



PROFITING FROM DESIGN

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The site visit proposal

Q We're a smaller landscape design/build company. Most of our projects are between \$2,500 and \$5,000 and rarely get over \$10,000, so selling design fees is really tough in our market. Any suggestions on how we can improve our closing rates without a plan?

—Jonathan Chaseman, JC Landscape Construction, Gresham, Ore.

As much as all of us want the glamorous, high-end design/build jobs, many of us don't work in these markets or have access to these types of clients. Or maybe you do work in prestigious areas but still have to go out on calls that are not "design worthy," although they're still potential one- or two-day moneymakers.

Whatever the reason, you need to create a preprinted proposal form that will help you land these smaller, less prestigious projects—or what I'm now officially calling "estimate/build" work—right then and there. I call these forms site visit proposals (SVPs) because they're designed to help you close the deal on the initial site visit or meeting.

Are we embarrassed to admit we do "low-end" work? Will our peers look down their noses at us for admitting we do smaller installations? Well, I've got some news for you, Mr. SnootyScapes Landscape & Design: Smaller or low-end projects can be just as profitable as those negative-edged, maturely planted, hardscape-dominated, high-end landscape installations, and they can be just as interesting. (OK, that last part is a stretch.) Still, the profit generated from the \$1,500 to \$5,000 projects isn't any less green than that of a so-called "high-end" project.

Think about it. If you sell enough \$5,000 installs, before you know it you'll have \$25,000 worth of work, which is pretty decent for anyone. For smaller companies this can provide you with two weeks of solid work. For larger companies you can turn your B and C crews (or enhancement crews) into profit-making machines. You know what else? By selling smaller or low-end work your newer designers and salespeople

will gain the experience and confidence they need to eventually start selling larger work in the future.

Anatomy of the SVP

So let's discuss how the SVP works. I created the SVP because, like many of you, I'd go on leads that were smaller and didn't require a design but still could make money. At the end of these appointments, I'd tell the prospects I would put together a proposal and get back to them in a few days. The reality was that once I left these calls and started getting busy with paid clients and checking on projects under construction, these estimates slowly started working their way to the bottom of the to-do pile. Time would pass and frustrated potential clients would call the office looking for their estimates. I'd apologize to them, saying how busy I was, and tell them I would get it to them that day, which oftentimes never happened.

One winter I decided that enough was enough and I created a mini proposal—the SVP—that I could complete right on site. It's a professional-looking document that's a hybrid between a blank triplicate NEBS form and a formally typed proposal. The SVP includes three sections: site work, landscape planting and miscellaneous considerations, plus materials and labor cost breakdowns for each.

The next year, instead of leaving these types of appointments with a false promise that I'd get back to the prospects with a design, I wrote up a proposal right then and there. Naturally, the homeowner couldn't be happier, nor could I. Since my SVPs are triplicates, I gave the client the white and yellow copies with a self-addressed stamped envelope and I kept the pink copy for my records.

If the clients wanted to do the work, they just sent in their signed copies with a check for a third of the price. If not, I knew I did my job and responded to them in a timely fashion. Using my SVP I sold more work, got fewer complaints and slept much better.

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

» WEB EXTRA

Download a sample SVP in the September Web Extras section of [Landscape Management.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net).