fits with your family's philosophies.

4 ► TAX REDUCTION STRATEGIES

“You never let the tax tail wag the dog,” but, you need to be mindful of our ever-changing tax environment.

Most business owners today work with CPAs on both their business and personal tax returns. The focus is typically on reducing tax burdens today. In addition to minimizing the tax burden in each working year, you need to begin planning for the tax implications in retirement.

Consider these common assets: 401(k), Roth IRA, annuity and nonqualified brokerage account. The money

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in each of these is taxed differently. How and where you save/invest your money over the next 10, 20 or 30 years can have a tremendous impact on how much of your money you actually get to spend when you go to use it. That's why it's important to build a sound savings and investment plan that complements your business and other assets.

5 ► RETIREMENT PLANNING

From wealth accumulation to wealth preservation, the ultimate goal is retirement income distribution. Financial independence means something different to everyone. Some business owners we work with tell me that they'll "never retire" and continue to have some role in their companies for the rest of their lives. Others want to get out as fast as possible. Even if you fall somewhere in between, retirement typically will be one of the largest goals most people accomplish.

Retirement planning doesn't have to be daunting, but for many, the unknown of how much they have to save each year and what return they need to achieve can prevent them from ever



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Determining retirement income

Use these parameters to determine how much income you'll need when you retire.

▶ **Projected business sale.** This factor is challenging, especially if you're looking 10 to 20 years ahead. If the year you plan to retire falls in line with a negative economy, this number may not be what you thought. It may force you to extend your timeline. Working with a good advisor, you should be able to come up with a conservative projection.

▶ **Fixed income sources.** From Social Security to pensions, the next step is determining what you have coming in each year and how it will inflate over time. Many sources will provide more income the longer you wait to turn them on, so you most likely will find yourself looking at multiple options for each.

▶ **Investable assets and current savings.** Look at all the wealth you've accumulated outside of your business in cash and investment accounts and tie in how much you're adding to these each year and at what rate they're growing. This includes other assets (other things you own that could be used/sold to produce a cash equivalent) and inheritances (these can have a major impact on a retirement planning picture.)

If we assume these three factors will make up most, if not all, of your income streams in retirement, you can begin to project how close you are to hitting the target you want. Don't forget to account for income changes throughout your working years and expense changes in your budget. Thirty years from now, most people will have a different view of the lifestyle they want to live.



getting started. Don't fall into that trap. (See "Determining retirement income," above, for more information.)

6 ▶ ESTATE PLANNING

The last key area of planning ties into the eventual transfer of all your assets—and the documents you may need in place to ensure things happen the way you want. These could include wills, living wills, powers of attorney or any number of different types of trusts.

Many bad things can happen when you don't have a proper estate plan in place, including having monies tied up in probate, paying additional taxes and fees or losing assets all together. Meet with an attorney to understand your options and what makes sense for you and your family. The attorney who drafted your operating agreement or your buy-sell agreement may not be the same person to use when it comes to your personal documents. Find the right person and get the documents done. Once completed, review them as life events happen, or at least every three to five years.

TOTAL INTEGRATION

Now that you know the most important areas to focus on, what's next? The key to effective financial planning is to integrate all of your advisers and strategies. It's the only way I know to help business owners make their plans efficient and coordinated. Typically, a good financial planner also will play the role of a quarterback and help manage each person on the team, including your CPA, attorney, debt specialist and liability specialist. They all should talk to one another, considering they each play a vital role in ensuring you complete your plan. Knowing that all these areas coordinate should create some much-needed peace of mind.

If you aren't following your plan, whose plan are you following? The sooner you start planning, the better off you'll be. What are you waiting for? *LM*

Marino is a financial planner with Skylight Financial Group in Cleveland. He is a registered representative of and offers securities, investment advisory and financial planning services through MML Investors Services LLC. Reach him at 216-592-7358 or brianmarino@financialguide.com.

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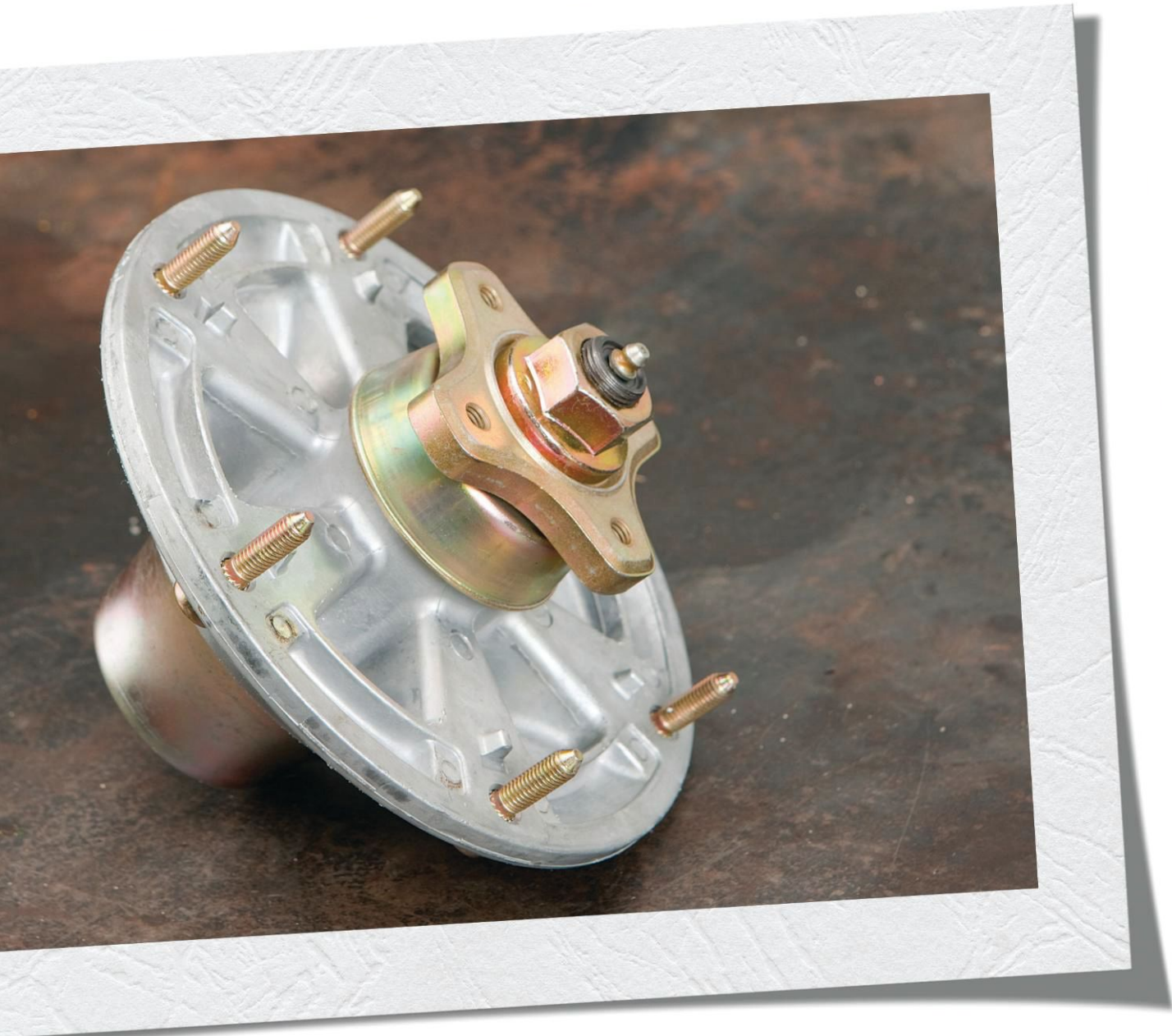
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CHOOSE A GOOD ACCOUNTANT

A GOOD NUMBER CRUNCHER IS VITAL TO YOUR FINANCIAL SUCCESS. SHOULD YOURS BE AN INSIDE EMPLOYEE OR AN OUTSIDE PROFESSIONAL?

BY RON EDMONDS

Many small business owners don't consider selecting an accountant to be a very important business decision. That can be a crucial mistake.

I can tell you many stories in which my clients didn't have the right accountant—and others in which the right accountant made all the difference in the world.

One client with more than \$2.5 million in annual revenue used a bookkeeper from a national tax preparation service to prepare his financial statements. The only problem was she got sick and ended up a full year behind in preparing monthly financial statements. (Actually, that wasn't the only problem...) Another client relied on a part-time CFO to fill the need. At one point, he was there one day per week. When times got tough, the client cut the part-time CFO back to

a couple days per quarter. That didn't quite work.

Most small businesses have one main advisor they go to for serious business advice. For some, that advisor is their accountant. For others, it's an attorney. For others, it's an industry consultant or a business coach. I've seen each of those possibilities work very well, but you do have to have an accountant, whether it's an inside employee or an outside professional.

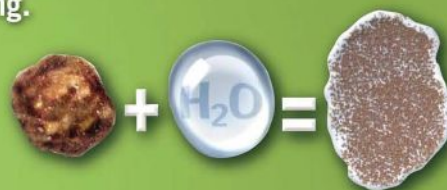
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To determine which set-up works best for you, consider what you need from your accountant. Of course, you must have an accountant or tax professional to prepare your tax returns. That's only the beginning, but sadly, in many cases, that's where the relationship between a small business and its accountant begins and ends.

CONSIDER YOUR NEEDS

What do you need an accountant for beyond tax compliance? Here are a few things that come to mind:

› **Tax planning.** Tax planning is never easy for a business, but it's become extremely challenging in the current political environment. It's hard to plan when taxes and tax rates are uncertain and change frequently. You need an accountant who follows what's going on legislatively and at the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and other taxing authorities.

› **Tax audits and controversies.** You need an accountant or other tax professional who can help you avoid problems, help resolve issues as they develop and guide you through an audit when necessary.

› **Accounting systems.** You need an accountant to help you set up an appropriate accounting system for your business. The real purpose of that accounting system is to give you the information you need to run your business. Many business owners and some accountants understand that. If you can't get accounting system advice from your accountant, where are you going to get it? There are some alternatives, such as consultants, who may or may not be accountants, who specialize in implementing accounting systems such as QuickBooks for small businesses. Nationally, there are a handful of consultants who specialize in implementing these systems specifically in landscape services businesses.

› **Financial statements.** Your accountant should make sure you have access to accrual-based financial statements (i.e., ones that match

revenue to the time period it was earned and expenses to the periods in which they're incurred). Usually, your accountant will compile, review or audit those financial statements. This is a frequent problem area, as tax-oriented accountants often will compile income tax-based financial statements that are cash basis, which are not much help in understanding how the business is performing financially. You also may be getting them very late, probably about the time your extended tax return is due. When it comes to running your business, that's ancient history.

› **Business advice.** Your accountant will develop an in-depth knowledge of your business and has done the same for many other businesses. You should

CPA. You may find an accountant with credentials, such as a public accountant or an enrolled agent who can serve you well, but make sure their skills extend beyond tax compliance.

› **Look at the range of experience.** Either your accountant or his firm should bring a range of experience, including tax compliance, tax planning, accounting systems and financial statement preparation. Be sure to ask about those qualifications.

› **Check industry experience.** Ideally, your accountant will have specific industry experience or be willing to gain industry knowledge through continuing education or using industry information available from trade groups. You also can share information from trade magazines with your

MANY COMPANIES MAKE THE JUMP TO AN IN-HOUSE ACCOUNTANT WHEN THEY REACH \$3 MILLION TO \$5 MILLION IN ANNUAL REVENUE.

receive value from that experience. Your accountant should be able to advise on such topics as budgeting and working capital management.

IDENTIFYING A WINNER

So how do you find an accountant who meets your needs? Here are some suggestions:

› **Look at qualifications.** You may want a certified public accountant (CPA). A CPA has four to five years of education, passed a challenging comprehensive examination and agreed to follow professional and ethical standards, including continuing education. But not all CPAs are alike. For example, I passed the CPA exam nearly 35 years ago and practiced as a CPA for many years. But I have never prepared a corporate income tax return for a client. Not once.

Your business may not require a



accountant to inform them of industry developments. Your financial statements should be prepared on a basis similar to other companies in your industry.

► **Ask for referrals.** One of the advantages of participating in trade associations is having a working relationship with your peers, sometimes even your competitors. You may be able to ask for a referral to an accountant with exactly the qualifications and experience you need. Accountants are bound by a high level of ethics, including maintaining client confidentiality, so it's usually not a problem to use an accountant who serves other similar businesses in the area.

► **Check references.** I recommend asking for—and checking—references for any accountant you're considering. They may not be of great value (who would give you an unhappy client as a reference to call?), but you can pick up information about how well an accountant actually performs. Do they meet deadlines? Are they accessible? Are they knowledgeable about issues?

► **Evaluate your accountant from time to time.** Choosing an accountant is not necessarily a one-time proposition. Like most other business relationships, it's a good idea to periodically evaluate whether your accountant is meeting your needs. Your needs now may be different than they were when you were a start-up. The accountant who served you so well in the beginning may not be the best fit for you now. Many companies wait too long to make a change.

At some point, it will become time to consider adding an in-house accountant. There's no magic formula, but many companies make that jump when they reach \$3 million to \$5 million in annual revenue. After taking the step, many business owners say it was the single best decision they ever made to improve their business and they wish they'd done it years earlier.

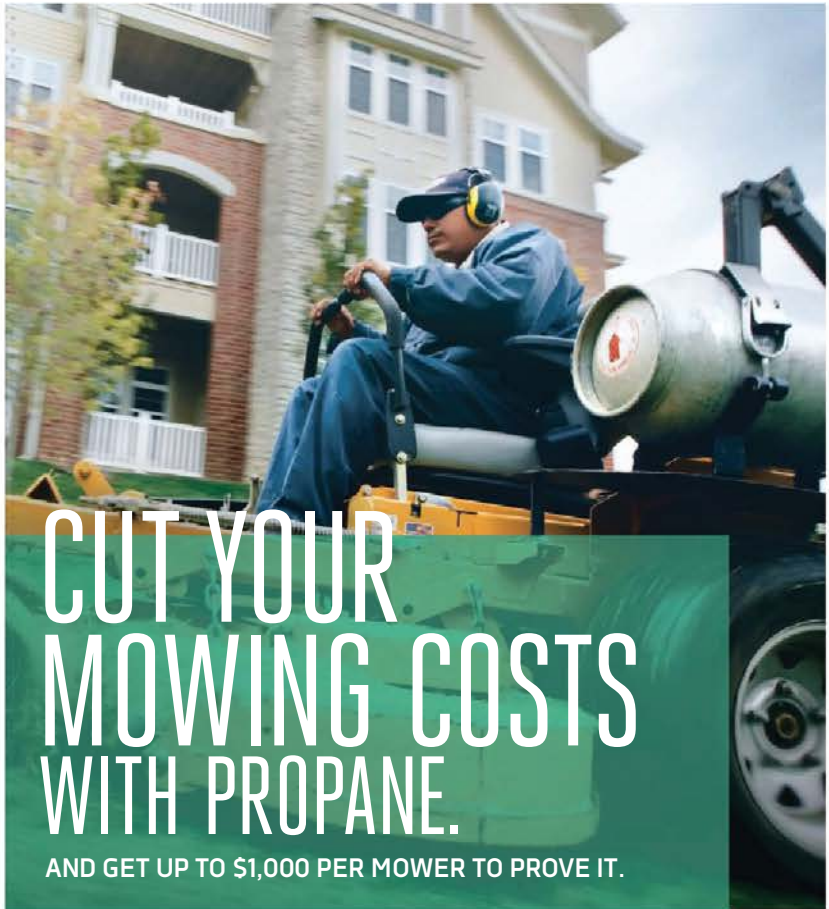
When you make that move, you should have the in-house expertise to better manage your business. As we've established, managing the relationship with your outside accountant can be

complicated. Most companies still need an outside accountant when they have an inside one, but there's a side benefit: Your inside accountant probably will be responsible for helping you manage your relationship with your outside accountant.

Selecting an accountant carefully is likely to pay dividends for your busi-

ness—some obvious ones and others less so. It's an important step in the process of building the foundation for business success. **LM**

Edmonds, a corporate finance professional, is the principal consultant for The Principium Group in Cordova, Tenn. Contact him at redmonds@principiumgroup.com.



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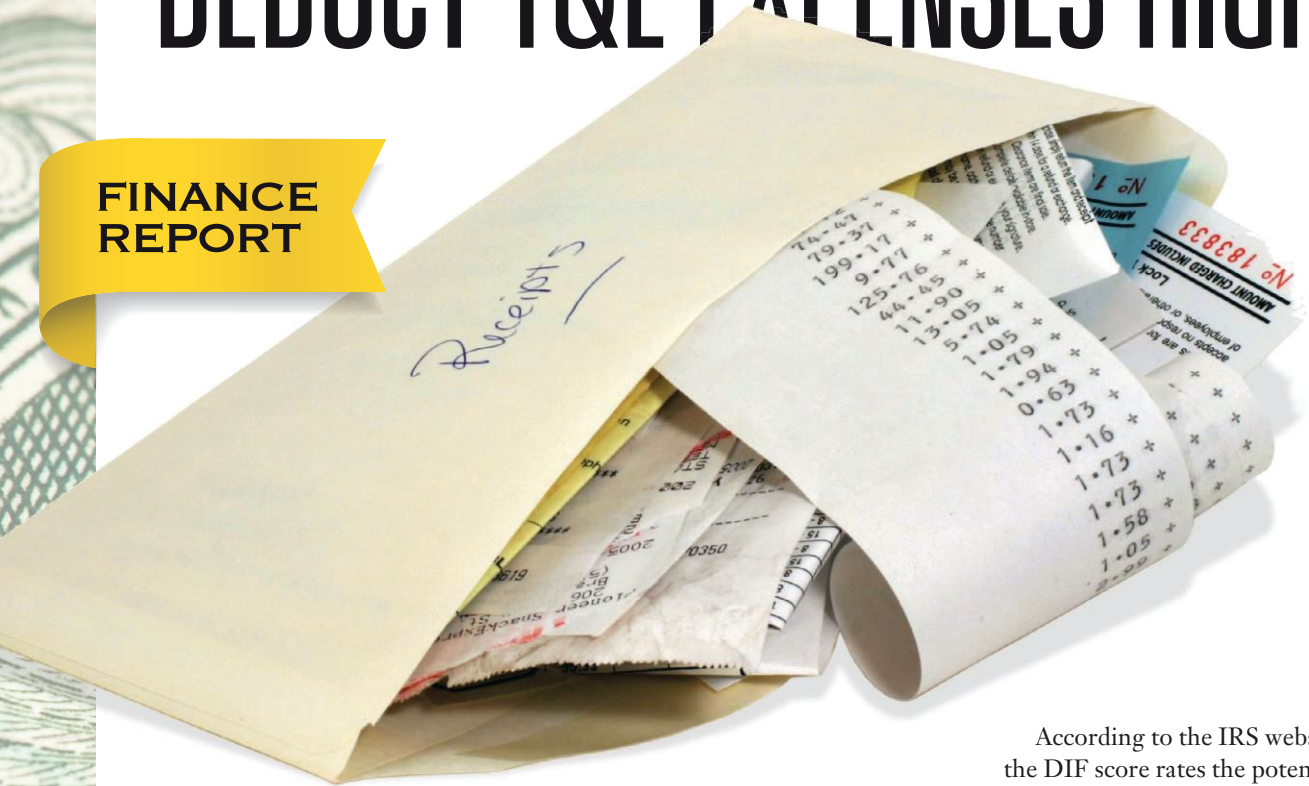
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FINANCE REPORT



“Is the cost of today’s activities tax deductible?” That’s the question one of my land care clients recently asked me at a fancy dinner after a Green Industry golf outing.

Having just been through a tax audit for another client where the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) auditor disallowed most of his travel and entertainment deductions on his prior three years of tax returns, I replied, “It might be.”

“Are you kidding? This day is absolutely deductible,” my client replied with righteous indignation. He’s probably correct, but it’s because several tests for deductibility had been passed—not just because he was having a great day on the golf course with his buddies.

Many businesses deduct expenses

AVOID EXPOSING YOUR COMPANY TO AN AUDIT.

BY DANIEL S. GORDON

related to travel, meals and entertainment and hope the statute of limitations passes, thereby avoiding disallowance of those expenses upon audit. Take note: New IRS technology makes that a risky strategy.

In fact, the IRS receives millions of tax returns each year and it doesn’t have the resources to go through them all, so it uses an automated computer-based scoring system called the Discriminant Inventory Function System (DIF).

According to the IRS website, the DIF score rates the potential for change or irregularities based on past IRS experience with similar returns. Though the calculation of the actual scoring system is a well-kept secret, the purpose behind the programming is likely an attempt to determine which returns would have the most potential of generating additional revenue for the IRS through audit.

Traditionally, travel, meal and entertainment disallowances have been a significant revenue generator for the IRS, and it’s likely that if the deductions you take are outside the norm, you will be audited. That does not mean there will be an audit adjustment, just that you will be audited. How well you keep records showing your compliance with the law will determine if there will be an adjustment—and if so, how much.

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T&E DEDUCTION RULES

So what are the rules for deductibility of travel, meals and entertainment? Here are four to consider:

1 Business purpose. For travel, meals and entertainment to be deductible, the expenses must meet the “business purpose” requirement. Under this requirement the expenses of attending a convention or meeting, including the cost of travel, meals, lodging and incidental expenses, are deductible as a business expense as long as the professional can prove that his or her attendance primarily benefits or advances the interest of his own employment or business. Generally, travel expenses paid or incurred for a spouse or other family member aren’t deductible unless the family member is a company employee, has

a bona fide business purpose for the travel and otherwise would be allowed to deduct the travel expenses if not a family member.

2 50 percent reduction. Landscape professionals generally may deduct meals and entertainment expenses incurred for business purposes. However, deductions for meals and entertainment must be reduced by 50 percent. Specifically, this reduction applies to any expense for food or beverages and any cost for an entertainment activity.

3 No club dues. Another rule related to meals and entertainment relates to membership dues for social or country clubs. The landscape professional must remember the dues or initiation fees to such clubs are not deductible, although amounts expended specifically for business

meals and entertainment while at these clubs is deductible subject to the 50 percent limitation.

4 51/49 split for combo trips. For purposes of travel, the landscape professional can deduct all travel expenses if a trip was entirely business related. If the trip was primarily for business but extended a few days to make a personal side trip, you can only deduct the business-related travel, which includes the cost of getting to and from the business location as well as related expenses. Caveat: When a combination business and personal trip is taken domestically, there’s the 51 /49 percent rule, which precludes a travel deduction to and from the business destination if the trip is more than half personal. Therefore, the business purpose should account for more than half the time spent away to deduct the travel.



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IT'S LIKELY THAT IF THE DEDUCTIONS YOU MAKE ARE OUTSIDE THE NORM YOU WILL BE AUDITED.

BURDEN OF PROOF

The burden of proof is on you. To deduct travel, meals and entertainment without having them disallowed upon audit, you need to maintain meticulous records.

Specifically stated in the regulations, you cannot deduct amounts that you approximate or estimate. You will need to retain source documents, such as receipts, cancelled checks and credit card statements. It's helpful to retain meeting or convention brochures and agendas to fulfill your burden of proof.

In the case of an audit, timely accurate and well-organized information is paramount.

For your records to be considered "timely-kept," record the expense and supporting information at or near the time of the expense. The IRS considers a timely-kept record more valuable than a statement prepared later.

Source documents are typically considered adequate if they show the amount, date, place and essential character of the expense.

You must keep records as long as

they may be needed for the administration of any provision of the Internal Revenue Code. Generally, this means you should keep records that support your deduction for three years from the date you file the income tax return on which the deduction is claimed.

If you don't follow the guidelines, don't be surprised if you get audited, are precluded from taking a deduction listed on your tax return and are forced to repay the tax plus penalties and interest. A good reading of IRS publication 463 should provide the information needed to comply with the tax laws as they apply to the deductibility of travel, meals and entertainment. **LM**

Gordon is a New Jersey-based CPA and owner of Turfbooks, an accounting firm that caters to land care professionals throughout the U.S. Reach him at dan@turfbooks.com.

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3/6	Daniel Tal , Author/Designer <i>Ambit-3D</i>	Graphics, Sales, SketchUp
3/13	Joe Salemi , Vendor <i>DynaSCAPE</i>	Design Software, Marketing
3/20	Jeff Korhan , Consultant/Author <i>True Nature Inc.</i>	Social Media, Marketing
3/27	Rich Arlington , Consultant <i>Rich Arlington & Associates</i>	Business, Team Building

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ABOUT THE HOST

Jody Shilan is an award-winning landscape designer with more than 35 years of experience in the green industry. In addition to hosting FD2B Talk Radio and managing FromDesign2Build.com, Shilan is a regular presenter at industry events and writes the "Profiting from Design" column for *Landscape Management* magazine.

Shilan earned his Bachelor of Science in Landscape Architecture (BSLA) from Rutgers Cook College and his Master's Degree in Landscape Architecture (MLA) from the University of Massachusetts.

Shilan is a National Green Centre "Rock Star" and a Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) Trailblazer.



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LAWN/TREE CARE 6 ways to make your website sell

In College Station, Texas, Texas A&M AgriLife Research scientists are trying to utilize evapotranspiration (ET) to help develop simple formulas for watering lawns.

Operating on the principle that history is a good teacher, Charles Fontanier, AgriLife Research associate, and Richard White, Ph.D., AgriLife Research turfgrass physiologist, are conducting studies at the Texas A&M AgriLife Turfgrass Field Lab to determine if historical ET data can be used to predict water needs when irrigating St. Augustine grass.

The goal is to create a message that's easy to understand for both homeowners and landscape contractors and also will promote water conservation and healthy turf, Fontanier says.

"From the reference ET, we can adjust it to the different types of grasses we are growing, as well as perhaps a microclimate—if it is a sunny spot or a shady spot," Fontanier says. "So we can adjust the number accordingly. If the number for a warm-season turfgrass in Texas is 0.6, then 60 percent of the weather station output is what we should be applying to our grasses.

"But keeping up with real-time ET data can be too time consuming," he says. "So our goal for this study was to demonstrate and quantify the effects of using historical average water needs as a predictor of actual plant water needs."

Fontanier and White have used historical averages to set the irrigation system run times each of the last two growing

Texas A&M researchers seek a simple turfgrass watering formula.

By KAY LEDBETTER

seasons. For example, on average over the past 47 years, St. Augustine grass has needed about 4.25 inches of water in July. They have used that number to irrigate the grass each July.

Their four treatments in the study were: reference ET from the weather station or 100 percent, which would be an over-watering scenario; turf coefficient, which is what's theorized that the turfgrass actually needs; and two deficits, 40 percent and 60 percent of the turf coefficient.

"Looking at the two years we've had recently and comparing the differences, in 2011 when we really had severe conditions, our main goal with any irrigation was really just bud and crown survival," Fontanier says. "If we kept enough plants alive, we could get regrowth once rains did come. In fact, that is what we found. Even though we lost a tremendous amount of density in our deficit irrigation treatments, the grass survived, and by March, we had close to 100 percent stands."

Superficially, all the plots looked the same, he says. That's the important message for areas that can tolerate that seasonal reduction in quality—that St. Augustine grass will survive "if you just moderate your irrigation and keep it moist enough that we have enough buds to stimulate regrowth," Fontanier says.

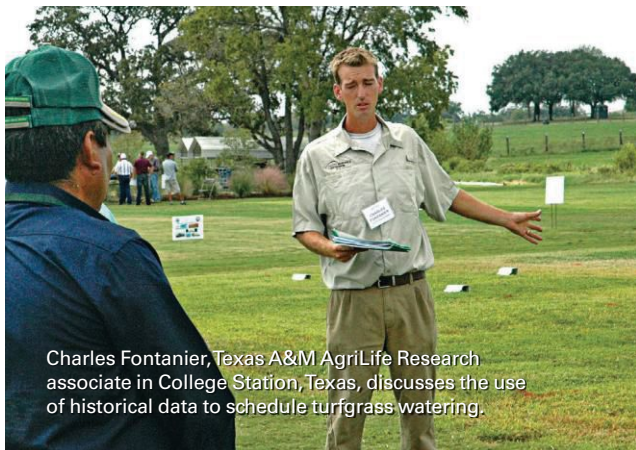
FERTILIZER IS KEY TO RECOVERY

A second aspect determined from the study is that nitrogen fertilizer is key to the speed of that recovery, Fontanier says, and the high fertilizer experiments show greater recovery.

"If you look at 2012, where we did get occasional rains, our water conservation treatments or deficit irrigation treatments not only survived, they actually look pretty good," he says, adding the researchers under-irrigated in 2011 by about 20 percent and over irrigated in 2012 by about 10 percent.

"But if you look at the long haul," Fontanier continues, "we think we will be right on the money—or at least promoting some level of conservation utilizing historical ET as a base for irrigation."

Reprinted with permission from Texas A&M's AgriLife Today, where the author, Ledbetter, is a writer.



Charles Fontanier, Texas A&M AgriLife Research associate in College Station, Texas, discusses the use of historical data to schedule turfgrass watering.

MAINTENANCE

No longer an “alternative”

At Sebert Landscaping, propane- and battery-powered equipment are business as usual.

By JONATHAN KATZ

Seibert Landscaping could be less than two years away from converting its entire mower fleet to propane power. The effort is part of the Bartlett, Ill., company's goal to eventually end its reliance on gasoline by utilizing some form of alternative energy for all of its equipment, including handheld products.

“That means no transfer of gasoline or diesel into gas cans, mowers or handheld equipment,” says Steve Pearce, general manager of Seibert Landscaping.

Seibert Landscaping, with estimated annual revenue of \$25 million, embarked on a journey about four years ago to reduce its environmental footprint, Pearce says.

“The No. 1 reason why we're so proactive in this movement is because it's responsible within the industry, responsible to our clients and responsible to the environment,” Pearce says. “The cost savings is second, which is a very important part of our business, because that's another benefit to the client.”

The company already has swapped out approximately 40 percent of its 150-plus gas-powered mowers for Exmark propane units and has not purchased a gas mower in three years. The switch comes at a premium, with propane mowers costing \$800 to \$1,000 more per unit, Pearce says. But in the long run, propane should save Seibert money, partly because propane is significantly cheaper than gasoline. Further savings are possible through longer service life, Pearce says. He expects to gain an additional 500 to 800 hours per mower engine with propane units.

To refuel the mowers, Seibert's propane supplier arrives two to three times per week with a propane transfer truck to refill the tanks. The company stocks up to three extra tanks per mower. In the future, Seibert plans to purchase its propane in bulk and refuel its own tanks, which will lead to additional savings, Pearce says.

One of the inherent disadvantages of a propane mower is its loss of horsepower. Seibert compensates for that loss by upgrading to 24-hp engines rather than the lower 20-hp engines it would purchase for gas mowers, Pearce says.

“So we're actually seeing no difference in performance when it comes to the mowers,” he says.

The company is in the process of studying how fuel efficient the propane-powered mowers are compared to traditional gas mowers. Seibert's initial study showed a slight increase in fuel consumption with propane, Pearce says.

CHARGED-UP FOR HANDHELDS

The company also is migrating to battery-powered handheld equipment. About two-and-a-half years ago company owner Jeff Seibert challenged employees to develop a solar-powered trailer to charge batteries for handheld equipment.

Pearce and other employees installed a solar film on top of the trailer that feeds energy through an inverter, which in turn charges a battery-pack system. This setup allows employees to charge batteries continually rather than waiting until the end of the work day.

The company recently learned about

a development by handheld equipment manufacturer CORE Outdoor Power that could mean eliminating the inverter, which costs about \$6,000. With the new system, power would travel from the solar panels to a voltage regulator—costing only a few hundred dollars—to the charger.

Moving to battery-powered handheld equipment is a work in progress, Pearce says. The company currently is testing about 25 battery-powered blowers and trimmers from CORE and Stihl. It will be another five years or so before Seibert replaces all of its handheld equipment with battery-powered units, he adds. Performance issues and wide-scale availability are the greatest hurdles.

“There has to be industry interest in these pieces for the manufacturers to produce and engineer the equipment that we're going to expect, and that's been lagging over the last few years,” Pearce says.

The battery-powered handheld units cost approximately 20 percent to 25 percent more than traditional equipment. The units perform as well as gas-powered blowers and trimmers when used for routine maintenance tasks, but they're less effective in heavier maintenance applications, Pearce says.

Manufacturers have rapidly improved the reliability and performance of the machines, and Pearce expects further advancements soon.

To other companies looking to make the switch, Pearce says, “You have to be innovative, you have to think outside the box, and you have to be a leader in your own organization.”

Katz is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.



Seibert staff built a trailer to recharge handheld equipment batteries.



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A patio with “exquisite furnishings” enhances a company’s portfolio, says John Algozzini.

Park it here

Ramp up your designs by offering seating options. *By JOHN ALGOZZINI*



PRICE IT RIGHT

Everything designers do outside is part of the design process and the profit process. Furniture is an integral part of both.

“I have a design responsibility to my client and also a financial responsibility to my employer to explore all possibilities in the landscape,” says designer Anna Smailus of Thornapple Landscapes in Batavia, Ill. “While seat walls are incredibly popular, I also like to include furniture groupings and bench seating in those jobs where budget will allow it. By doing so, I’m providing a professional service that helps complete the design thought.”

Small furniture purchases made by landscape contractors may not be high-margin items, but they don’t have to be loss leaders either. Pricing varies from project to project, but I recommend including a 15 percent to 20 percent mark-up on materials only. Delivery, assembly and set up are done on a time and material basis.

A lower profit margin on furniture may be a reality, but there is an upside: There are almost no post-installation issues since it doesn’t require water and any warranty issue is with the manufacturer. Also, when a company decides to photograph a project a year or two after the installation, it knows its furniture selections will be in place as part of the design. Arriving to find plastic furniture from a big-box outlet on a patio you designed can be a bit deflating, but a patio with exquisite furnishings enhances any company’s portfolio at point of presentation.

SELLING SEATING

Not all clients are receptive to the idea of having furniture selected for them. It takes a subtle and educated approach to engage clients and gain their trust. Locating the furniture on the drawing is a good way to start; it shows clients that you’ve considered scale and how the space can be used for the family and for entertainment.

Talking about seating provides a competitive edge. It involves the designer in a more meaningful way. Early in the process that discussion assists the homeowner in a way that distinguishes the designer as more concerned, informed and holistic than the competition.

The landscape market evolves constantly and being part of the evolution is preferable to watching it pass you by. Whether you park it here or park it there, furniture in the landscape provides pleasure, profit and possibilities for every designer and contractor looking for an edge in their business.

Algozzini is director of design at K & D Landscape Management in the Chicago area. Reach him at jalgozzini@kdlandscapeinc.com.

A good landscape is always about utility *and* aesthetics. One of the more expressive ways to accent any garden is through seating options. Seating in the landscape is a definitive expression of style. Whether it’s wood, metal, wicker or composite, the furniture in our landscapes helps define, embellish and provide the outdoor living space with enduring character. Almost any landscape I design today includes seating, whether it’s seat walls or furniture groupings.

What led me to start integrating furniture and other site amenities was a class I attended by landscape architect Leo Kelly. The class was not on furniture, but on wood structures. He referred to one of his arbors as a “visual pause.” It made me think not so much of arbors or pergolas but of other garden elements that gave the eye and the user points of reflection beyond the patio or the plantings. More specifically, it led me to think about seating and furniture in the garden beyond its basic utility.

VARIETY AND PLACEMENT

Whether the space is strongly formal or randomly casual, I like to incorporate a variety of seating elements into designs. My designs have included wide-ranging seating choices, such as seats from Wrigley Field in Chicago and a tribal council stump from the TV series “Survivor.” But even a solitary chair in the right place on the patio or in a garden bed works wonders from an aesthetic and practical standpoint.

Beyond Kelly’s “visual pause,” sometimes furniture is a “visual stop.” A thoughtfully placed grouping, chair or bench at the end of an axial view works wonders to create impact. The terminus of an axis is not completely developed from a design standpoint unless there’s something located there to catch and hold the eye.

LAWN/TREE CARE

6 ways to make your website sell

Don't just set it up and forget about it.

By ANDREW POTOTSCHNIK

Your website is your most important salesman. In fact, making sales is the only reason to have a website.

Here are six great ways to give your website the tools it needs to close sales.

1 Start with a professional design. Hopefully, no one reading this would ever let a member of their team show up at prospective client's home or business wearing cutoff jeans, flip-flops or a tank top. Like it or not, our image projects an idea of how we operate. If your website looks sloppy, hard to use or is just a glorified business card, it says something about your business. Make it professional and project the image you want to portray in your market.

2 Display certifications, licenses, awards and memberships. In a sense, every salesman presents a resume of qualifications to a prospect; your website should do the same. Letting the world know your business is licensed, insured, a member of important trade organizations and even an award winner shows you're serious about how you do business and that you strive to be (or are) the leader in your industry. Companies that aren't in it for the long haul don't go to the trouble.

3 Offer a strong guarantee. Giving a salesman the ability to guarantee your work is the ultimate counter to any objection a customer would have to using your services.



Testimonials and reviews are important elements for your website, Andrew Pototschnik says.

If you currently don't advertise a guarantee, are you not going to fix a job when a client is unhappy? If you are, then you already have a guarantee. The only thing you're not doing is telling people that you have a guarantee.

Advertise it. Make it public. Let people know that they're not going to make a bad decision if they choose you and they're going to be happy with your service, no matter what.

4 Show off your public recognition and media coverage. Those who sell services for popular or publicly recognized companies have an easier time selling and often can charge a premium. Maybe you've been featured on the local news or in other media outlets; this recognition adds a lot of credibility to your business. It lets people know that you have a good reputation, you're trusted and you're a leader in your market.

5 Share positive reviews and testimonials from satisfied customers. Seventy-two percent

of consumers say online reviews are as trustworthy as personal recommendations. More than half of them say positive online reviews about a local business make them more likely to give it a try. Showing positive reviews and testimonials on your website from real customers proves you have a reputation for high-quality service and choosing your company is a safe bet.

These also serve to diffuse the inevitable negative review you'll receive from competitors and former customers who can't be satisfied.

6 Present before-and-after photos of your successful projects, staff and fleet. A salesman who can demonstrate he's successfully completed hundreds of different projects, just like what his prospects need, has an easier time getting a contract.

Before-and-after photos of your work go a long way. Showing that you have a large staff and a fleet of trucks demonstrates you run a real business, you've been doing this for a long time, you have the resources to deliver and you're not going anywhere.

Your website is a salesman, and just like a salesman it should get better and better over time. So don't just set it up and forget about it. Continually update it, add new content to it, improve it and focus on converting visitors to customers. That's why we have websites in the first place. **LM**

» WEB EXTRA

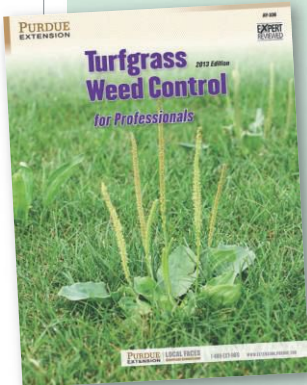
Visit the Web Extras section of LandscapeManagement.net for a link to download Pototschnik's free guide on lawn care marketing mistakes to avoid.

Pototschnik is founder of LawnCareMarketingExpert.com, a website-optimizing consulting firm. He spoke at the 2013 Lawn Care Summit, presented by the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) and the National Pest Management Association (NPMA), in Orlando in January. This article is a snippet of his keynote presentation, "How to Get Found on the Internet and Make Your Website Sell."

LM REPORTS

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TURF CARE EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES



Purdue Agronomy

The revised edition of Turfgrass Weed Control for Professionals is now available. The 96-page publication includes content on turfgrass culture, weed types, weed life cycles, developing a weed control program, indicator weeds, herbicide information, control of tough weeds, an herbicide FAQ section and more. Color photos of crabgrass growth stages and herbicide mode of action have been added to this edition. Also new for 2013 is the availability of a PDF version for those who want an electronic copy. MDC.itap.purdue.edu/item_number=AY-336



Agrium Advanced Technologies

New Spread it & Forget it Controlled-Release Fertilizer,

available with Barricade Pre-Emergent Herbicide or Dimension Specialty Herbicide, has been added to AAT's line of slow- and controlled-release fertilizer technologies. With a choice of Barricade or Dimension impregnated into the fertilizer granule, this new product allows users to fertilize once up to every six months, while getting pre-emergent crabgrass control. AgriumAT.com



Yellowstone Compact & Commodities

Created by a landscape professional, YCC's new, patent-pending BioPac'r facilitates the curbside process of turning clippings into a more usable product. BioPac'r compacts up to three days of mowed clippings into an anaerobic cube. Landscapers save money by reducing trips to a dumpsite and by unloading the clippings in 50 seconds. Clippings that aren't composted could be sold as fermented livestock feed or feedstock called grass-clipping silage, thus creating an off-season revenue stream. BioPacr.com

Grasshopper

Aerate and loosen compacted soil in less time with less labor compared to walk-behind or pull-behind aerators—even in tight spaces—with a Grasshopper AERA-vator coreless lawn aerator. The power takeoff (PTO)-driven AERA-vator works without slicing or cutting, improving turf development and water absorption with little surface disruption, according to the company. The patented vibrating tines deep-fracture soil instead of plugging cores, which means turf areas are immediately available for use. The AERA-vator attaches in place of the out-front mower deck for zero-turn maneuverability to aerate large turf areas, such as athletic fields and parks, quickly and efficiently.

GrasshopperMower.com/aerate



Northern Tool

NorthStar's Broadcast and Spot Sprayers include the Towable Boom model, equipped with a commercial-grade NorthStar NSQ Series pump for easy priming, durability and resistance to harsh environments and corrosive chemicals. Tow behind your ATV or tractor. Its sibling product, the NorthStar ATV Boomless Broadcast and Spot Sprayer, breezes through big jobs and spot spraying—featuring a 40-ft. spray pattern and a handheld spray gun. NorthernTool.com



Exmark

The Exmark 30-inch Stand-On Aerator features a split-tine design to allow easier turning with tines engaged. The compact design heightens maneuverability in tight spaces while the 30-inch aeration width and 7.5-mph top speed deliver maximum productivity. Mass is centralized directly over the tines for maximum core depth consistency, and core depth is adjustable, from 2-in. to 5-in. The self-cleaning tines are easy-to-replace. Tine down-force is hydraulic-actuated and adjustable by the operator. An electric-start Kawasaki V-Twin powerplant delivers professional-grade power, reliability and durability. The Exmark 30-inch Stand-On Aerator is covered by a one-year limited warranty. Exmark.com

TurfEx

The new TS200 spreader is part of TurfEx's full line of zero-turn mower attachments. Capable of spreading seed, fertilizer and ice melt, the spreader is engineered specifically to maximize mower productivity. It holds up to 2.5 cu. ft. of material, and features a corrosion-resistant polyethylene hopper to reduce weight and maintenance concerns. The spreading operation is controlled via the manual flow gate and electric-powered spinner, both of which can be actuated from the mower's seat. Additionally, the spinner includes adjustable paddles for fine-tuning the spread pattern. A clear cover, universal mount and two-year limited warranty are standard. TurfExProducts.com




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Billy Goat Industry

The newly enhanced Billy Goat OS901SPS includes a new blade design that reduces thatch and improves blade life, thanks to its sharpened leading edge and attack angle—combined with a new foot-actuated height adjust that raises and lowers the reel and provides more blade depth. The 22-in.-wide overseeder is hydrostatically self-propelled to reduce fatigue associated with pushing and features best-in-class, intuitive right and left operator drive controls. Its exclusive, 11-blade “floating head” cutting system maintains contact with the contours of uneven ground, increasing seed-to-soil contact and improving germination rates. An exclusive Auto Drop system automatically starts and stops seed drop with bale engagement and disengagement, conserving seed and preventing end-of-run seed piling. The unit comes standard with a 30-lb. seed box and is elevated above the turf to eliminate clogging. Conversion kits are available to retrofit the OS900SPS series with the new enhancements. *BillyGoat.com*



Turfco

Turfco's T3000i spreader/sprayer features enhanced capacity, versatility and simplicity, including more durable front bearings, trim-lock speed for consistency while in use, and hands-free speed control.

“With the hands-free speed control, it's essentially like driving a car,” says Turfco Executive Vice President Scott Kinhead. “You don't have to be Edward Scissorhands to run it. You just step on the machine, flip the lever, put your foot on the pedal, and you're off and running.”

Not only is the T3000i intuitive, it also has 45 percent more hopper capacity and a total capacity of 275 lbs., making it suitable for both residential accounts and large commercial accounts.

“The goal is for people to be able to buy one machine that can handle both types of properties, making it more cost effective and efficient,” says Kinhead.

Turfco also has increased the auxiliary tank to two times the capacity. Now the spreader/sprayer has the ability to treat 125,000 sq. ft. per fill and can fit through a 36-in. gate. It also features 12- to 18-ft. spreading widths, 6- and 9-ft. spraying widths, and a 4-ft. trim spray and 15-ft. wand for spot treating. *Turfco.com*

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Mediterranean dining

THE MISSION

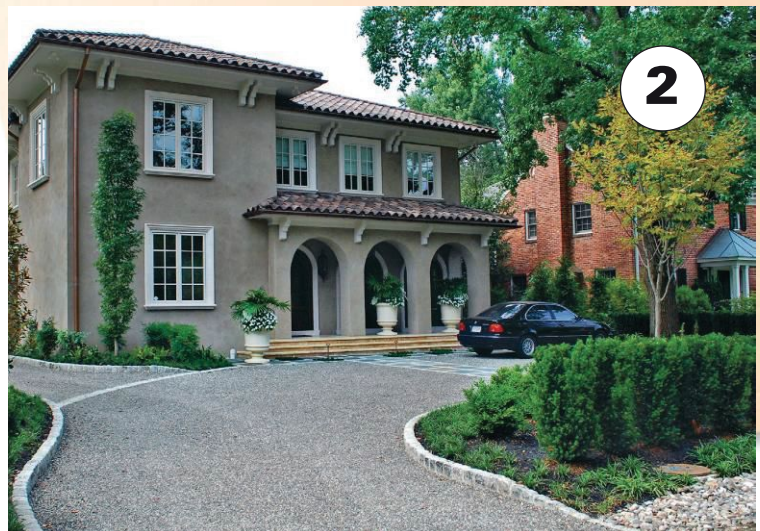
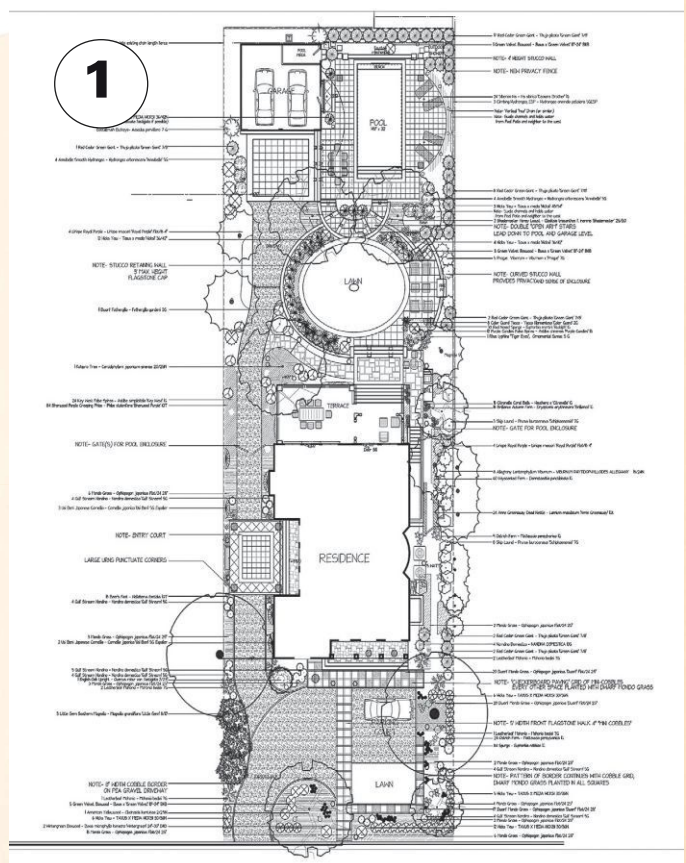
A garden and outdoor dining spot evoke Old World design and contemporary flair for this Virginia home.

Olney, Md.-based Botanical Decorators was faced with quite a “must-have” list from its client—including an upper-level terrace, a covered patio space, a grilling station, a fireplace, a level lawn area, a driveway to the garage with parking for two cars, a pool and lush, colorful plantings. Winter weather, a steeply sloping backyard, and lots of regulations with which to contend were just a few of the obstacles that lay ahead, but Morgan Washburn, Botanical Decorators’ landscape designer for the project, knew his team was up to the challenge.

First, it had to tackle the backyard slope. “To properly develop this site, we custom-designed an 1,800-gallon rainwater harvesting system to capture and reuse more than 85 percent of the stormwater runoff,” he explains. “This allowed us to maximize our allowable impervious surface area, and accomplish all of the client’s requests in an environmentally responsible manner.

“For the driveway, we installed a gravel paver system that absorbs runoff and will not compact,” he continues. “The captured water is then used to irrigate the landscape.”

Having the driveway enter from the left side allowed the team to create an inviting interior courtyard. “While the paving pattern of mini cobbles and flagstone produces a stepping-stone look, the clever play of the flagstone and mondo grass inlays creates a separation between the front porch and the courtyard,” notes Washburn. “Our plantings were kept simple, with plays of textural greens and a columnar sweetgum to lend a Mediterranean vertical line.”





PHOTOS: ROGER FOLEY (2 & 4);
BOTANICAL DECORATORS

THE WORK

1 | The master plan.

2 | The right direction. The curve in the driveway downplays the service entrance to the left. Cobblestone inlay gently guides you to the front of the house. The columnar sweetgum lends a Mediterranean accent.

3 | No reservations. The upper-level travertine terrace with custom-designed railings is an ideal place to dine al fresco, offering a view of the gardens and pool.

4 | Blooms where they're planted. The custom cast planters overflowing with plants can be viewed from the street and the living room. A random paving pattern with mondo grass inlays buffers the parking area.

5 | Fireside chats. Beyond the pool, a gently curved wall features a contemporary fire feature—ideal for after-dinner gatherings.

6 | Nature's wall. Green Giant arborvitae screens the neighboring view. It's also a lovely backdrop to the cool-colored poolside plantings.

For more than 30 years, Botanical Decorators, Olney, Md., has provided design-build-maintenance services for residential projects in Washington D.C., Maryland and Virginia. Botanical Decorators designs, builds, installs and maintains outdoor spaces that "let homeowners and their families enjoy them to the fullest." For more information, visit BotDec.com. Plus, see the Web Extras section of LandscapeManagement.net for more photos of this installation.



Stormwater woes

Twin Oaks Landscape differentiates itself by fixing clients' stormwater problems.

CHRIS SPEEN, GENERAL manager of Twin Oaks Landscape, in Ann Arbor, Mich., was looking for a differentiator. There were a lot of landscape businesses in his area and they all offered the same services. He wanted to not only stand out from the crowd but offer a unique service that could drive additional revenue. He set out to find what was lacking in his area—and what he found was a need for stormwater management.

"A plumber goes as far as taking care of the internal problem and getting the water outside, but what happens after that?" says Speen. "That's where we come in."

Launching this new service was no small feat, and Speen had to team up with a civil engineer to offer it properly. The civil engineer completes drawings and puts the certified stamp on official plans. Since the job involves roadways, drainage ditches and retention ponds, there's a lot at play.

"We tell our clients it's an opportunity to protect their asset or infrastructure," explains Speen. "In the past, people may have ignored the retention pond for 20 years and then have to put a ton of money into solving a problem. We talk to them about a maintenance program where they're paying a smaller fee for an ongoing service and they can often prevent those problems. If we can do a little bit of work each year, it's much easier for a group like a homeowners' association (HOA) to budget for that than to wait 20 years and have to fix a huge problem that wasn't budgeted for."

While the work got started with HOAs, Speen also has contracted with municipalities and does work on a smaller scale for individual residential properties that have stormwater management issues.

To start the service, the biggest investment was the partnership with a civil engineer, Speen says. Twin Oaks has a design/build division, so it already had an excavator and a compact loader, plus an underground camera with scope.

"The resources were already there, so the question was, how do we get the equipment we already have to do more work?"



A before-and-after look at a Twin Oaks stormwater management project.

BEFORE



AFTER

The service has seen a return on investment and it drives off-season revenue.

"We were booked for December and January working on stormwater management," Speen says. "It's the time of year when you can typically only make money doing snow services, so we've found this has been great winter work."

Though it has been successful, Speen cautions that it takes hard work. To get a client on a stormwater management program, it can require six or seven meetings before any income is generated.

"It's a big time commitment," he adds. "We primarily research jobs that bring us income throughout the year—on a monthly payment plan—as opposed to one-time jobs, though there are times these can work out as well."

Because the size and scale of the jobs are so vastly different, there's a range in pricing. Speen has some accounts that pay \$500 a month, while others pay up to \$6,000 a month. "The key is getting the details on the client's budget and what they're prepared to spend, and then building a plan that works for them," he says. "Our company is not focused so much on price, but on value. We offer high value by conducting the service the right way, and ultimately saving them thousands by managing their stormwater runoff properly and in good timing."

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

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY:
Twin Oaks Landscape

HEADQUARTERS:
Ann Arbor, Mich.

WHAT? A stormwater management service

WHY? "In this business, people ask all the time: 'What do you do specifically?'" says General Manager Chris Speen. "Once they like your landscape services they want to know what other services you offer. So we were looking for something different, a long-term relationship based on trust and loyalty."

HOW? "We teamed up with an engineer and started to separate ourselves from the pack and gain new business with this new service," says Speen.

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Maurice Dowell

President of Dowco Enterprises Inc., St. Louis



Who's your mentor? I have an informal mentor, Bob Coulter. Through his services, he has earned my respect. Bob is a shining example of an individual who can hold up the mirror of what a coach looks like. He's a friend, an individual who's shown me so many attributes of a leader. I'm amazed. Bob listens. He cares. He deeply wants you to succeed at whatever you're doing.

As a Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) Trailblazer, you are a mentor yourself. What advice do you give? What I insist upon is that you have a dream, you

have a goal and then ask yourself, "What am I doing today to achieve that goal?" When we all begin to think that way, it changes life.

At work, we sit down as a management team once a year and project our goals as if they've already happened. And then we open them the following year. It really keeps us focused on where we want to go. You take a copy and put it on your mirror and that way you're always working toward that goal.



What's your goal at work every day? Stay humble and really enjoy the moment. I make sure to surround myself with the best talent available. My job is to show them where the sidelines are and where the goal post is and just get out of the way.



Did selling suits at Sears enlighten you in any way? It goes back to the humbling thing. Over the winters I would work there, and in the summer I would leave and grow my landscaping business. Once, I left Sears for a year and when I returned they were going to pay me minimum wage because I lost my seniority.

I said, "Forget it," and one of my coworkers called and said, "What are you doing? Get back in here and take this job." Two weeks later I met my wife, Donna. She was a jewelry girl. It's worked out ever since. When you humble yourself, life has a way of providing for you.

What aspect of your business do you pride yourself on most?

We're very clean, we're very organized, we know who our clients are. Our goal is to increase our dollar per customer. That's why we focus on the upper echelon. I cannot focus on selling to a customer who has no potential. Having such a narrow focus probably doesn't bring me as much additional business as I could get—but it brings me the right business.



OFF THE CLOCK

WHAT'S THE FIRST THING YOU DO WHEN YOU GET HOME FROM WORK? I walk my yard with my wife and we connect. I'm a landscaper. I look at the plants and the waterfalls. We look out on a lake. It's just beautiful.

THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE ARE... Simple.

WHAT'S YOUR GREATEST INDULGENCE? This goes back to my wife. We sit in the hot tub and talk and have one-on-one time. That's one of the things we enjoy the most, and I look forward to that. It's been 28 years now.

IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME, WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY? I would have hired a consultant and gotten involved with PLANET and other organizations earlier.



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