



## EDITOR'S NOTE

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# Help vs. hype

**W**elcome to the Business Planner 2014 edition of *Landscape Management*. I sat down to write an editor's note about the importance of the three areas we focus on in this issue: leading, running and growing your business. But I can't get the last one, *grow*—which focuses on sales and marketing—off my mind because I'm fresh out of attending the Content Marketing World conference in Cleveland.

Content marketing: What does it mean, precisely? For marketing expert Jay Baer, who keynoted the event, it's as simple as helping people. As he says, "If you sell something, you make a customer for today. If you help someone, you can create a customer for life."

Baer says marketing should be about *help* and not *hype*. It all boils down to a concept he calls "youtility" (he's authored a book by the same name). One of his favorite examples is *Taxi Mike's Dining Guide*, which started out as a simple yellow printout distributed by a taxi driver in the ski town of Banff, Alberta, and has grown into a website. Taxi Mike distributes this guide—"like a one-man Trip Advisor"—for free in bars and restaurants. He makes genuine recommendations about the best places in town and distributes the content to a touristy, bar-going contingent that may need his services down the road.

This is not a new concept. Have you ever wondered why one of the most prestigious rating scales in fine dining is associated with a tire manufacturer? In 1900 in France, Michelin began publish-

ing a guide for drivers with restaurant reviews to create demand for cars and ultimately for car tires. *The Michelin Guide* is published—and respected as an authority—to this day in France, most European countries and select cities internationally.

Likewise, John Deere has published *The Furrow*, a print magazine to help farmers succeed, since 1895.

Although this approach isn't novel, it has a new life due to consumers' access to information via mobile and social media tools. Consider that 64 percent of U.S. mobile phone owners have a smartphone, according to Nielsen. That means any prospective customer is just one swipe away from researching any type of product or service he or she wants to purchase or learn more about, including lawn care or landscaping.

In 2010, the average consumer needed 5.3 pieces of information before making a purchasing decision. By 2011, that figure rose to 10.4, according to Baer, and likely has skyrocketed since then. Why? People know they have nearly all the world's information in the palms of their hands, so they dig around a bit before calling for a quote or making a decision.

"If you make a bad decision now, you're just lazy," Baer says. But if you help customers and prospects make good decisions—whether they choose to work with your company today or sometime down the road—you just may be a hero to them.

Remember: The difference between selling and helping is only two letters, Baer says. But those two letters make all the difference in the world.

# Landscape Management

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