



# HOW CAN I GENERATE BUZZ?

BY JON GOLDMAN

**A** How can we get prospects to chase us instead of us chasing them? For most landscaping companies, marketing is difficult. You need to get noticed, but you can't afford to break the bank on big-name celebrity endorsements and Super Bowl ads. It is possible, however, to promote your company without a big-time budget and generate powerful marketing buzz.

YOU CAN USE YOUR **BACKGROUND, PROFESSIONALISM AND EXPERTISE TO TURN YOURSELF FROM "ANOTHER COMPANY" INTO A TRUSTED RESOURCE YOUR CUSTOMERS TURN TO.**

No matter the size of your company, you can use your background, professionalism and expertise to turn yourself from "another company" into a trusted resource your customers turn to. Do this by transforming from a design/build, landscape maintenance, snow removal or whatever kind of vendor into a design/build, landscape maintenance or snow removal expert. The key is vendor to expert.

Generating leads is one of the most difficult challenges any business faces, so any strategy that accomplishes lead generation is a competitive advantage you don't want to ignore. Positioning yourself as an expert accomplishes that.

## MAKING THE SHIFT

Here's the secret to becoming an expert: You probably already are an expert. Think about it. Do you know much more than your customers about their lawns, irrigation systems, weeds or the pool, patio or fire pit of their dreams? Chances are, you know an

enormous amount your customers would love to know.

As an aside, this underscores the need to stay on top of the ever-changing trends and best practices in the industry. Whatever your niche is, stay current. That's why participating in your local landscape association, attending national events, and reading constantly is mission critical to the success of your business.

## PUBLISH OR PERISH

The first step to becoming an expert is being published. The phrase "publish or perish" comes from academia, but it's not just stuffy professors who stand to benefit from being published. Whether it's a book, e-book or article, being published shows you know what you're talking about. Being published creates a level of credibility that attracts potential clients to you. That's especially true if you offer specific solutions to prospects with specific problems.

Most businesses chase prospects, but when you chase prospects, they often run in the opposite direction. Becoming an authority makes potential clients seek you. Suddenly, instead of chasing customers, you have customers chasing you.



## USING VENDOR TO EXPERT

Often, you'll face competitors ready to undercut and underbid you. Becoming the expert can help you avoid impossible-to-win bid situations. Take a page out of the book of Chris and Craig Zeigler, owners of Agronomic Lawn Management (ALM) in Virginia Beach, Va. They were competing with a national player who could beat anybody's price. ALM needed a way to position itself with prospects in a way that was more than just about a lower price.

The Zeiglers used their personal and professional activities to create a compelling story. They published an advertorial (see image, above right) that positioned the company as a local hero. The first paragraph describes their involvement with a local organization. Autism is a cause personally meaningful to the Zeiglers because they have a nephew diagnosed with it. They give a portion of their company's profits to a nonprofit organization called F.A.C.T. (Families of Autistic Children of Tidewater). The Zeiglers' write-up showed how ALM wasn't just another landscaping company, but a devoted part of the community that takes from its bottom line to help neighborhood children in need.

The Zeiglers went on to share their expertise, talking about Craig's background—N.C. State and Penn State University with a degree in turfgrass management—and discussing landscaping topics such as agronomics, weed control and turf fertility. By sharing their knowledge, they positioned themselves as experts. The transition from vendor to expert worked. This small landscaping company experienced dramatic results. In four months, it increased the number of customers from 864 to 1,050, and ALM's annual projected sales rose from \$426,000 to \$612,000.

## CLAIMING YOUR EXPERTISE

The first step to becoming an expert is identifying your audience, which I call your hungry fish. Go deep and narrow and focus on the prospects your business targets. Where do they live? What kinds of homes do they have? Which outdoor living problems do they face?

### Agronomic Lawn Management Creating lush, healthy lawns and giving back to the community

BY JOHN DOWNS SR.

The fight against autism has gained a new champion in Hampton Roads. Agronomic Lawn Management will be donating a percentage of its profits to help fund research on the disease. The company's commitment to the community is a testament to the power of a small business to make a difference.



This house has been made all the more beautiful with Agronomic Lawn Management's care.

"I really appreciate the fact that they specifically mentioned autism in their article. It's a cause that is very important to me. I think it's great that they took the time to write about it. I've been a customer of ALM for a long time and I'm really impressed with the quality of their work. I would definitely recommend them to my friends and family." —Client Mary Brown

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Visit [brandlauncher.com/ALMadvertorial](http://brandlauncher.com/ALMadvertorial) to see a full-size version of the advertorial.

The next step is to create what I call irresistible bait—the published material you'll be offering. Your materials should help prospective customers gain a deeper understanding of the problems they face and the available solutions. The ideas don't have to

be new or original. The key is that they're available to your audience in a clear, useful format. Once you've decided what you want to publish, determine how you'll present the material. Once again, think about your audience. What format do they prefer? Can you give a seminar to a local group? Are you able to publish an article in a local paper? Should you offer audio or video material on your website? One of my favorite formats, when appropriate, is an e-book. It's long enough to deal satisfactorily with a specific subject but short enough to write and self-publish quickly. The format isn't as critical as getting your irresistible bait created and in the hands of your prospects. You can always start with one format and then repurpose the material into others.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Your customers are less trusting, have more choices and have access to more information than ever. But much of your competition is still stuck in the model of limited choice and information. Using the vendor-to-expert approach will elevate you above the other choices and position you right where you need to be: top of mind for your customers and prospects. LM

*Goldman is a marketing expert, entrepreneur and president of the business strategy company Brand Launcher. Reach him or download his free e-book, "The Secret of the Watermelon," via [brandlauncher.com](http://brandlauncher.com).*

Planning pointer

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