

TURNING POOLS INTO PONDS > TREATING EAB
A LOOK AT WOMEN'S BUSINESS ENTERPRISES

Landscape Management

Jerry McKay,
president of
McKay Lighting,
Omaha, Neb.

Finding focus

How three companies
flourish by sticking
to a niche.



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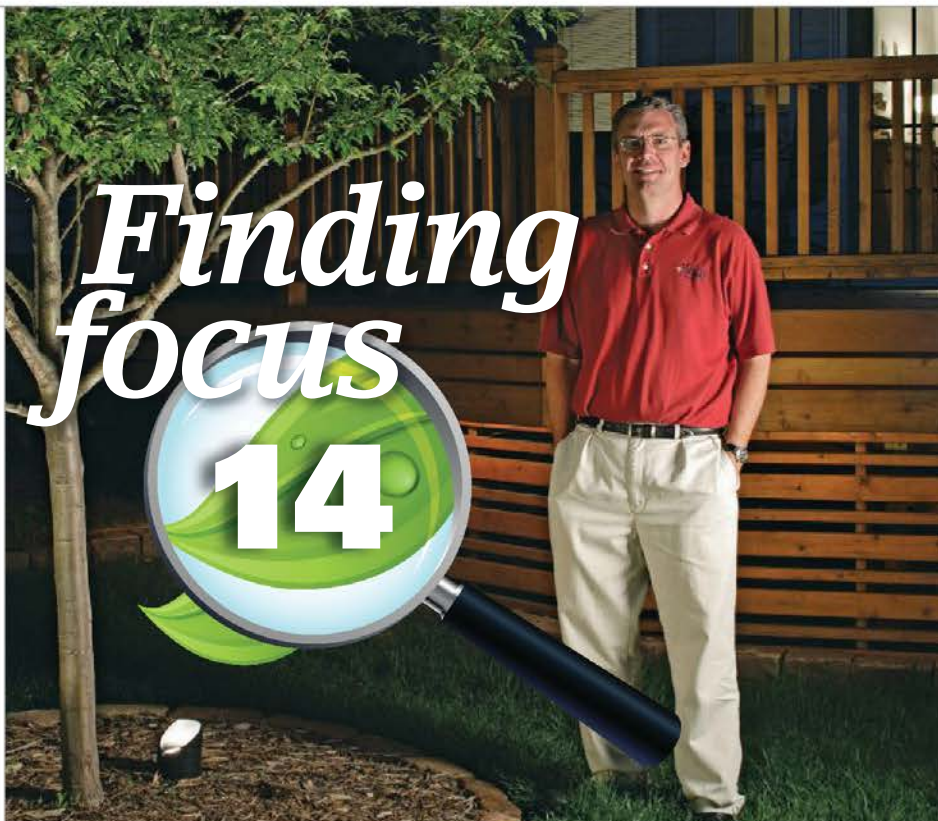
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Photo courtesy of McKay Lighting

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ONLINE NOW

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On the Web

LM website has a new look

Last month we mentioned here that our blog has moved to its new home, LandscapeManagement.net. Now, that home has enhanced its look with a new eye-catching makeover. Our website's new design showcases exclusive content geared toward your business needs—and it's more user friendly and interactive than ever before. Log on now to explore the changes!



SEEN ON TWITTER

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@SuziMcCoyGMG: Always. Grt #PR Lessons from Paula Deen: How What You Say Can Damage Your Brand <http://entm.ag/1cfiy2z> by @JimJosephExp via @entmagazine

@ShaunKanary: It's cool to work for a company like @WeedProOhio that organizes #CommunityService projects to give back

@Bayer4CropsUS: Female farm operators are more likely to own the land that they operate. Interesting stat from @usda_nass <http://bit.ly/15ytkiL>

@ambidextrousinc: RT @LandscapeMgmt Impatiens disease could encourage diversity in landscape plantings <http://sbne.ws/r/dqYa>

BLOG

FROM THE LM BLOG

» LandscapeManagement.net

The blog is abuzz this month with lots of valuable tips from *Landscape Management* contributors. Rich Goldstein talks to Jody Shilan about what it takes to build a million-dollar company, consultant Jeffrey Scott explains how recruiting is like marketing, and we share important HR best practices from consultants Ed Laflamme and Bill Arman.

WEB EXTRA

Visit LandscapeManagement.net »
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» Learn about how researchers say tree loss due to Emerald Ash Borer infestations has negative health effects, including cardiovascular and lower respiratory diseases.



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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

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

In the long run

In late spring I traveled to Naperville, Ill., to see how that city has put in place an aggressive program to save its 16,000 municipal ash trees from Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). (See page 25 for more details on that trip.)

In addition to hearing about (and seeing with my own two eyes) healthy, thriving treated ash trees literally across the street from trees that are dead and tagged for removal, I heard a story that stood out to me about how Green Industry professionals should be getting involved in the fight against EAB.

M.D. Skeet, a certified arborist and district manager for The Care of Trees, told the story of a few ash trees lining the property of his favorite sub shop. Being an unabashed tree lover who's also on the front lines of the effort to save trees from EAB, Skeet pointed out the failing ash trees to the facility manager, who explained her landscaper handles all of her exterior needs. Skeet kindly explained the trees were dying and may be able to be saved through insecticide treatments—or else they eventually will need to be removed due to safety reasons. Again, the manager said the landscaper's the expert and hadn't mentioned a thing.

Now, Skeet knows there is one of two things happening here: The contractor is either oblivious to the fact that he has an EAB problem on his hands or he knows about the ailing trees and doesn't want to alert his customer to the fact that the trees are dying on his watch.

It's a shame, Skeet explains, for a few reasons. These trees are likely going to be removed because they'll be too far gone by the time the landscaper recognizes or addresses the problem. These trees are some of the only greenery providing shade to the property. Also, it's a totally missed opportunity for the landscape company, not to mention a disservice to the customer.

Had the contractor recognized the EAB-infested ash trees, it could have recommended management options (removal or treatment). Depending on the company's capabilities, it may have made an additional sale. At the very least it could have referred the business to a tree care or tree removal firm. The bottom line is the landscaper isn't doing his client justice by either missing or ignoring the problem. The problem is, instead of doing what's ultimately right, too many contractors are short sighted and fear they'll lose an account.

Do you have a network of professionals in related fields you can rely on when you face a situation that's not in your wheelhouse? All three Green Industry executives interviewed for the cover story (page 14) talk about how their hyper-focused businesses thrive thanks to strategic partnerships with like-minded professionals.

Don't be ignorant or negligent like the landscape company in Skeet's story. Find others you can align with and agree to trade leads on a handshake or contractual basis. Whatever works for you, as long as it's best for the customer in the long run.

Landscape Management

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Smart Irrigation Month ramps up

Manufacturers lend support for the annual initiative with month-long promotions. **BY BETH GERACI**

Irrigation companies are ramping up their water conservation messages again this July in honor of Smart Irrigation Month, an annual Irrigation Association (IA) initiative launched in 2005 to tout the benefits of efficient water use during the heart of summer.

The association encourages companies in every sector of the industry, including manufacturers, dealers, distributors and contractors, to educate customers about efficient water use and offer solutions to today's water challenges.

Smart Irrigation Month "provides a platform for the entire industry to promote the importance of smart irrigation products, practices and services and grow demand for them," said Kathleen Markey, marketing director for the IA. "It's important for us to increase public awareness of water use efficiency, especially during the summer but also year-round."

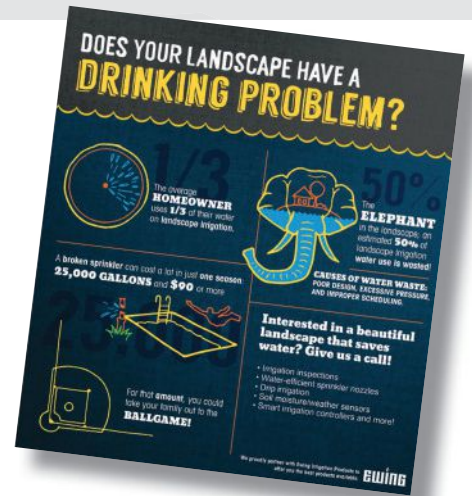
Irrigation equipment suppliers are on board for the initiative again this year, including Ewing Irrigation, which has created sales tools to enable contractors to engage clients in conversations about smart irrigation. The tools include a flyer

showing property owners how to reduce their outdoor water use; an irrigation inspection form; and a proposal form. The customizable forms are free to download on Ewing's website, www.Ewing1.com.

The company also is commemorating the month with an irrigation photo contest and Monday deals on water-saving products.

Hunter Industries is hosting a Smart Irrigation Month promo because "we are strong supporters of the Smart Irrigation Month initiative, and our goal at Hunter is to help raise awareness of smart watering practices," said Troy Leezy, marketing manager for Hunter Industries and a Smart Irrigation Month committee member.

Log on to www.HunterIndustries.com for a collection of educational resources about intelligent water use, or upload a photo showing how you're marketing Smart Irrigation Month for a chance to win a weekly prize of \$250—or a trip to the Irrigation Association show in Austin, Texas (Nov. 4-8).



Ewing Irrigation offers a slew of smart irrigation downloads for contractors.

NHLA swears in 2013-2014 board

The National Hispanic Leadership Alliance (NHLA) has officially named its new board of directors, which the organization said was chosen to represent the Hispanic community's diversity.

Replacing Jesus "Chuy" Medrano as president is Raul Berrios, president of Rulyscapes in Centreville, Va.

A founding member of the NHLA, Berrios has concrete plans for his two-year tenure. "Our members are the backbone of the organization," he said. "So the main goal will be to increase the number of members as much as I can."



Berrios also will focus on improving the access members have to job training, whether it be through on-site support, webinars or group classes. "I've been part of the association for a long time, and I'm especially excited about focusing on workforce development for our members and their organizations," he said.

Rounding out the new board are past president Medrano; president-elect Juan Torres; secretary Pam Berrios; and treasurer Veronica de Hoyos. Joining the board of directors later this year are Arnulfo Lopez of Nature Safe Landcare, Gresham, Ore., and Jose Cantu of Saw House Inc. in Houston.

Rain Bird is getting in on the action, as well, with an initiative called "Project PRS" to build awareness about the water-saving benefits of pressure-regulating sprays and rotors. High or fluctuating water pressure is a common problem, the company states, and one that can waste water (and money) by increasing an irrigation system's flow rate. Log on to www.facebook.com/RainBirdCorp to learn more and keep up with the company's July promotions.

Also showing support for the month-long initiative are state governments. Markey is encouraged by the growing number of them promoting July as Smart Irrigation Month through official proclamations—the number stands at seven today, with cities such as Denver and Oklahoma City participating, as well.

"The fact that we have these state governments supporting smart irrigation highlights its importance," Markey said.

MAILBOX



Taking it slow

I noticed Beth Geraci's article about Cinque Terre. ["Hear Me Out," June]. I spent a few days there on our trip to Italy two weeks ago, so the timing of your article was an interesting coincidence ... Unfortunately, stopping to "smell the roses" is not the American way but I won't soon forget the trip and how nice it was to be in a place where things move just a little bit slower.

John Butts

*Siesta Key Landscape, Inc.
Sarasota, Fla.*



Aspire to inspire

I just read "B the change" [May cover story] on [landscape management.net](http://landscapemanagement.net) ... It's very inspiring!

Lisa Bailey

*Owner, BayLeaf Studio
Maynard, Mass.
via LinkedIn*

Thumbs up

I think you're doing a great job with the magazine.

Rick Girard

*CEO, Girard Environmental Services
Sanford, Fla.*

Share your thoughts by emailing mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net.

Immigration reform passes Senate

But will the House take up the legislation? BY BETH GERACI

The U.S. Senate on June 27 passed bipartisan, comprehensive immigration reform by a vote of 68-32. And if the legislation ever sees the light of day, it will impact the landscaping industry.

The long-debated Senate provisions would create a path to citizenship for the estimated 11 million individuals living illegally in the U.S., add 20,000 border security agents at the U.S.-Mexico border, create a mandatory E-verify system and make minor changes to the H-2B guest-worker visa program, among other things. H-2B changes would make returning H-2B workers exempt from the program's 66,000 annual cap through 2018, require employers to pay incoming and outgoing transportation costs for workers, change the way wages are calculated and require employers to pay a new \$500 processing fee.

But immigration reform is slow to be entertained by House leaders, who've said they will not take up the Senate bill at all. "Getting a bill through the Republican-controlled House will be a challenge," said Gregg Robertson, government relations consultant for the Pennsylvania Nursery & Landscape Association. "No House Republican has taken up [immigration reform] as Sen. Rubio and Sen. John McCain have done."

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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.

Disaster plan dos and don'ts

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is predicting an active hurricane season this year, with more than a dozen big storms and a couple major hurricanes statistically overdue to hit vulnerable regions of the country.

After Superstorm Sandy, the violent tornadoes that recently devastated parts of Oklahoma and the wind-whipped wildfires testing those living in the arid Southwest, reports indicate we're still not out of the woods.

As more and more towns and cities continue to be impacted by severe weather, many of us are feeling that seasonal weather patterns—and their higher than normal, lower than normal temperatures—are upside down. And with an early hurricane season already upon us, we need to batten down the hatches in more ways than one.

While we can't prevent natural disasters from striking, it helps if we have an emergency plan in place so we can help others and ourselves get back to business as quickly as possible.

Here are some Dos and Don'ts for protecting your business and your customers' interests in the event of a natural catastrophe:

DO:

- ▶ Be prepared. Make emergency preparedness an integral part of your strategic operating plan.
- ▶ Create a vulnerability map. Determine the most likely threats to your business and your customer's business, and identify the consequences and what ifs.
- ▶ Create an up-to-date list of priorities and identify ways to address risks to your business and your customer's business. If you're a national company or have multiple branches, mobilize nearby branches to move into the affected areas to support the local branch.
- ▶ Reach out to neighboring contractors for help. You could take this to a new level by reaching out to your customers in advance (where you have advanced warning) and let them know you are setting up this emergency response on their behalf.
- ▶ Reach out to your customers a season early

and team with them to orchestrate partner response teams that combine resources.

- ▶ Consider a fee-based service that would allow you to stage equipment and other resources at their sites to facilitate a more immediate response.

- ▶ Document with pictures, videos, etc., and note the efforts you are making. This will come in handy for insurance, risk management or other property-related clean-up issues.

- ▶ Get your billing done promptly before customers forget how bad things were.

- ▶ Communicate before, during and after the event. Let your customers and employees know what your plans are and what to expect.

- ▶ Identify alternative suppliers in case a major disaster affects your vendors. Get your contract terms worked out up front so you are not left scrambling.

- ▶ Make sure your contact list and address book is up to date in case you or your customers are working from temporary offices.

- ▶ Protect your data. Back up your systems and make sure you can get access to critical information. This will help both your business and your customer's business in case servers, systems and technology infrastructure go down.

- ▶ Create a personnel policy plan. Invest in cross training so your staff can take over critical functions if employees can't get to work or are otherwise affected.

- ▶ Review your insurance and risk management policies and ensure they are up to date.

- ▶ Create a crisis management "chain of command" team responsible for protocols and procedures in the event of an emergency.

DON'T:

- ▶ Ever price gouge, exploit tragedy or take advantage of the situation.
- ▶ Reach out to new customers without first taking care of existing customers.
- ▶ Put your employees in harm's way.
- ▶ Bite off more than you can chew.

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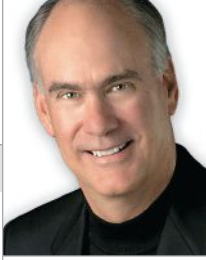
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THE BENCHMARK

FRANK ROSS

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

Focus on the right stuff

In the last several months in this space, Jeff Harkness, Kevin Kehoe and I have written about sales performance, margin generation (a sign of pricing and productivity) and, of course, my favorite, net profit.

Why net profit, you ask? Well, in my mind there are two reasons we are in business: profit and fun.

Profit is our scorecard and the fuel for our lifeblood—cash flow. And, fun...that's the fire in the belly, the passion that keeps us doing what we do 24/7. If we don't enjoy it, we shouldn't be doing it!

And my point is? We're at the mid-year mark for most of us outdoor contractors. When was the last time you checked how you were progressing toward your annual profit goal?

You do have an annual profit goal, don't you?

Have you generated your mid-year financial statements? Are they generated by profit center (each type of work you perform)? Have you compared the mid-year performance to your budget? You do have an annual budget, spread by month, don't you?

So, how do you measure up?

If you don't know, that means you do not have a scorecard for the most important financial standard in any of our businesses—net profit.

If you don't trust what you see, that means that you don't have an effective information system. Either way you're flying blind and what net profits you have will only materialize because you're lucky.

I play golf, so I know all about lucky. I'd much rather be lucky than good—wins every time. But, in business, luck is what we make for ourselves. In business, we have to be good to succeed.

When we discussed profit performance for 80 odd of the industry's best and brightest companies, we saw that in our sampling, average levels of profitability on revenues of between \$5 million and \$45 million ranged between 8 percent and 12 percent. Not bad, though I'm certain each one of those companies would like to improve upon that performance.

So, how did you stack up to that "standard?" Do you see any room for improvement? Thought so.

Committing to net profit

Here's a test for you. Take a look at the average amount of profit percentage you put on each job you bid last year. At the end of the year, how much profit did you make? Is your year-end net profit percentage the same as what you put on jobs, or is there a disconnect?

For many of us there is a disconnect. Why? Because profit simply isn't something we track. It's not a focus.

Statistician and consultant W. Edwards Deming said it best: "If we do not track it, we cannot control it."

Truer words have never been spoken.

So, here's where we start. I want:

1. A commitment from you that net profit is the most important financial standard you have in your company. It's not sales, it isn't margin—it's the bottom line: net profit.
2. You to realign your internal information systems to focus on how you're performing on the bottom line by profit center.
3. You to commit to generating an annual budget by profit center that's spread by month so you can track how you're performing each month.
4. Your budget to be flexible enough so you can reforecast the coming months at will.
5. You to have a comprehensive estimating system that defines the three primary financial elements of any proposal: direct costs, overhead and profit.
6. You to have a job-tracking system that tells you where you're making profits and where you aren't and indicate how you can fix the problem areas.
7. You to give your principle managers specific and measurable financial goals.
8. You to build an internal system of information and reporting that enables you to report back to your managers how they're doing, hold them accountable and coach them on how to reach their goals.

So, you see, maximizing profits isn't hard, but it's not easy. If you commit, if you focus on profit, if you build your systems, if you involve your people, profits will come.

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IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This annual low-growing weed is common in thin turf with low nitrogen levels.
- ▶ It contains three oblong, hairless leaflets with miniscule teeth along the edges. The center leaflet is on its own petiole.
- ▶ Its inflorescence is a cluster of yellow flowers, similar to small hop clover (*Trifolium dubium*).
- ▶ Burclover reproduces by seeds from "burred" seedpods, as well as spreading prostrate stolons, which allow the weed to tolerate close mowing.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Mechanical removal is not recommended, as stolons may break and sprout, increasing the infestation.
- ▶ Clean up any existing burclover with a postemergent application of a product containing clopyralid or triclopyr. Apply a preemergent herbicide containing isoxaben in early fall or any time prior to germination, or immediately after cultivation.
- ▶ Also, consider adjusting your fertility program to include more nitrogen and less phosphorus.

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FALSE DANDELION

Hypochoeris radicata

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ Also known as hairy cat's ear, this perennial weed closely resembles common dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*).
- ▶ Leaves are arranged in a basal rosette and are densely hairy with toothed or irregularly lobed margins. This is in contrast to common dandelion, which has highly divided, hairless leaves.
- ▶ Leafless flower stalks are present, with two to seven yellow ray flowers on each stalk. Leaves and

flower stalks emit a milky sap when broken.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ As with any turfgrass weed, proper cultural maintenance of the lawn will greatly reduce false dandelion's prevalence and presence. Properly mow, fertilize and water the lawn to encourage healthy turf.
- ▶ When false dandelion is actively growing, apply a postemergent systemic herbicide such as florasulam that will move from the treated foliage throughout the plant and into the extensive root system.

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Finding focus

How three companies flourish by sticking to a niche.

BY **MARISA PALMIERI**

Many businesses adopt the “one-stop shop” approach, either with strategic intent to offer convenience and sell more products and services to existing customers or simply because they have trouble saying no.

In any case, some companies can offer the Jack-of-all-trades approach and prosper. (Think: Walmart, among others). But some—like Erbert Lawns, McKay Lighting and Oasis Turf & Tree—prefer to be a master of *one*.



1

Erbert Lawns

Littleton, Colo.

Focus > Residential maintenance

When John Erbert, owner of Littleton, Colo.-based Erbert Lawns, was just out of college he took a job helping a friend paint a Discount Tire showroom. It was a multi-day job, and over the course of working there Erbert observed customers coming in and asking for non-tire services. Did they do struts? No. Alignments? Nope. Every time, the staff explained they just did tires and wheels.

Erbert asked the Discount Tire manager why the company would turn away interested customers. Erbert himself had run a landscape business since age 12 and would do anything a client asked—mowing, tree trimming, etc., for residential or commercial customers.

The manager’s answer: “Our owner wants to be the best at one thing.”

Despite the fact that this philosophy went against everything Erbert learned in school—“you’re supposed to get the customer and then sell them other stuff”—it struck a chord with him. He knew he was spreading his company too thin.

“I went home that day and in my mind I was convinced that we were going to be the residential mowing guys,” he says. “Slowly, we dropped our other services and that’s when we became profitable.”

That was in the mid-1990s, and it took about three years for Erbert to transition to a residential mowing-focused business.

“At first it was really hard to say no,” he says. “Now it’s much easier because we have confidence and we believe in what we do.”

Today, Erbert Lawns is a nearly \$3 million operation that employs 45 people. Nine-tenths of its revenue comes from residential mowing. The other 10 percent comes from things it doesn’t market, such as fertilization or aeration, which it does for a handful of customers.

“Most people in the industry look at residential mowing as where they started out and as unprofitable,” Erbert says. “But there’s a way to make it work.”

And what’s that? For Erbert, it’s only doing small lawns (no more than about

14,000 square feet), using walk-behind mowers and mandating customers pay by credit card.

Many of these decisions are driven by simplicity, which Erbert thrives on.

“The simpler it is, the more attractive it is to me,” he says. “Every decision we make is based on two things: Does it service the customer and does it serve the team?”



Above: Soon after founding his business at age 12, John Erbert’s father helped him build a bicycle with a trailer so he could increase his service area. At right: An Erbert Lawns truck parked in front of one of its signature small lawns; Erbert Lawns’ core value card.



“When you focus, in turn, you reap the other benefits of specialization—which is a better product for the consumer.”

—JOHN ERBERT, ERBERT LAWNES

The small lawn focus came about because these properties proliferate in the type of neighborhoods Erbert likes to hone in on: those with track homes.

The use of walk-behind mowers came from a labor need. Erbert faces turnover like many seasonal businesses do. “We need a way to train people fast,” Erbert says. “Walk-behinds are simple and do a great job.”

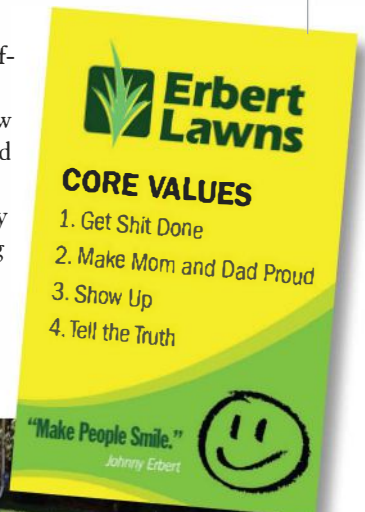
As for the credit card mandate, it’s an idea borrowed from a competitor that set up shop across the street about a decade ago and required customers to pay with plastic. Erbert liked the idea, realizing the burden it would ease on accounts receivable. When he first tried to put it in place, he still made exceptions for customers who preferred to pay by check.

“Then we found out we’d start dropping the ball with collections and some would fall

through the cracks,” he says. “Here we were making exceptions and we were paying the price, so we had to let the customer go or demand they use credit card.”

Again, that requires telling customers “no,” which can be a difficult thing to do, Erbert says.

“Customers are trying to throw money at you and you’re small and trying to grow,” he says. “It takes so much direction and focus to say no, that most people aren’t willing to. When you do focus, in turn, you reap the other benefits of specialization—which is a better product for the consumer.”



2

McKay Lighting

Omaha, Neb.

Focus > Landscape lighting

In 1987 Jerry McKay moved back to Omaha, Neb., after graduating from college with a political science degree and working in Seattle for a few years. He'd worked in the landscape industry in high school and college, and he soon started McKay Lawn Service, which did mowing, fertilization and snow removal for primarily residential customers.

Five years into the business, he was having lunch with a friend who was a landscape distributor's sales representative. McKay mentioned he felt the need to "sell something else."

His friend told him that his company, LESCO, was picking up the Nightscaping line of landscape lighting fixtures, which might be an interesting add-on because it didn't require much overhead or equipment.

McKay started his research. He first attended a Nightscaping seminar at a lighting showroom in Kansas City. He recalls the instructor saying, "Most people in this room will do one or two jobs a year. Rarely do I see anyone focus on this and make it a business."

"I thought I would be the one to be different," McKay says. Next, he was ready

"I knew I could let the lawn business grow, but I didn't want to manage two businesses. I just wanted to focus."

—JERRY MCKAY, MCKAY LIGHTING

to attend the manufacturer's Nightscaping University held in California, but was still uncertain himself. He recalls his wife saying, "What are you doing?"

"I remember burning a Northwest frequent-flyer ticket on it, thinking, 'If this isn't my deal, I'm no worse for the wear,'" he says. "At the time, not a lot of people were doing what I was going to do. People thought of landscape lighting as kit lighting. These were aluminum and powder-coated fixtures. I thought I could pull it off."

It turns out the course was taught by Nightscaping founder Bill Locklin, who McKay calls a "pioneer" of landscape lighting.

"So there was a story behind it," he says. "I'm the type of guy who needs the story behind it."

So, after getting the story and beginning to learn the craft, McKay returned to Nebraska, started McKay Lighting and designed and installed low-voltage landscape lighting for his



McKay Lighting projects often highlight multiple features, including plants, hardscape and water elements. The company has done work for some clients at multiple residences in several states.



home, his parents' home and his best friend's parents' home.

"The first fall we did eight jobs and I knew then I had something," he says. He kept the two companies separate from the get-go, though both bore the McKay name and they shared space and overhead.

"My hope was sooner than later I'd sell the lawn service," McKay says. "I'd done it in high school and college and it had run its course. It was three years into lighting that I knew it had hope. I knew I could let the lawn business grow, but I didn't want to manage two businesses. I just wanted to focus."

In 1998, McKay sold the lawn business. Initially, he had concerns about dropping the part of his business with recurring revenue, but before long he got confirmation that he made the right decision.

"As soon as I sold it I didn't know how I could have been running both," he says. "It was like releasing a big weight. I thought, 'Now I can thoroughly focus.'"

Focus has no doubt been a benefit for McKay, which today does \$1 million to \$2 million in annual revenue.

"We say it all the time [about lighting], 'It's all we do,'" he says. "We have strategic partners in other like industries—landscape, hardscape and things like that. From a strategic point of view with those relationships, they know we'll never compete with them."

Never? McKay says he hasn't been tempted to branch out into other services again precisely because of those relationships.

"We'd never even mulch for someone because it would look like we're getting into landscaping," he says. "It would hurt our partner relationships and detract from our service."

Staying specialized also has allowed McKay to attract top talent. His last two management hires have been employees who have sought out the company because lighting is all the company does. One is a horticulturist who was previously working at a landscape company. Another was doing some lighting at a landscape company and wanted to do it 100 percent of the time.

continued on page 18

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"We have 12 people who are really dedicated to lighting and with that passion, we don't stray," McKay says. "It's like a good marriage."

Although some members of the landscape industry say lighting is a tough service line to be in, especially through downturns, because it's a "nice to have," McKay says his business has flourished partly because of good timing.

"We started toward the beginning of lighting evolving," he says. "Because it was new and we were introducing it to our market, it never really slowed down. When it did, we were lucky enough we were in the middle of some really large jobs."

Particularly, McKay endured years 2000 and 2008 with "gigantic" high-end residential projects.

"In 2000, that one was the largest one we'd done at the time," McKay says. "It had 64 1,000-watt transformers and over a thousand lights on the property." He estimates it took a year to complete, with starts and stops due to construction. The 2008 project rivaled that one, and segued into multiple out-of-state jobs for another client.

"So we never really felt like there was a downturn for us, which was lucky," he says. "Sometimes timing is really important."



Oasis Turf & Tree

Loveland, Ohio

Focus > Lawn care

In 2004 Rob Reindl felt like his Loveland, Ohio-based business was on a treadmill. He'd grown his mostly landscape maintenance business from zero to \$700,000 in annual revenue in eight years with both residential and commercial clients, but that year the business was stagnant.

His frustrations primarily came from the commercial side.

"I'm anal retentive," he says. "I want to be the very best, but commercial properties aren't into being the best; they're primarily budget focused. That's more important than who's the best."

It's easy to grow quickly in commercial maintenance, but, as Reindl found out, "You realize the loyalty's not there."

Something needed to change, and he recognized commercial maintenance clients weren't going to pay for the detail his company offered. When he analyzed what type of client would pay for his meticulousness, Reindl determined residential lawn care customers would be the best fit. Plus, he says, there's less competition because the need to have a pesticide applicator's licenses scares some people away.

Reindl's bet paid off. Oasis Turf & Tree is on track to gross about \$2.8 million in 2013.

Despite the competition from the national players in the lawn care space, Reindl says he believed there was a need for a company offering superior quality.

"I had residential customers who wanted perfection and were willing to pay for it," he says.

Could Oasis have kept the residential maintenance part of his business? Yes, but Reindl determined that being on a customer's property every week providing mowing services opened up his fertilization business to room for error. For example, he didn't want to run the risk of a customer canceling lawn care because the mowing crew left a few blades of grass on the back patio.

In 2005, the year Oasis Turf & Tree first focused on residential lawn care, the business shrank from \$700,000 down to \$350,000.

"My wife probably wanted to kill me," Reindl says. "It was a scary time for me to make that decision, but ultimately it was the right decision."

Despite the challenges associated with retooling his business, Reindl says he wouldn't take back the time running a landscape maintenance business.

"If I hadn't made those mistakes, I'd be asking some of those questions now," he says. "I now know I don't want to do

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those things," he says of mowing and snow removal services.

Plus, the efficiency lessons he learned on the maintenance side have helped him on the lawn care side.

"One of the things I learned running a maintenance business is in order to make a buck you have to be super efficient," he says. "We created a lot of efficiencies, and I figured out how to duplicate them on the lawn care side."

For example, Reindl's technicians are armed with laptop computers with software that gives them turn-by-turn directions to every stop on their routes. Their custom Freightliner Sprinter vans feature a foldout ramp to allow a ride-on sprayer/spreader to roll out the back.

Oasis also has been boosted by a few smart moves. One of those was hiring Paul Wagner, a lawn care industry veteran and current president of Fit Turf in Denver, as a consultant. Another is networking



"If there were any services we might add, it would be in the area of pest control, but I feel pretty confident our services best suit our niche."

—ROB REINDL, OASIS TURF & TREE

with peers and even striking an exclusive, handshake customer referral deal with a like-minded residential design/build/maintenance contractor.

Challenges on the lawn care side are more sales- and customer service-related than production-related, Reindl says, because of the sheer number of customers a successful lawn care business needs.

"Ultimately, if you're going to grow a lawn care business, you have to be able to build a marketing machine and sales machine," he says. "Otherwise you're not going to grow. If you look at a TruGreen or Scotts, they use phone sales and massive amounts of direct mail because you need so many customers to create the revenue."

So, would he diversify again? "No," Reindl says, at least not into the maintenance space. "If there were any services we might add, it would be in the area of pest control, but I feel pretty confident our services best suit our niche." **LM**

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I WANT MY WBE



Women-owned businesses benefit from third-party certifications.

BY **DIANNA
BORSI O'BRIEN**

Katharina Hoffman, president of Hoffman Commercial Landscaping, says getting a Women Business Enterprise (WBE) certificate isn't easy. It's a lot of paperwork. It takes a lot of time. And it isn't, she says, a free ticket to making money.

But she'll also tell you it saved her Caledonia, Wis.-based business. Hoffman credits her WBE certificate for the growth of her landscape design/build and maintenance firm, which she co-owns with her husband, from two employees to seven—and for the firm's trajectory toward topping \$1 million in revenue this year.

So what's a WBE certificate? It's validation given by a range of organizations, including local, county, state and federal governmental agencies and third-party groups, that proclaims a firm is at least 51-percent

woman-owned, woman-controlled and woman-managed.

Why would you want your firm to have this seal of approval? It opens the door to billions of dollars' worth of contracts with thousands of governmental agencies and large corporations.

As Rachel Owens, a principal at California-based consulting firm Succession Strategies puts it, "It's one more arrow in your quiver when you're talking to other entities you want to do business with." Owens presented a webinar on the who, what, why and how of WBE certification earlier this year for the National Association of Professional Women in Landscape.

Opportunity knocks

For Hoffman, it started in 2008, when she saw her company's commercial landscaping work dry up due to the economic downturn. Then when the condominium developer she and her husband were working with declared bankruptcy and left them unpaid for \$250,000 worth of completed work, she knew something had to change. And she noticed landscaping funded by state and government agencies was still under way.

That's when she decided to restructure her firm, get her WBE certificate and target city, county and state projects. Hoffman had first learned about WBE opportunities after subcontracting for a company that had Minority Business Enterprise status.

"Once I realized the opportunities out there with the minority status, I investigated on the Internet and found out about WBE and Disadvantage Business Enterprise certifications," she says.

Today, Hoffman Commercial Landscaping specializes in restoration and landscaping services for federal and state facilities, including park restoration and maintenance services; highway work, including seeding, planting and erosion control; wetlands prairie restoration; green roof projects and hydroseeding/hydromulching at municipal airports, all thanks to the WBE certificate.

"It's not waterfalls and beautiful gardens, but it's a great opportunity," says Hoffman.

Hers isn't the only Green Industry firm touting the benefits of a WBE designation.

Crystal Arlington, president and CEO of Affiliated Grounds Maintenance Group Inc. (AGMG), of Lake City, Pa., says her WBE certificate has helped her double her business every year except one during the past five years and made it easier for her to work throughout the nation. Today, she does business in 39 states, working with 7,000 contractors to offer



Katharina Hoffman

landscape management, lot sweeping, power washing, snow removal and ice management—and she's heading toward a seven-figure revenue tally this year.

That's not surprising, as experts say the targets for WBE firms are large and plentiful. Governmental agencies—and many corporations as well—have set-asides or supplier diversity programs that call for a certain percentage of all contracts to be given to women-owned businesses. The federal government, for example, purchases \$575 billion in goods and services, and a percentage of that business must go to a women-owned business, Owens says.

The WBE certificate shows a firm is eligible for those contracts. In some ways, a WBE is simply a marketing



Crystal Arlington

tool—it provides opportunity, but it doesn't guarantee profitability, longevity, expertise or capability, notes Owens. There's no size requirement—small firms, large firms and sole proprietorships can get a WBE certificate.

Two tracks

There are two ways to go about getting a WBE. If you're planning to target governmental agencies, one approach is to get a WBE certificate through the specific agency you plan to approach. That's what Hoffman did. She's certified with the state of Wisconsin, which allows her to bid on contracts for municipalities, counties and highway work.

Another way is to get a WBE through a third-party certifier. There is no single WBE certificate accepted across the

nation by all corporations or agencies; instead, there are two major third-party certifiers whose certificates are recognized by many corporations as well as many governmental organizations.

**THERE'S NO SIZE REQUIREMENT—
SMALL FIRMS, LARGE FIRMS AND SOLE PROPRIETORSHIPS CAN GET A WBE CERTIFICATE.**

The two third-party certifiers are the National Women Business Owners Corp. (NWBOC) and the Women Business Enterprise National Council. Both organizations are also third-party certifiers for the Small Business Administration's Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) program.

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Both organizations provide various support services to those seeking WBE certification and conduct site visits. There are Green Industry firms certified by both organizations.

Arlington went with a NWBOC WBE certificate, citing the ease of working with the organization, after learning about it at a women's business conference. She also notes the national WBE eased her paperwork burden. Instead of getting a WBE for each of the 39 states she



works in, the NWBOC qualifies her, and she's only had one potential client request additional certification.

WBE certification has allowed Hoffman Commercial Landscaping to grow its federal and state contracting work.

WBE certification is not for everyone. If you won't or can't do the paperwork, or your future goals don't include doing business with sizeable firms or governmental agencies, a WBE might not be for you. In addition to the paperwork, getting a WBE certificate includes a site visit during which you must prove your firm is indeed woman-owned, -controlled and -managed.

Getting your WBE isn't a pot of gold. "We still have to provide exceptional work, build relationships and do marketing. It all takes time," says Hoffman.

Getting started

Owens advises getting started by looking at what kind of organizations you want to target—corporations or

Finding WBE opportunities

Here are a few sites to start with to locate organizations that want to do business with WBE-certified companies.

For corporate work, look for Diversity Outreach Programs, or check with NWBOC or WBENC for buyers seeking WBEs.

For city, county and state agencies, check for offices such as Minority Business Development Offices or an Office of Small Disadvantaged Business Utilization. For federal government work, start here:

- » System for Award Management (sam.gov)
- » Federal Procurement Data Service (fpds.gov)
- » U.S. General Services Administration (gsa.gov)
- » Small Business Administration (sba.gov)



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government agencies. If you want to target government contracts, consider what agency you want to approach. That will help you decide what kind of WBE certification to pursue. You'll also need to budget for WBE application fees, which can range from \$350 to \$1,000, depending on a firm's revenue, and yearly renewal fees.

"All industries are in demand," says Owens, "and there is a reason to be certified. Spend the time, do your homework and get familiar with what the government is buying."

Getting the certificate, Owens notes, is only the first step, whether you're going for corporate or government business. The next step is market, market, market. Once you have your WBE certificate, she suggests sending out news releases, adding it to your marketing materials, registering with databases and

checking out opportunities via governmental portals.

"Sing it from the rooftop," advises Owens.

Both NWBOC and NBENC have lists of firms that are looking for vendors with WBE status. Doing business with government agencies also means looking at their requests for proposals (RFPs).

"I'm out there looking for jobs, talking to project managers. I'm not waiting," says Hoffman. Today, her firm bids on—and wins—contracts from state government; county and highway projects, including municipal green roof projects; sewer projects; and park maintenance, such as trail restoration.

"We're doing a lot of park work in Milwaukee," says Hoffman, "It's our little niche." **LM**

O'Brien is a freelance writer based in Columbia, Mo.

Proof positive

To get a WBE certificate, you'll have to prove these things via documentation and an on-site visit:



51 percent woman ownership. In the case of a sole proprietorship, you'll have to show you were the source of at least 51 percent of the starting capital.



51 percent woman controlled. For example, you must be on the bank signature card for your firm and if your corporation has a board of directors, you'll have to prove you're in control of the board as well.



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Dave Shetlar, Ph.D.

The Ohio State University

Shetlar is a Professor of Urban Landscape Entomology at The Ohio State University where he performs outreach on turf and ornamental entomology, teaches general entomology and concentrates

on turfgrass entomology research. He was a research scientist with ChemLawn Services from 1984 to 1990 and he joined Ohio State in 1990. He has coauthored several books on turfgrass insects and has a long list of research and outreach publications.

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Andy Kurth

*President of
Weed Man of Madison*

Kurth is president of Weed Man of Madison, Wis.; Milwaukee, Fox Valley, Wis., and Rockford, Ill. He's a graduate of the University of Wisconsin with a

degree in Soil Science with emphasis in Turf Management and Agribusiness. In 2012, Kurth was voted one of the Top 40 Under 40 from *InBusiness* magazine, he's president of Wisconsin lawn care association LAWN and is a past LAWN Person of the Year.

MODERATOR:

Marisa Palmieri, Editor of *Landscape Management*

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MARKET WATCH

LAWN/TREE CARE

A good option

In Naperville, Ill., a public-private partnership demonstrates removal isn't the only option for EAB-infected trees. *By* MARISA PALMIERI

Municipality maintenance budgets typically have two line items for trees: prune and remove. Cities often don't have room in the budget to treat trees with control products, no matter how dire the need, but a public-private partnership in Naperville, Ill., over the last few years proved it can be done and it can save thousands of ash trees.

Naperville, like much of Illinois—and much of the Northeast U.S.—has an Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) problem. This tiny, green insect is lethal to ash trees if it goes undetected and untreated, and Naperville has about 16,000 ash trees on municipal property alone. The pest, which was first identified in the U.S. in Michigan in 2002, is predicted to

cause \$10 billion to \$20 billion in losses to urban forests over the next decade.

Last year, Naperville City Council approved a plan to treat all viable municipal trees with the insecticides dinotefuran, emamectin or imidacloprid. It was no easy decision, but motivated residents, an educated city council and private partnerships made saving trees a better option than removing them.

“One common thing with all elected officials is we don't like to spend money—especially with unknown outcomes,” says Naperville City Manager Doug Kreiger. “Our city council went to the trouble of learning and understanding the full treatment process and balanced that with the risk of no treatment or across-the-board tree removals.

They determined we needed to do what we could to save our urban forest.”

Ultimately, Naperville will spend about \$2.3 million to treat its municipal ash trees, says Dick Dubulinski, director of public works. Tree removal would have cost \$6 million. The Care of Trees manages soil applications for 14,000 of the city's trees and

another company handles trunk injections for about 2,000 trees.

Having a record of successful treatments was an important piece of the puzzle in Naperville. That came in the form of the city being a part of Valent Professional Products' Legacy Tree Project (LTP) since 2010. The program provides free insecticide treatments for five years for 150 to 200 municipal ash trees. The goal of the Legacy Tree Project is to build awareness about treatment as an option.

The healthy state of the LTP-treated ash trees over a two-year period helped Naperville officials understand that treatment was an effective option for the rest of the muni trees.

For cities that forgo treatment, their dead ash situations may reach an “exponential phase” in which it's too late for treatment and reactive tree removal is unsustainable, says Joe Chamberlin a field development manager for Valent. There won't be a large enough budget to remove dead trees and there are not enough tree contractors to remove them, which has safety implications because dead trees could fall, damaging property or injuring citizens.

That may be the fate for the city of Chicago and many other cities, too.

“I've heard it said that we're going to be an island with the only ash trees around,” says Naperville City Arborist Jack Mitz. “And I think it's true. If your intention is to save trees, you can't wait and debate because it will be too late.”

PG 25

LAWN/TREE CARE Emerald Ash Borer treatment options

PG 26

IRRIGATION What's better: design software or hand drawing?

PG 28

MAINTENANCE Paying workers per job vs. per hour

PG 30

DESIGN/BUILD 3-D imaging technology helps communication

» WEB EXTRA

Visit the Web Extras section of LandscapeManagement.net to read about a study that correlates tree loss due to EAB with negative health effects.



A dead ash tree on private property in Naperville, Ill., is flagged for removal. The city is treating its 16,000 municipal ash trees with insecticides.

IRRIGATION

Design debate

Does software save time or muddy the irrigation design process?

By JONATHAN KATZ

Designing an irrigation system can be a time-consuming process that becomes increasingly complicated when errors occur. Many irrigation contractors use design software to hasten the process and improve accuracy. Experiences using computerized design often vary. Some users report major efficiency increases, while other designers prefer the intimate knowledge they gain from manual designs.

Jason Anderson's first experience with irrigation design software occurred in 2005, a year before he joined the staff at Design Two Four Two Six in Bellevue, Wash. A coworker at his former company had introduced him to a system by Land F/X. Anderson was so impressed by the system's ability to automate designs that a year later he recommended it to his new boss at Design Two Four Two Six.

The design software costs about \$3,000 for a single license. The software works within existing AutoCAD systems. Companies that don't already have AutoCAD can purchase a basic AutoCAD version from Land F/X for another \$1,000. Land F/X and similar systems enhance the capabilities of AutoCAD by performing automated calculations and allowing more flexibility to make adjustments.

The system has cut the time Anderson spends on designs by at least one-third, freeing him to take on additional projects. Previously, Anderson drew the plans by hand. He used Excel spreadsheets to tally the number of heads needed for a particular plan.

With Land F/X, Anderson can select a standard set of heads for a particular design and then click a tool in the program that automatically connects the lateral lines, the main line and the valve.

"I'm able to link them all together and tell the program how much water is coming through the water source," he says. "The program has been set up so it can take these calculations and essentially tell you whether or not the irrigation system is going to work. It really automates everything."

Anderson also can input elevations and access manufacturers' product information through the system.

The automated design process reduces the likelihood of mistakes, he says.

If Anderson misses a critical design component, the computer program automatically highlights the overlooked area, saving the company from potential change orders or stress on the irrigation system caused by poor installations.

TESTING THE WATERS

Landscape architect Marina Wrench began using a four-week trial version of Land F/X in January to see if she could eliminate human error from the design process and improve efficiency. Wrench, who works for Cameron McCarthy Landscape Architecture and Planning in Eugene, Ore., says her firm currently draws head layouts and zoning on trace paper before drafting the plan in AutoCAD. The hand drawing allows the designers to make adjustments that aren't possible in AutoCAD. Land F/X provides similar flexibility while automating the process.

Wrench estimates the system can cut design times by at least 30 percent.

"The time I saved scaling blocks, calculating GPM, PSI and pipe sizes was tremendous, in my eyes," she says.

While the system shows promise, there were some compatibility and technical

issues, Wrench says. Half of Cameron McCarthy's landscape architects use AutoCAD LT, which is not compatible with Land F/X. In addition, the learning curve was steeper than AutoCAD because of the expanded range of tools available. Wrench also encountered a technical glitch when adding pipe hoops that caused all the pipe sections to disappear.

"Technical support did not know why and how this happened," she explains. "But with every piece of technology, you get a few hiccups nobody can explain."

So far, Wrench hasn't convinced her company to purchase the Land F/X system, but she says she for one prefers computer-created drawings.

HANDS-ON KNOWLEDGE

Hand drawings may be more time consuming, but they can be invaluable to contractors who do both design and installation.

In 2004, Jim DeJarnatt left the telecommunications business to join a landscaping firm. Last year DeJarnatt decided to form his own irrigation business, a three-man operation called Aqua Jim in St. Louis.

DeJarnatt typically can produce a drawing in four to eight hours. He has dabbled with AutoCAD in the past but says the drawings offer him insight into the job that automated systems cannot.

"I like the drawing aspect of the work," he says. "It gives me a good feel for the job, especially if I'm going to be doing the installation. It gets me immersed in the job."

Katz is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.



Professionals say there are pros and cons to both hand drawing designs and automated irrigation design software.



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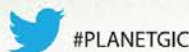
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MAINTENANCE

Paying by piecework

Does compensating employees by the job pay off? *By DAVE TUCKER*

When it comes to paying maintenance crewmen and foremen, have you considered the piecework system—paying your employees by the job instead of by the hour? With piecework you pay your employees for getting the job done; it doesn't matter how long it takes them.

PROS OF PIECEWORK

The one big pro is obvious: The employee begins to think like an owner.

Under a piecework system, employees are less often found milling around the shop. They think twice before coming back for a broken bracket on a trimmer. Time is money. If a foreman does have to come back, he'll make smart decisions, like leaving the other workers on the job. You'll also find him amazingly anxious to vanish from your presence to get back on the job. Routing will improve, too, as 7/11 stops suddenly will seem much less necessary and become less frequent.

Your foreman now correlates maximizing his paycheck to maximizing your product or service. Upon arrival at the job site, he's no longer inclined to wait for the song on the radio to end or finish the conversation regarding the latest subtleties of

last night's game scores. He wants to start cutting as soon as he parks the truck.

In addition, instead of three crew members waiting around for the last crew member to finish up, they are all finishing up at the same time.

Wasted minutes add up quickly. If one crew does 20 jobs in a day and wastes five minutes on each job, it's 100 wasted minutes per crew member. For a two-man crew (200 minutes) that's three hours and 20 minutes per day. Can you afford it?

RAISING PAY

What if you could compete with the fast-food joints by attracting intelligent, motivated and hardworking employees who'd rather work in the great outdoors? Within the piecework system, you may be able to offer a hardworking individual the possibility of \$20 per hour.

Plus, by using this system, owners spend less time managing employee problems and more time developing their businesses. In aligning employees' goals with your own, workers can become the team you've worked so hard to produce.

Ultimately, with a piecework system

employees now only make money when the company does. When the grass is long and wet, they make less money, just as the owner does. When the dry season comes and some employees make \$20 per hour, remember that the same employees are providing \$150 per hour in billables. Wouldn't you like to be paying \$20 per hour to your best employees?

Because the piecework system requires employees who are concerned about quality, not simply in making more money, this system needs the right kind of people. With piecework, employees need to be smart enough to realize that their paycheck depends upon satisfied customers.

IMPLEMENTING PIECEWORK

Any time a change is implemented by an employer, employees immediately assume it's to make the owner's pocket fatter and theirs thinner. To address this concern, consider introducing the piecework system gradually. At first, you may want to institute a substantial production-based bonus system (where approximately 10 percent to 20 percent of employees' pay would be a result of production bonuses). Then, begin by paying \$1 per man-hour produced in a week, after 50 hours has been produced. Employees will see the immediate benefits of the system.

Ask yourself why you can be so much more productive in the field than your workers. Are you not already on the

piecework system? Put your foremen and crew members on the same system and you'll find that your employees will not only work better, they'll work smarter.

PIECEWORK EXAMPLE

Each job is rated as X number of man-hours. A \$45 job is approximately a 1.0 or 1.2 man-hour job, either \$45 per hour or \$37.50 per hour. If your labor costs average 40 percent, you can pay your workers 35 percent of the billing price, or \$13.50. This strategy gives your otherwise \$8-per-hour employee the opportunity to make \$13.50 per job, no matter how long it takes him.



Tucker is president of CLIP Software and author of "Lawn Maintenance and the Beautiful Business," from where this article is adapted. Reach him via thebeautifulbusiness.com.



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DESIGN SOFTWARE

DESIGN/BUILD

Seeing is believing

3-D imaging software makes life easier, clients happier for Pennsylvania-based Plantique.

By EMILY SCHAPPACHER

When Brian Richardson shows his clients 3-D images of their landscape design projects, he says he can see the light bulbs go off inside their heads. They may ask for a few more trees by the garage or perhaps a longer retaining wall, and Richardson can show them what it would look like with just a few clicks of a mouse. He can even add in the sound of a bubbling waterfall and it's as if the clients are already enjoying their backyard oasis.

"Even though [before] we would present a detailed plan and show them examples of materials, it was very tough for the client to visualize exactly what it was going to look like," says Richardson, senior designer at Plantique in Allentown, Pa. "But now, by the time we get started, they have already seen a very good representation of what the design will be like, and I don't have to assume they understand what we are going to do."

With design/build



comprising 75 percent of Plantique's service mix, and with a customer base of 80 percent residential clients, the software has become an important sales tool for the \$6.9 million company.

Richardson began seeing 3-D imaging software at trade shows and in trade publications about two years ago and knew Plantique needed to embrace the technology to stay competitive. After testing various programs, Plantique chose Realtime Landscaping Architect because it worked with its current estimating system. Other programs with 3-D capabilities include Pro Landscape, Dynascape and VisionScape.

Plantique started using 3-D regularly last March. The company has four software licenses, and spent about \$5,500 initially to acquire the software. It also needed to add a plotter/scanner/copier to print designs to scale in color, which cost approximately \$8,000.

SALES EFFICIENCY

Richardson says the software speeds up a client's decision-making process. Plantique has fewer mistakes and misunder-

standings between clients and designers and fewer callbacks, as well. Sales meetings are more productive because the images decrease the amount of time designers need to spend explaining what the finished project will look like. Changes suggested by the client, which used to take a day or two to communicate through a hand drawing, can now be made in seconds during the very same meeting.

"It improves our efficiency because the client sees with their own eyes what they are getting," Richardson explains. "There will always be questions and changes on the fly, but many times it's nipped in the bud."

Like many types of technology, the software offers regular updates that enhance its performance. Over the past year, Plantique has installed updates that add the capability of including outdoor sounds, moving human figures and different neighborhood background settings, like mountain ranges or the countryside. Richardson says the updates are simple to install by just clicking on them when he receives a notice. But the updates, he adds, are one of the few simple aspects of the software for Richardson, 50, who says he's still trying to master the program. He's received help and training from some of Plantique's younger designers, who learned the program in school. Despite all the bells and whistles of 3-D imaging, he says he still believes in the importance of hand sketching. He often begins a sketch on paper and then scans it into the 3-D program to bring it to life.

Richardson advises contractors to communicate to clients that the 3-D images are "not exact representations, but very close approximations" of what the finished design will look like, as details like shapes, colors or material textures may vary in real life. But for Plantique, 3-D imaging has been a time-saving step in the right direction that Richardson says has placed the firm ahead of the curve.

"Hand drawing has worked well, but we knew it was going down this road," he says. "It's the wave of the future and it's only going to get better." LM

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

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7/10	Jerry Gaeta , Consultant, <i>J. Gaeta Business Planning</i>	\$0 to 1 Million in 60 Minutes	PANTS13
7/17	Tom Shay , Vendor, <i>Profits Plus Solutions</i>	How to Promote Customer Loyalty	PANTS13
7/24	Bruce Crawford , Educator, <i>Rutgers Gardens/Rutgers University</i>	The Best of the Best in Plant Material	PANTS13
7/31	Dave Conklin , Vendor, <i>RankPop</i>	SEO in Plain English	PANTS13
8/7	Jason Cupp , Consultant, <i>Kolbe Certified Growth Consultant</i>	Team Building for Landscape Contractors	Sponsorship Available

ABOUT THE HOST

Jody Shilan, MLA is an award-winning landscape designer and former landscape design/build contractor, who has sold tens of millions of dollars of design and installation work throughout his career. He now uses his 35+ years of experience to coach other landscape contractors how to easily and dramatically increase their sales by following his unique landscape design/build/sales process. He does this through public speaking, private consulting, group workshops and his "exclusive" members-only website www.FromDesign2Build.com.



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PROFITING FROM DESIGN

JODY SHILAN

Shilan is editor of FromDesign2Build.com. Contact him at 201/783-2844 or jshilan@gmail.com.

The design/build brain

Q When creating job descriptions, what is the best way to separate the roles of design and production?

—Mark Muzio, The Landscape Design Group, Waltham, Mass.

A This is a great question that companies of every size constantly struggle with, regardless of how many years they've been in business. Although my answer is straightforward and simple, creating a highly functional design/build team requires a significant amount of work and efficient internal systems. The good news is that once these roles are defined and everybody is on the same page, your installations and your business will run much more smoothly and more profitably, with fewer errors and better communication.

I can't promise that you'll achieve landscape design/build nirvana, but I can assure you that there's a workable system that will help all of your employees become more successful.

Essentially, there are two basic theories about managing the design/build process. The first is to have your designer be responsible for everything. This means not only designing, estimating and selling the installation, but also taking on the additional production responsibilities of job scheduling, project management and job costing. The second theory is to define clearly the roles of "design" and "build," allowing each department to focus on one part of the process or the other. By the time you finish reading this column, I think you'll be able to tell which theory I subscribe to and why.

Regardless of whether or not you want to believe it, personality-wise, landscape designers are different from production people, and vice versa. There's a scientific reason for this. Designers typically are right-brained. They're visual learners. They are creative by nature—intuitive and free spirited—and depend more on visual cues to understand. As you probably know, they're emotional and easily swayed by their feelings. Unfortunately, they also tend to be unorganized, lack time-management skills and they don't prioritize well.

On the other hand, production people are typically dominated by the left side of the brain; they're auditory learners. They learn through listening rather than by seeing. Unlike the creative and inquisitive right side of our brain, the left side is responsible for organization and logic. Therefore, those who have a dominant left side are typically thorough, prefer schedules and deadlines and love rules and regulations.

All this means that regardless of how much you may want your design/sales department to manage the installations, it's nearly impossible to find a right-brained, creative, free thinker who is well organized and likes to follow the rules. The opposite is true as well. No matter how much you may want your ultra-efficient production supervisor to learn how to think outside the box and creatively problem solve, it's probably not going to happen; he's not programmed that way.

Although we all have a dominant side of our brain, none of us is either 100 percent right-brained or 100 percent left-brained. We are a mixture of both, meaning there is hope for you, your employees and your business.

Now that I've given you some scientific proof that there's a real reason why you need to split the positions, what's my advice to you? Save yourself a lot of time and aggravation and don't try to have one person manage the entire process. Instead, find a creative right-brainer and let him or her design, sell and schmooze the clients. Then set up your designer with a time-managing left-brainer who can keep to a schedule and get things done. Once you have these two people in place, you just need to establish some standard operating procedures or best management practices that allow both sides of your design/build brain to work together to install beautiful landscapes, profitably.

To submit a question for Profiting From Design, please contact Shilan at jshilan@gmail.com.

In-ground opportunity

Transforming unused swimming pools into living pond environments has presented an exciting opportunity for this Pennsylvania-based company.



Steven Katz says pool-to-pond conversions are fulfilling.

STEVEN KATZ HAS worked in the pond-building, -refurbishing and -management business for more than three decades. During that time, some projects have stood out as especially unique. Take, for example, the project where the homeowners wanted their unused swimming pool turned into a pond. While such a project is a massive undertaking, Katz has found it can have amazing results.

When customers browse the website for Land & Seascapes in Aston, Pa., the page opens with a video of what looks like a beautiful, naturally occurring pond, complete

with plant life and fish. They're surprised to learn that the pond had a former life as a swimming pool.

"In the Northeast environment where we're based,

swimming pools don't exist well here," Katz says. "A lot of people have them put in but they soon realize that they only get, at most, three months of use out of them. Then they're staring at an unsightly cover for eight months." Many homeowners tire of that, Katz says, adding that Land & Seascapes saw an opportunity to transform underutilized pools into year-round features.

It may seem that already having a pool dug out would make pond installation easier, but transforming a swimming pool into a pond is more complex than starting a pond from scratch, Katz says. Pools are too deep to allow for a thriving

pond environment, so they need to be filled in before the process can even start.

"We're basically building the pond backwards when we're starting with a swimming pool, because we're doing a lot of the work from the underground up," Katz says. "Starting from scratch is a blank canvas, and that's easier to work with."

The result is a pond that homeowners can actually wade into. "Many of our clients grew up with lakes, streams and ponds and they like the idea of swimming in clarified water surrounded by a few fish and some lovely plants," Katz says. "The clarity of the water is beautiful and naturally maintained."

The profit opportunity from a swimming pool conversion is much bigger than that of a typical garden pond. Projects start at about \$150,000 for the conversion, a water feature and landscaping. But the amount of time, manpower and overall troubleshooting involved makes it a much more complicated process. Because of the cost and scope involved, the company doesn't do many pool conversions—to date it's done five—but Katz says the conversions are fun despite their challenges.

"One of the challenges is access," Katz says. "This requires big machinery. We need a good 8 feet to 10 feet of access just to bring in the machinery and transport our materials."

To make homeowners aware of that, Land & Seascapes markets the concept in display ads and on Google AdWords. It also wants potential clients to consider its other service—installing a "swim pond environment" from scratch as an alternative to standard swimming pool installation.

Katz is doing his best to spread the word that swim ponds have as many benefits as swimming pools. "We want homeowners to know that they don't have to live with a pool they don't want," he says.

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

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY: Land & Seascapes

OWNER: Steven Katz

YEAR FOUNDED: 1980

YEAR OF FIRST POOL-TO-POND CONVERSION: 1991

LEARNING CURVE: "The best experience is gained over the course of building hundreds of ponds and pond environments while working hands-on with my crew at many job sites," Katz says.

EQUIPMENT INVESTMENT: Pool conversion projects definitely required an investment in additional equipment, says Katz. The list included: skid-steers, track hoes, buckets with thumbs, several types of hydraulic equipment, vibratory sheep's foot rollers, jumping jack and pressure plate tamers, over-sized mechanical hand tools and more.

Pools need to be filled in to allow for a proper pond environment.



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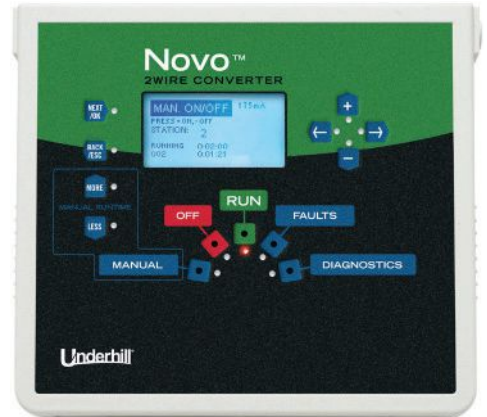
IRRIGATION



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Rain Bird // RainBird.com/prs



Novo

Novo, a compact two-wire converter, is designed to quickly transform any standard multiwire controller to two-wire operation by using a "plug and play" feature. Novo installs alongside the host controller and handles up to 32 two-wire stations. The host multiwire controller continues to run all scheduling programs and "talks" to the new two-wire valves and decoders via the Novo converter.

Underhill International // Underhill.us



Aquicare

Aquicare wetting agent helps irrigation practices by preventing localized dry spot conditions and rehydrating water repellent soils. Offering both preventive and curative relief, Aquicare helps reduce surface tension of the water droplets to make water wetter, improving its infiltration. It also is designed to resist excessive water retention on the soil surface.

WinField Solutions // WinField.com

MP3500

The newest addition to the MP rotator family, the MP3500, provides coverage from 31 to 35 ft., which allows for specification in mid-range applications. While this is the longest MP rotator to date, it still maintains the efficiency-focused features of the line, such as matched precipitation, wind-resistant streams, robust design and uniformity.

Hunter Industries // HunterIndustries.com





SEEDERS

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SourceOne // SourceOneOPE.com



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The Toro Co. // Toro.com/professional

TriWave 40

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Turfco // Turfco.com



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6000 Series

Toro has updated its line of Z Master Professional 6000 Series propane mowers with new closed-loop electronic fuel injection 27-hp Kohler Command Pro EFI propane engines. These new models incorporate closed-loop EFI technology that improves fuel efficiency, features best-in-class starting and can reduce downtime because the mowers operate without carburetors.

Toro // Toro.com/professional



Lazer Z S-Series

The new propane-fueled Lazer Z S-Series zero-turn rider can achieve up to 7.5 hours of operation on a single tank of fuel. The automotive-style, closed-loop electronic fuel injection system optimizes air/fuel settings based on exhaust output, in real time, to maximize performance and efficiency.

The ECU-controlled start-up simplifies

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Exmark // Exmark.com



2960EFI

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Dixie Chopper // DixieChopper.com



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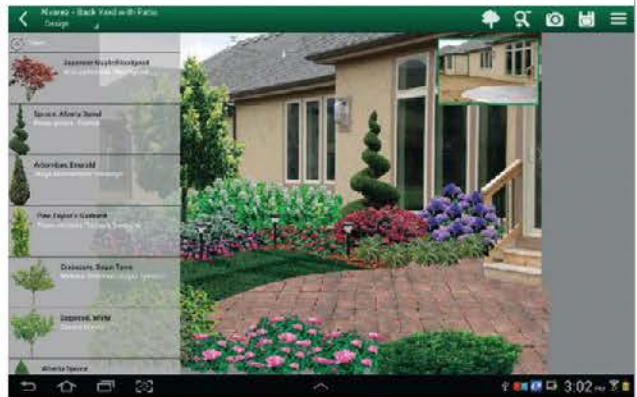
TECHNOLOGY



Model 126V-52

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The Grasshopper Co. // GrasshopperMower.com



PRO Landscape Companion

PRO Landscape Companion, a professional landscape design app for tablets, is now available for Android tablets. PRO Landscape Companion integrates with PRO Landscape design software and allows users to create, edit and present designs on a tablet. PRO Landscape Companion is free for PRO Landscape users and is also available for iPad. PRO Landscape is a complete landscape design software and includes photorealistic imaging, night and holiday lighting, CAD, estimating, 3-D renderings and mobile tablet applications.

Drafix // PROLandscape.com

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 3/4" to 2 1/2" 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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[Coming in August]

Obamacare: It's here

The Affordable Care Act has been looming over businesses since it was signed into law in 2010. Many of the law's major provisions are effective January 1, 2014 – less than six months away. So, will "Obamacare" batter or bolster your bottom line? We delve into the topic and offer strategies for how Green Industry companies large and small can minimize the impact to their businesses.



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Chris Davitt

President of Ruppert Landscape, Laytonsville, Md.



Who's your mentor? Over the course of my life and career, my mentor has changed, but one is Craig Ruppert. That started when I first began working with Craig [at age 11]. There are just so many fundamental processes about work and life that Craig coached me on.

Additionally, my mother has always served as a mentor. She passed away a year ago, but she had the best outlook on life of anyone I've ever known. She could turn the most negative situation into a positive.

How did you meet company founder Craig Ruppert? He was a friend of my brother's. Craig worked construction during the day. Afterward, he'd pick up my brother and they'd work until dark. My brother grew tired of it, but I loved it. I was 11 years old and being treated like an adult. I remember I used to run with the lawn mower. Our plan at that point was to just outwork people.

What are some of the most notable changes you've observed at Ruppert over the years? Learning the art of personnel management was a big part of the company's development. When we were in the process of trying to outwork everyone, we didn't think being liked was part of the equation. We started attending seminars and learned the value of people management and the value of systems. Systems can turn good ideas into reality.

Of all the initiatives and deals you've been behind at Ruppert, which ones are closest to your heart? The most satisfying are always people related. I enjoy reminiscing about various people who were at a crossroads and had considered leaving the company. But with the company's help, they overcame their challenges, stuck with their career and are better off 20 years later. When the company helps an employee get through a situation, those are the most satisfying moments.

Earlier this year you announced you'll retire in January, at age 53. Why? And what do you plan to do in retirement? My wife, Kate, and I have six kids. We have two grandkids, and in the next few years we suspect we'll have several more. I like the idea that we can send our kids on a getaway, watch their kids and be a life coach.

I'd also like to run a marathon, travel and heat my house with wood that I've cut and split. I expect the novelty of that project to wear off within a year.

What are you proudest of? We've had a very active connection with many charities over the years, including Food For the Poor and Easter Seals. I think these connections have made us a better company.

OFF THE CLOCK

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I FEEL MOST COMFORTABLE...

Facing challenges. The bigger the challenge the better.

IF THERE'S ONE THING I'VE LEARNED FROM WORKING IN THE GREEN INDUSTRY, IT'S THAT ____. It involves people from all walks of life—and challenges that never seem to be the same.

I ALWAYS SAID SOMEDAY I'D ____.

I never said this out loud, but I think, in some grandiose imaginings, you go through life thinking you're going to make a big impact on the world. There's still plenty to do in that arena.



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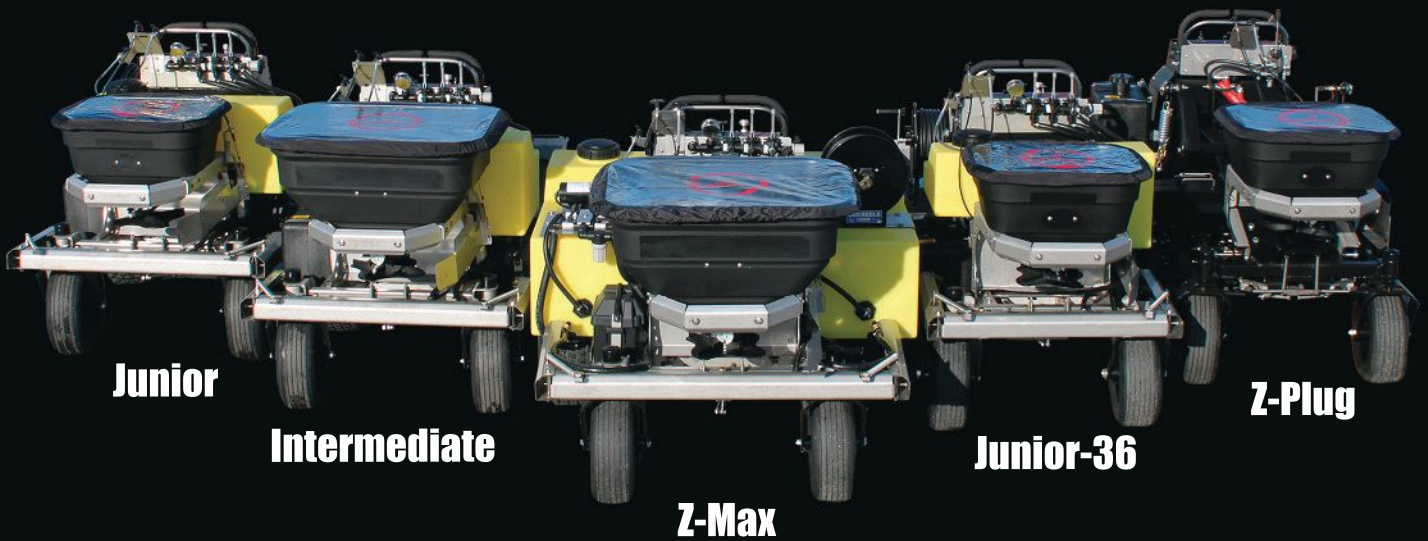
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