



BEST PRACTICES

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Knowledge: your secret weapon

If you're like me, you get your fair share of industry news blasts, social media updates and business-in-general updates. But how many of you actually read them?

The truth is, as much as we find the 24/7 news cycle overwhelming, deleting or dismissing updates just might be holding you back.

Early in my career, Joe Marsh, one of my mentors and the founder of Green Valley Landscaping (later acquired by ValleyCrest), met with me every morning to review the news.

Keeping up to date on the industry and staying informed was a priority for the company, and we clearly used it to our advantage. We discussed how announcements from our competitors, customers and suppliers would affect Green Valley's hiring, buying, operations and sales—and help us be more competitive. This practice taught me how to think critically, assess the big picture and learn how events happening somewhere else could influence something happening on my desk.

Landscape owners need to think about trends all the time. This year in particular there are legislative changes, spending cuts and government budget reforms that will significantly impact the workplace: health care mandates, immigration/tax laws and nationwide dialogues on green and environmental initiatives. Regardless of your position politically, you need to stay informed and know how these changes will affect your bottom line.

There are scores of websites, newspapers, magazines and other popular news sources to choose from. Information is abundant and everyone is swamped, with not enough time to absorb it all.

Here are 12 best practices to streamline the overload, prioritize what's relevant and make knowledge your secret weapon for success. They'll also help you keep up with trends in 30 minutes a day or less.

1. Keep up with industry news and insights through our own Green Industry media, who've triaged the important issues so we don't have to.

2. Follow state and national association newsletters and weekly feeds; scan headlines and talking points for facts and figures.

3. Identify and keep an eye on favorite news websites and seek a cross section of opinions.

4. Use an online news aggregator (i.e. Google News), to search current and past stories from a multitude of sources.

5. Create customized news pages or use an RSS feed, which provides an updated summary of web content and makes it easier to access specific topics.

6. Set up Google Alerts to stay on top of things without getting sidetracked by too much unrelated content.

7. Read all you can about our industry and your market. Keep up with trade publications and websites, influential bloggers and thought leaders.

8. Go beyond our own industry and learn what customers and professionals in related upstream fields (architecture, urban planning, development, real estate and construction) are talking and thinking about.

9. Read up on your customers' industries and their positions on issues through association journals, newsletters and blogs. Regularly talk with them about trends in their businesses. Read what your customers are saying on their social media sites and follow their news. What markets are they targeting? Are they expanding, downsizing? Are there new services? Is there an acquisition?

10. It pays to have a business-savvy mind. Read top business journals and magazines to find inspiration and information on marketing, management, technology, leadership and changing consumer preferences or buying habits.

11. Access or download mobile versions or apps of your favorite business and Green Industry news to your smartphones and tablets.

12. Encourage critical thinking and continuous learning. Set aside 30 minutes in your team meetings to focus on, share and discuss key topics and news that will affect your business.

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