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planning, processes and
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QUESTION OF THE WEEK

What's your New Year's resolution for your business? How will you achieve it?

- » **Matt Dingeldein:** We will be streamlining the systems we put in place in 2013: Budget-driven estimating, better job tracking, automated e-billing and the like!
- » **John Shea:** Receipt organization. Made envelopes tonight for each month.
- » **Jake Zappy Achterberg:** Stay firm with my prices! Can't drop prices just to get the job. Need to make PROFIT.
- » **Terry Delany:** As a leader, I refuse to listen to the "negative committee" that sometimes holds meetings in my head. My team deserves a confident leader.

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@ADLandscaping1: RT @LandscapeMgmt NY landscaper finds \$1M winning lotto ticket in the leaves. ow.ly/s9ALQ

@BobcatCompany: What devices do you use? MT @LandscapeMgmt: Survey says landscape professionals favor iPads over any other tablets. ow.ly/i/48v1z

@CompostCrusader: RT @GreggRobertson opines on the upswing in government regulation of invasive plants and its effect on landscape pros. ow.ly/sltFm

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- To get a taste of Weed Man's business plan and procedures (from page 16):**
- » Get direction on setting reachable goals with Weed Man's goal-setting worksheet.
 - » View hiring evaluation sheets for managers and technicians.
 - » Take business-planning pointers from a breakdown of the company's budgeting processes.
 - » Download an office checklist of daily, weekly and monthly tasks.
- For more on, "How to manage your online reputation" (page 22):**
- » Reference Lewis Landscape Services' settlement agreement to cover your back from clients who retaliate via online reviews.
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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

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Frequency illusion

Have you ever had one of those days or weeks where multiple bits of information—all with the same message—seem to materialize out of thin air, like they're screaming, "Hey, you! Pay attention to this!"

It feels like fate, but it's really just a matter of the brain's ability to recognize and call attention to patterns. It's called frequency illusion or the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon.

This recently happened to me. I'm taking the message as a cue to improve the way we do some things around here at *Landscape Management* (I won't bore you with the details of the magazine production process) and the way I do some things at home (paying bills, cleaning the house—also boring, I know).

What's not boring for a business owner, I'm sure, is operating an unsystemized business. In fact, if you're in this camp, it's probably downright chaotic and draining for you and for your employees. As for your clients? We probably don't even want to know what they think about your erratic procedures.

This topic—the disorder caused by a lack of standard operating procedures—is the one that's been following me around all week.

First, I came across this quote from legendary process improvement expert W. Edwards Deming: "If you can't describe what you're doing as a process, you don't know what you're doing."

Interesting, I thought, and true. *But wait, that sounds a lot like the message from the cover story I'm finishing up on*

the Weed Man USA way: Start with a solid plan and create systems to support it.

Then the other day, when I was refamiliarizing myself with the tenants of *The E-Myth* in preparation for the February issue of *LM*, I got that not-quite-déjà-vu-but-still-kind-of-strange feeling that comes when you can't avoid a piece of information.

The concept that seemed to be hitting me over the head became clear: Business systems and processes breed competency, structure and scalability—and, in turn, less stress and more profits.

Although this idea seems fundamental, apparently it's not.

Landscape Management research shows as many as 40 percent of Green Industry firms don't make an annual budget. The Benchmark columnist Frank Ross cites a study showing less than 10 percent of construction contractors plan out their years compared to 80 percent of manufacturers. Pair those facts with various research revealing anywhere from half to 80 percent of small businesses fail within the first few years, and you get the picture: Many companies, in the landscape industry and otherwise, are flying by the seats of their pants.

If you're not currently operating this way, congratulations. You're probably a recovering pants-seat flyer, aren't you?

If you are currently improvising your business as you go, let my case of frequency illusion—and lessons shared throughout this issue—serve as the catalyst to get your company's process-development program in place. Otherwise, you risk leaving your growth to fate.

Landscape Management

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Certified Wildlife Landscaping Professional program launches

The National Wildlife Federation aims to certify 300 Green Industry pros by the end of the year. BY MARISA PALMIERI

National Wildlife Federation (NWF) launched its Certified Wildlife Landscaping Professional (CWLP) designation late last year as an offshoot of its Certified Wildlife Habitat, Schoolyard Habitat and Community Wildlife Habitat programs. The new program certifies landscape professionals who commit to supporting ecologically sound and wildlife-friendly methods of landscaping.

"We wanted to bring together our expertise and couple that with the landscaping professionals' skills and expertise to combine for a true certification program for them where they participate in a training program," said Eliza Russell, NWF's director of education.

The impetus for the program was two-fold, she said: 1) Demand from its existing habitat program participants looking for expert help, and 2) Demand from landscape professionals asking for guidance on and recognition for setting their businesses apart from an environmental standpoint.

About 25 landscape professionals were certified as CWLPs in 2013. Some of them worked with NWF to test the program during its eight-month-long development phase. NWF hopes to grow the number of certifications to 300 by the end of 2014.

Ben Bowen, landscape manager for Ross NW Watergardens in Portland, Ore., is one of those pilot participants.

"One of the things I like about the program is it's very focused," he said. "It's not something that takes a huge investment of time or money to get involved in, but has some real benefits."

The advantage

Bowen names is the credibility gained by being associated with NWF and the ability to promote the certification on its website and via social media.

"I'm here in Portland, Ore., where this sort of thing is very important," he said. "I realize in some parts of the country, the (environmental) emphasis isn't there yet, but everywhere people are becoming so much more aware of the impact we have on the world around us. There's a little investment with time and money with this program, but I think it's one that would pay off for a lot of companies."

Getting certified

To become certified, landscape professionals complete 18 to 20 hours of online, self-paced training about wildlife habitat elements, native plants and more. The process also includes submitting documentation (plant lists, design, etc.) that emphasize how the company's approach "improves the larger ecosystem, benefits wildlife and enhances their client's experience with nature," according to the NWF's website. The training



culminates in a test with an essay. The first year certification fee is \$150 and it's \$200 to renew in subsequent years.

NWF worked with the Ecological Landscaping Association, the American Society of Landscape Architects and the Association of Professional Landscape Designers to develop its certification requirements.

Once professionals are certified, they're entitled to use marketing materials provided by NWF, such as web and print badges, a listing and profile page on NWF's website and access to more training.

Bowen noted his website received some traffic from the NWF site listing, but he hasn't yet landed a job directly from there. "We've had the badge on our website for a few months and had people who've commented on it," he said. "It's caught their eye."

Though any landscape professionals may apply to participate, the "sweet spot" for the program right now is landscape designers and installers, Russell said, noting the training reflects that focus. "We do know there are probably going to be more tweaks," she said. "And we need to learn more about the lawn care side of the industry."



AmericanHort debuts

AmericanHort, the Green Industry's new trade association, formally began Jan. 1, following the closing of the consolidation of the American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA) and OFA—The Association of Horticulture Professionals Dec. 31. The more than two-year effort to bring the groups together was initiated by the volunteer leadership of the legacy organizations. OFA and ANLA members have been automatically enrolled in AmericanHort.

"We will not forget the past as we rapidly move toward the future," said Michael Geary, president and CEO of AmericanHort. "We will continue the legacy of providing innovative educa-

tion, industry promotion, developing consumer and professional markets, an expanding convention and trade show and leading a powerful national government relations program."



The mission of AmericanHort is to unite, promote and advance the industry through advocacy, collaboration, connectivity, education, market development and research. The vision, developed by the new board of directors, is to be a leading and unifying organization for the horticulture industry to cultivate successful businesses and to enhance lives through the benefits of plants.

The new organization will represent breeders, greenhouse and nursery growers, garden center retailers, distributors, interior and exterior landscapers, florists, students, educators, researchers, manufacturers and all of those who are part of the industry supply chain. AmericanHort will have its primary office in Columbus, Ohio, and an office in Washington, D.C., to facilitate government relations and research activities, including the management of the Horticultural Research Institute. AmericanHort also will continue to manage America in Bloom.

» CORRECTION

The 1-Minute Mentor department of *LM*'s December 2013 issue (page 44) incorrectly identified Jim Cali as CEO of Southern Botanical. His title, in fact, is COO.

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BEST PRACTICES

CHERYL STEELBERG

The author, marketing consultant for the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a Green Industry PR veteran. Reach her at csteelberg@wilson-oyler.com.

A look through the marketing glass

Having trouble talking with your marketing team? We may know why. The first question can make or break the interview. “What is it we’re selling?” broke the ice.

“Why, it’s beautiful spaces, healthy living and artful gardens,” said the new-to-the-industry candidate experienced in marketing but whose wilted houseplants clearly meant landscaping was a risky career move.

“No,” said the marketing director. “We’re in the business of selling labor.”

Even after years of selling and writing about beautiful spaces, healthy living and artful gardens, despite the time-and-materials caveat, one thing is true: Landscape companies and the people who seek to market or promote their services are not always on the same page.

Being able to create and execute successful, persuasive marketing campaigns means being able to understand the full range of perspectives that people hold. Creative people, said an art director friend, think and deploy in bursts. They solve problems they cannot see. Contractors think sequentially and in tangibles. We are, he mused, circles talking to lines.

Communication styles and geometry metaphors aside, there are other disconnects when it comes to why it’s so tough to get traction and find magic in marketing; why companies think their marketing is broken; or why the quest for innovation and new approaches to old problems is never-ending.

To kick off a new year and inspire a new way of thinking about your own marketing efforts, your agency folks or the dynamics within your company between those who provide the bang and those who manage the buck, we’ve come up with a dozen takeaways guaranteed to provoke, irritate or comfort you, depending on which side of the marketing glass you’re looking through.

1. Marketing is central to all you hope to achieve. It’s not a value-add, add-on or one-off.
2. A clear vision and cohesive, goal-based marketing program will increase sales and revenue.
3. Marketing fundamentals—the business objec-

tive, knowing the customer, having relevant quality content and sense of community—plus tactics, communications tools and creative direction must be aligned with strategic business objectives.

4. When you can point to your marketing initiatives and know how they’re helping you affect your key business goals, you’re on the right track.

5. Marketing efforts should be quantifiable, prioritized, given a timeline and tied to an audience.

6. Your business plan should have a marketing component that addresses how you will promote and position your company, manage your reputation, sell your services, communicate with your customers, own your message and grow your bottom line.

7. Marketing your company is an ongoing endeavor and an energetic, perpetual-motion machine. It involves imagination, preparation, planning, organization, execution and a nimble IT infrastructure.

8. A marketing culture that’s technologically up-to-date, social-media savvy and demographically attuned will give your company distinct advantages.

9. Backing into a marketing program without a game plan or measurable goals will ensure a frustrating experience and costly outcome.

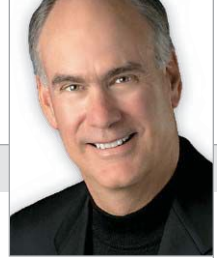
10. Marketing has a cost. So does new equipment. Both affect revenue. Often it seems there’s a better plan for the snowplow than for marketing. Get to know your marketing people just like you get to know your supply chain people so they understand the demands you have on the job.

11. Brainstorming sessions can be great. They can be made greater and deliver better, stronger ideas with effective collaboration. Invite cross-functional teams to the table to share ideas in real time. Then triage, implement, track and measure.

12. In the absence of a single-source or in-house resource, bringing together outside freelancers—graphic design, content, social strategy, web development—and creating an integrated “ad hoc agency” team bundles collective energy for success; it improves project communication, delivers better, more integrated results and saves costs.

EDITOR’S NOTE

This month, Best Practices columnist Bruce Wilson asked his marketing consultant to take the pen. “In my conversations with contractors, marketing is easily the most misunderstood of all functional and financial priorities,” Wilson says. Let’s turn to Cheryl Steelberg for her take.



Voila! You have a budget

OK, it's January. You should have your budget completed for this 2014. You do, don't you? Uh-oh, you don't, do you? Why is this budgeting thing always such a struggle? Would you ever go on a long trip without a road map? Would you ever contract a large job without an estimate? Of course not. And, it follows that you should never embark upon a year's worth of work without a business plan—i.e., a budget.

I've heard all the excuses not to make a budget: "Frank, there are just too many variables. We don't know what jobs we're going to get. We don't know what the weather is going to be like. Heck, all our work could be with some !#? *?! general contractor, owner or architect. What about your dear budget then?!"

Another reason we don't plan is that preparing a budget is hard work. First of all, you have to get your head around the concept that a budget has nothing to do with prior year trends. Now, that statement is almost blasphemy. How can you possibly budget next year without knowing what we did last year? OK, I'll concede the point that some historical data is useful, but only if you'll concede that for most of us there's no year in our recent past that we'd ever want to repeat.

Thus, I give you zero-based budgeting. Actually, Jimmy Carter brought the term "zero-based" into vogue when he was running for president in the 1970s. It didn't work so well for President Carter, but it can work amazingly well for us.

So, where do we start? What's the most important line item on your income statement? Profit, of course! That's where you start—at the bottom and work your way up. Don't start with, "How much revenue will I do this year?" We simply don't know the answer to that question. The real question is, "How much revenue *must* I do to meet or surpass my profit goals?" So, I give you this process:

STEP 1: Determine how much profit you must make to cash flow the coming year.

- › How much debt must you retire?

- › What capital expenditures do you plan to make?
- › What working capital do you require for operations?
- › What's your tax exposure?

STEP 2: Plan each overhead expense in detail.

This is the zero-based concept. Detail every overhead expense account as to what will be spent during the year and when. Just this simple awareness of how you spend money will give you new knowledge of what's happening around you and reap amazing cost savings.

Add steps 1 and 2 together to determine the minimum *gross margin* goal for the year.

STEP 3: Determine your capacity to perform work.

You're in the service business, which means you sell labor. In this step you'll plan for the number of people you can effectively manage on your payroll with your existing supervisory structure. What raises do you anticipate? What benefits? How many hours will you pay your workers for billable activities versus those you do not bill for? How many of those hours will be paid at an overtime rate? This process will be the blueprint with which you'll manage the coming year's production labor force.

STEP 4: Determine what backlog you have by type of work for the coming year.

Backlog is the work you've sold less that which you've performed. In installation, you should have estimates for the cost to complete this work along with the remaining gross margin to be earned. In maintenance, this will be your renewal jobs less an estimate for attrition. Either way, with this step you'll calculate how much of your margin goal (steps 1 & 2) you've already sold.

STEP 5: Determine what new revenue you must generate to cover your remaining margin.

Based upon how you price your work, you'll now calculate how much additional work you must sell to cover your net profit requirement and your budgeted overhead expenses. Add this work program to your backlog and *voila!*, you have a budget.

It's simple, really. Our focus is to determine how much work we *have* to sell—not what we will sell. It's a completely different mindset.

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COMMON DANDELION

Taraxacum officinale

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This perennial overwinters as a small rosette of leaves. Seedlings grow from a taproot and begin to emerge in early spring, when soil temperatures reach 50 F.
- ▶ Solitary, bright yellow blossoms grow on the end of leafless, hollow stalks that emit a white milky sap when broken.
- ▶ It produces a puffball seedhead shortly after mowing, and seeds are easily dispersed by wind.
- ▶ Dandelions prefer moist

conditions and soils, but thrive in weak, thin turf.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ For early-season control of weeds that overwintered, apply a postemergent herbicide containing florasulam to turf early in the spring, when temperatures are cool and the dandelions have not yet bloomed.
- ▶ Thick, healthy turf is important for managing this weed species. Properly mow, water and fertilize lawns to encourage healthy growth and minimize thin turf.



FALSE DANDELION

Hypochaeris radicata

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ Also known as cat's ear/ catsear or flatweed, this perennial weed closely resembles common dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*).
- ▶ Leaves are arranged in a basal rosette; they are densely hairy with toothed or irregularly lobed margins. This is in contrast to common dandelion, which has highly divided, hairless leaves.
- ▶ Each leafless stalk has two to seven bright yellow ray flowers. Leaves and flower stalks emit a milky substance 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 lawns 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 to provide control.

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All systems

While visiting with his neighbor one evening in the mid-1980s, Roger Mongeon ventured down to the man's basement office to take a look at his business. The neighbor ran a two-truck Weed Man franchise from his home in Ajax, Ontario, outside of Toronto.

Mongeon, a chemical engineer with an interest in owning his own business, was fascinated.

"He was doing \$110,000 in sales and his bottom line was \$55,000," Mongeon said. "I said, 'Wow. I didn't realize you could do this with lawn care.'"

After months of analysis and research, Mongeon "felt good" about his decision to leave his decade-long career at Union Carbide Corp. and purchase a Weed Man franchise. In 1987 he moved his family to his hometown of Ottawa, Quebec, to own and operate his first territory in Hull, just across the river from Ottawa.

For his foray into lawn care and franchising Mongeon created a 10-year business plan—a practice he refined working in marketing and facilities planning at Union Carbide.

"My initial concept was to have a \$700,000 lawn care company and live happily ever after," he said. "I felt that would be my life. I'd stay there and develop that franchise. I never would have dreamed it would have turned out to be what it has."

How has it turned out? In addition to owning multiple Canadian Weed Man franchise territories, Mongeon and his team, including daughter Jennifer Lemcke, have helped many other lawn care professionals flourish since they acquired the rights

to sell Weed Man license agreements in the U.S. through the firm Turf Holdings Inc (THI).

With a combination of top-tier talent and solid business planning practices, THI has grown Weed Man USA to more than \$60 million in total franchise system sales in 2013 since acquiring the rights to the U.S. in 1996 and developing an expansion strategy in 1999.

Entering the U.S. market

Though Mongeon's team is the Weed Man franchisor in the U.S., it's also a multiunit franchisee in Canada through Turf Management Systems, which did \$27.3 million in 2012 sales. Mongeon's Canadian-owned operations all started with that initial franchise in Ottawa 27 years ago. His first year there he grossed \$123,000 in sales, losing \$8,000. The second year in business, that location doubled its revenue and made about \$50,000 in profit.

"That's when I realized it was going to be a great opportunity," he said.

In 1989, Mongeon and partners expanded into Montreal with seven territories. Four years later, with Weed Man's Canadian territories already sold out, Mongeon assembled a group of shareholders made up of family and friends to acquire multiple existing franchises in Ontario. That year Lemcke decided to join her father's business (despite telling him at one time, "I'm not ever going to join Weed Man"). She took on a yearlong management trainee

» WEB EXTRAS

- Weed Man USA lives and dies by its systems. Visit the Web Extras section of [Landscape Management.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net) to download the following resources from Weed Man USA:
- Goal-setting chart
 - Hiring evaluation sheets
 - Staff daily, weekly and monthly checklists
 - Sample business plan/budget creator

GROWING LIKE A WEED

Weed Man USA officials projected to have 148 license agreements and 316 territories by the end of 2013. Here are some key growth figures.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 (projected)
Revenue	\$34.1 million	\$38.6 million	\$44.3 million	\$53.4 million	\$66.5 million
Revenue growth	n/a	13%	15%	21%	25%
Customer #	72,000	81,000	93,000	106,000	135,000
Customer # growth	n/a	13%	15%	14%	27%
Production vehicles	228	241	259	296	336
Production vehicle growth	2%	6%	8%	14%	14%

GO

BY MARISA PALMIERI

Weed Man USA's strategy banks on planning, processes and people. How you can learn from its model.



Despite telling her father Roger Mongeon, "I'm not ever going to join Weed Man," as a teenager, Jennifer Lemcke is COO of Weed Man USA/Turf Holdings Inc.

ALL SYSTEMS GO

position in Ottawa, eventually being promoted to manager of that location. She and her husband, Chris, grew it from less than a half a million dollars to \$2 million in annual revenue in six years. Today, Chris Lemcke is national technical director of THI, managing vendor relations and product testing for all Weed Man USA materials.

By 1996, Mongeon's sights crossed the border, and he struck a deal with Weed Man founder Des Rice to acquire the U.S. franchising rights. Several years later Mongeon connected with Terry Kurth, a former Barefoot Grass Lawn Service franchisee, who was under a three-year non-compete agreement after TruGreen-Chem-Lawn's 1997 acquisition of Barefoot. Mongeon didn't yet have a strategy for entering the U.S. market, but he knew Kurth from the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA, now part of PLANET) and wanted to pick his brain.

"I said, 'Come up to Canada, our treat, and we'll talk about some concepts,'" Mongeon says. Out of that meeting came the idea of a subfranchising model: bringing on American lawn care veterans to sell, setup and support franchises within their own territories.

continued on page 20

HOW TO CREATE SYSTEMS

Creating business systems—a linchpin of Weed Man USA's success—sounds like a complicated process fit for a business school grad.

Jennifer Lemcke, COO of Weed Man USA, assures you it's not. Systemizing your business can dramatically transform the culture from one of chaos to one of order, she says. The first step is knowing where to start.

Lemcke takes a tip from business guru Stephen Covey, suggesting you "begin with the end in mind."

In other words, figure out what you'd like the outcome to be. Next, define what you need to accomplish that goal, document the process, determine what metrics will reflect success and follow up to ensure employees are using the system.

For instance, when Weed Man USA franchisees began asking about how other locations were getting customer referrals, Lemcke set out to create a formal referral process. After identifying the goal ("create a system for obtaining referrals"), she began to work backward to achieve it, gathering information from multiple sources. "What's our process in Canada? What are our top 10 franchisees doing?" are the questions she began asking.

She discovered most franchisees receive about 4.5 percent of business from referrals, but some "superstars" have more than double that amount at 9 percent. How could all units get to that level?

She collected all the referral-related marketing collateral she could, analyzed existing data about referrals and brainstormed this topic from the customers' point of view. The conclusion was it's all about the technician, as that's the relationship clients cherish the most. Now, there's an entire process laid out for technicians. It details how to ask for a referral, what materials to use and how to follow up (with a thank-you note asking for another referral).

In December, when Weed Man USA franchisees attended the company's national conference in Florida, they went home with a list of best practices and ready-to-go marketing materials such as door hangers.

"We just work backward," she says.



THE SUB WAY

Turf Holdings Inc. (THI) counts its move in 1999 to recruit American lawn care veterans to be sub-franchisors as one of Weed Man USA's keys to success. These are the subs who've helped build the business. THI itself serves as the subfranchisor for the regions not covered below.

Steve Russell and Chuck Russell

Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Southern Illinois
Brothers and owners of Eradico Services, a Michigan-based provider of pest control; lawn, tree and shrub care; and holiday lighting services.

Ken Heltemes

North Carolina, Georgia
Former multiunit franchisee for Barefoot Grass Lawn Service.

Terry Kurth and Andy Kurth

Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Northern Illinois
Father-son team; Terry Kurth is a former multiunit franchisee for Barefoot Grass Lawn Service.

John Sanders

New Jersey, Eastern New York, Eastern Pennsylvania
Former independent lawn care firm owner; sold to ServiceMaster.

Phil Fogarty

Ohio, Western New York, Western Pennsylvania
Former independent lawn care firm owner; sold to The Scotts Co.

Bruce Sheppard and Brandon Sheppard

Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Washington D.C., Delaware, South Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Northern Florida
Father-son team; Bruce Sheppard is a former lawn care industry supplier and independent lawn care company owner.

Jon Cundiff

Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Northern Texas
Former independent lawn care company owner.



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ALL SYSTEMS GO

continued from page 18

What was the draw for the subfranchisors, many of whom had already operated—and sold—successful lawn care companies of their own? “If they own a part of it and get a chunk of the royalty payments, they’ll be inside Weed Man (USA), but it will be their own business,” Mongeon says of the idea. “That’s how we sold it: An opportunity to leverage their expertise in a way they couldn’t on their own.”

This strategy resonated with many of the lawn care professionals Mongeon and Kurth approached to join the company, and it set Weed Man USA apart from the existing franchise systems in the market. By 2001, THI added as many subfranchisors as it wanted to, peaking at 13. THI has since bought back three subfranchise areas, with those former subs staying on as franchisees.

“Terry’s Rolodex was very important,” says Mongeon, as were his own acquaintances from PLCAA. Although, every potential sub his team approached initially wasn’t a good cultural fit.

“For us, the selection process was very key to our success,” says Lemcke, who today serves as COO of THI.

Systems, plan are the secret

As a franchisee in Canada, Mongeon’s business grew fast, fueled primarily by

passion, Lemcke says. But that approach only works for so long. “There’s a time you get tired and say, ‘I don’t know if I can do this.’ You have a choice of going backward or stopping growth, but that’s not where we wanted to go,” she says. “We wanted to continue to grow our business.”

The tipping point for Mongeon’s Canadian franchise group came around 1998. It needed to institute standard processes or risk burnout or stalled growth. Lemcke was integral to creating these procedures for business areas such as hiring, door-to-door marketing and more. (See sidebar, “How to create systems.”) Today those processes, coupled with the annual business plan template Mongeon first developed, are the hallmark of Weed Man USA’s operations.

“If you start off with great people and you stick with your commitment to tak-

ing care of your customers—what Des Rice brought to Weed Man—and then you instill this cultural way of looking at your business through a business plan, that’s the heart of the franchise system we brought to the U.S.,” Mongeon says. “Through that we use people and systems to make sure once you develop the business plan, you can execute the plan.”

More about that plan: It’s a document each franchisee creates during a two-and-a-half-day meeting in the fall for the following year. It’s not merely a budget. It includes a zero-based budget, marketing tactics, hiring, equipment buying and more—all laid out with a schedule for the year.

“Our franchisees are totally committed to it,” Mongeon says. “They look at the business plan and systems as being the core.”



PHOTO: BRIANTZETZ.BRIANTZETZ.COM

HISTORY OF WEED MAN USA

1970

Des and Brenda Rice found Weed Man in Canada.

1986

Roger Mongeon purchases first Weed Man franchise in Hull, Quebec.

1992

Weed Man sells out territories in Canada.

1996

Weed Man awards Mongeon’s Turf Holdings Inc. (THI) the master franchise rights to the U.S., creating Weed Man USA.

1976

Weed Man begins franchising in Canada.

1989

Mongeon adds seven more territories in Montreal, Quebec.

1993

Mongeon leads a group of family-and-friend shareholders and expands into Ontario, acquiring multiple franchises. Future Weed Man USA COO Jennifer Lemcke joins her father’s Ottawa, Quebec, location.

1999

THI adopts a subfranchising model to expand into the U.S.

“SYSTEMS ARE ONLY GOOD IF PEOPLE BELIEVE IN THEM AND USE THEM.

—ROGER MONGEON

Also integral to the business plan on the franchisee level is an open-book concept. “What that allows us to do is to get complete buy-in from the employees and management team,” Lemcke

says. “It sets tone for the year and allows managers to work as a team.”

Finally, Weed Man USA’s business plan model gets great results because it’s a living document, Lemcke says.

“Many people make a business plan, but they don’t make it alive throughout the year,” she says. “They put it on a shelf, and at the end of the year say, ‘We either made it or we didn’t.’”

The Weed Man USA plan is interactive. Managers may adjust it on a weekly or daily basis with data from accounting and sales. “For example, if we start to see our marketing is falling behind, we can say, ‘You’re working Friday night,’” Lemcke says. “Because if you get too far behind, eventually you’re going to lose the game.”

As much as the business plan and systems are practical tools, they’re also psychological motivators, Mongeon says.

“All of this is instilling the belief that you will succeed,” he says. “That’s the key ingredient. The thing about systems is they’re only good if people believe in them and use them. If you believe you’re going to succeed, you’re going to work yourself to death because you know it’s going to work. That’s what all of this data and the plan bring. That’s what we have

right now: that tremendous belief we’re going to be successful.”

No surprise, Weed Man USA has a 10-year plan. By 2023 the company expects to more than double its licenses, territories and 2013 system sales to \$138 million. That’s well beyond what Mongeon, in 1987, believed his lawn care company would be. **LM**

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2012

Weed Man USA/THI hits \$53.4 million in U.S. franchise system sales.

2013

Weed Man USA/THI projects more than \$60 million in system sales.



How to manage your *online reputation*

Learn from one landscape contractor's concerted effort to make his company's online image shine. BY JIM LEWIS

It's easier than ever before for customers to access the Better Business Bureau (BBB) as well as sites like Angie's List, Yelp, Citysearch, Google+ and dozens of others that prompt consumers to leave online reviews. Posting negative reviews to these forums is empowering for consumers. It's a way for them to "get back at you" if, for any reason, they're unhappy with your services. Needless to say, consumers unfortunately often misuse that power.

The problem for contractors is the small percentage of people who are upset with your company is 10 times more likely to sound off than the percentage of happy customers. Your company may have hundreds or thousands of satisfied clients, but a prospect who's checking you out online may get a skewed impression of your business based on remarks from a few displeased customers who, ironically, were happy to take the time to complain online. It's an unfortunate and unfair situation for contractors that

requires you to raise your game and work harder than ever before to protect your company's reputation.

For landscape contractors in the residential landscaping market, this is particularly important. Though, companies with mainly commercial accounts aren't off the hook. People everywhere head to the web to research companies online before they consider giving them a call. Having bad reviews will cost you calls and, ultimately, cost you jobs. Thus, protecting your reputation can make or break your company.

What to do about bad reviews

Fortunately, there are several steps you can take to better manage your online reputation and restore your company image. They require a proactive, diligent approach, meaning you have to make them a priority. The slow season is a great time to work on this.

1 The first thing to do is become aware of your company's current online reputation. Check the aforementioned sites

and find others by doing a web search for your company name plus the word "reviews." Read every review carefully and take note of where you stand now.

2 Next, if you have negative reviews, make a concerted effort to respond to those reviews politely and with facts, not emotionally. For example, don't write: "This customer was a royal pain from the start. Nobody wanted to work with her. Plus, she kept asking for extra stuff for free." A better response is: "We did have difficulty from the beginning trying to understand this client's wishes. But we made an earnest effort to understand what she expected and fulfill those requests. We reworked several areas until she was satisfied and even threw in a few extras."

3 Then make it a point to get your happy clients to leave reviews on that site for you. Your goal is to drown out the negative reviews with positive ones. It's not always easy to get satisfied customers to take time out of their

schedules to leave a review for you, but if you catch them at the right time or surprise them with a little something extra at the end of your project, they will be much more motivated to do so. You have to get creative. Be on the lookout for opportunities to ask customers to post reviews about you, such as when you've just wrapped up a job and they're glowing about their newly installed, pristine landscapes. It gets easier over time. (See Web Extras, "Asking for positive reviews.")

Beyond reviews

There also are things you can do—even without any reviews—to make your company's online image go from mediocre to impressive. For instance, many companies don't have an A rating with the BBB simply because they've never taken the time to update the BBB with their company information.

A few years ago, I found my Beaverton, Ore.-based company Lewis Landscape Services had a B+ rating, despite there being no complaints filed against it. Turns out, BBB rated my firm this way because it didn't have enough information. Once I completed my profile—which is free to do—the bureau upped my grade to an A rating. Next, I asked BBB about how to receive an A+. I was told I needed to be in business for more than 10 years with a good record. I had been, and once I provided proof of my 10-year existence, my rating bumped up to an A+.

After that production, the next step was to begin promoting that Lewis Landscape Services had an A+ rating with the BBB. That meant becoming accredited, which cost time and money. Initially, it took about four hours of completing forms. It cost me \$1,700 last year, based on my annual revenue. It wasn't an enjoyable process, but I'm glad I did it. Once accredited, I was allowed to use the A+ BBB rating on proposals, my company website and other marketing materials. I was surprised how much of a difference it made to our customers. Many of our clients voiced they were very impressed to see we had an A+ rat-

ing. I never knew how much they valued that designation until we promoted it. Our efforts paid off, as the percent of jobs we landed went up.

You can do similar things to improve your profile on sites like Angie's List, Citysearch, etc. Most review sites allow you, as the business, to take ownership of your listing. After you've done that, you can respond to reviews, upload photos of your work, give a description of your company and more. It just takes a little time in front of a computer screen to drastically improve your profile and image.

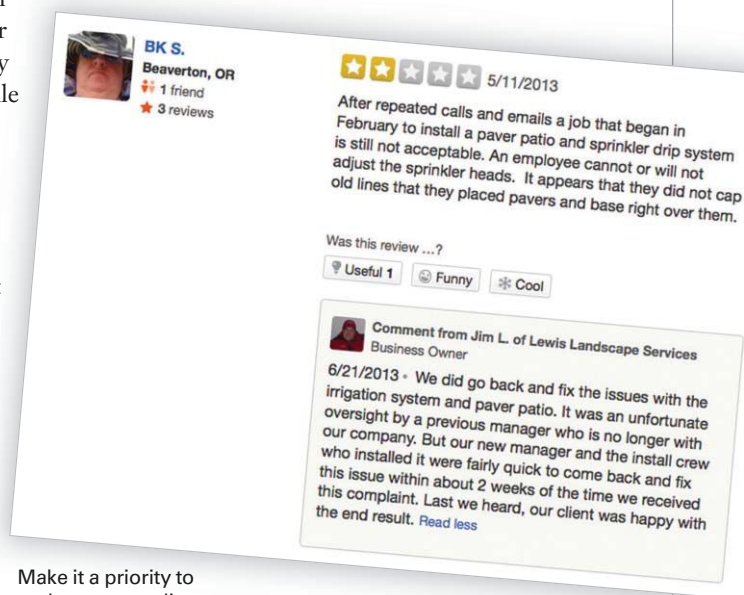
Additionally, many consumers look at more than one review site when checking out companies. The BBB and Angie's List definitely have the most market share. But don't discount all the others. Your goal should be to have the best possible profile on any and all online review sites. Remember, even if you don't yet have reviews on certain sites, just creating a profile, providing a good description and uploading photos of your work can make a big impression on people looking around the Internet for information about your company. So take charge of these profiles. Do everything you can to make them as positive as possible.

Always leave customers happy

The other side of reputation management involves making sure your customers are pleased. That sounds obvious, but occasionally, despite your best efforts, some people are never satisfied. You can't control that. When you run into those clients, you may have to do more than

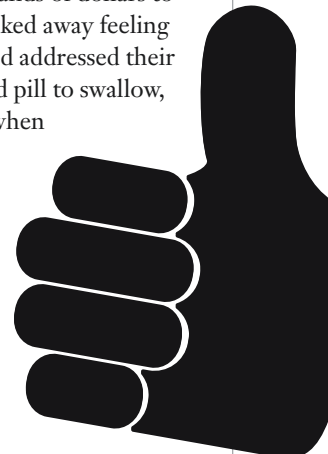
you should to make sure they're at least left feeling like they aren't owed anything. An angry consumer who believes he or she was ripped off is much worse for you than someone who you couldn't please with your services, but with whom you could come to a resolution. The former customer is much more likely to leave a negative review online about your company than the latter.

With the hundreds of customers Lewis Landscape Services serves, it's



Make it a priority to reply to poor online reviews on sites like Yelp (pictured), Jim Lewis says.

bound to run into some difficult, overly-demanding or totally irrational clients. So is your company. How you respond to these situations can make a huge difference for your reputation. My company has had jobs where it refunded customers hundreds or, in rare cases, thousands of dollars to make sure they walked away feeling like I listened to and addressed their concerns. It's a hard pill to swallow, refunding money when you know you did everything right. I've met many contractors who wouldn't do it, just on principle, and I understand their concerns. But you have to *continued on page 26*



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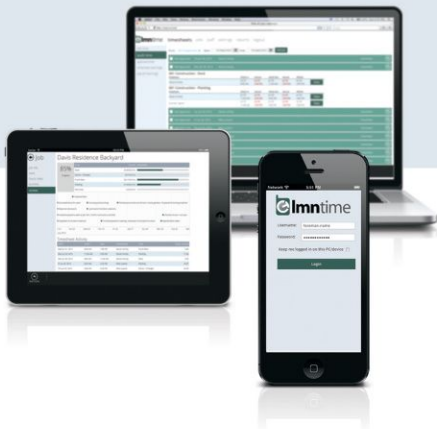


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ONLINE IMAGE

continued from page 23

look at the bigger picture. If that customer goes away angry with your company, feeling the situation wasn't resolved, how much damage could it do to your reputation?

My company works very hard to make sure all customers are happy with our



GET YOUR HAPPY CLIENTS TO LEAVE ONLINE REVIEWS FOR YOU. YOUR GOAL IS TO DROWN OUT THE NEGATIVE REVIEWS WITH POSITIVE ONES.

workmanship. And at least 99 percent of the time they are. But when a client's satisfaction goes south, you can do your company a huge favor by staying calm,

addressing their concerns as best as you can, acting professionally and keeping your emotions at bay. If the only solution is to give a partial refund, so be it.

In those instances, I try to negotiate as little of a refund as possible and I have the client sign an agreement drawn up by my attorney. A key clause in that agreement is the "hold harmless" clause, in which both parties agree, as part of the settlement, not to defame the other in any way, including via online reviews. I make sure my customer understands that part of the agreement.

Most of the time you're going to be better off losing money and cutting bait than you would be sticking to your guns and fighting the consequences of a negative review.

In today's reputation-driven, consumer-empowered world, your image is key. You'll spend more time and money trying to restore your reputation after a few bad reviews than you would have lost by simply settling with the client.

Your image as a high-quality company will be maintained if you use your reputation to your advantage in your marketing, website and proposals. I ensure it will pay off for you in the long term. The growth and success Lewis Landscape Services has seen in recent years, I can attest, is due to the fact it's worked diligently to quell the negative and promote the positive. Everyone has upset customers from time to time. It's how you address and respond to those situations that can make all the difference for your company's reputation. **LM**

Lewis is president of Lewis Landscape Services, a \$3 million design/build, maintenance and irrigation firm in Beaverton, Ore.

» WEB EXTRAS

To learn about how Lewis asks for positive reviews and for an example of the company's client settlement agreement, visit the Web Extras section of [Landscape Management.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net).

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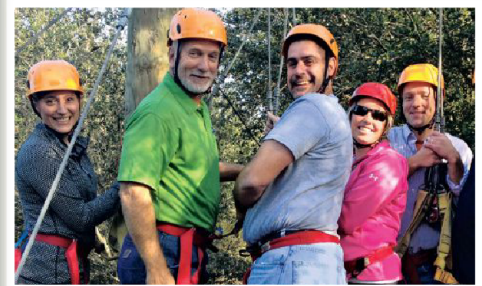


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PG 30

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PG 34

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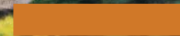
PG 38

MARKETWATCH

SERVICE SEGMENT SNAPSHOTS

Tussey Landscaping's tours couple community giving with attracting leads.

PAGE 34



A grower's fescue grass seed field stretches into the horizon in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

The new norm?

Suppliers discuss the underlier for turfseed shortages and high prices. *By SARAH PFELEDDERER*

Gone are the days when turfseed fields dominantly cloaked the surfaces of Willamette Valley, Ore.

Crops such as wheat, corn and soybeans overtake the grounds that once were boasted as the world's turfseed capital.

Meanwhile, lawn care professionals have been pulling more money out of company bank accounts to pay higher prices for the lesser supply. When will prices drop?

The answer may be never, suppliers say. The reason lies in a span of events stemming from the housing market crash in 2008 and the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009.

THE HISTORY

Prior to the recession, the annual value of grass seed was more than \$500 million in Oregon, according to the Oregon Seed Council. In 2009, that value was nearly split in half to \$300 million.

Coinciding with those figures, Bruce Jump, turfseed production manager at WinField Solutions, based in Shoreview, Minn., recalls the housing market booming in the mid-2000s. (Keep in mind, each new house warrants a new lawn.)

"Housing was going crazy," Jump says.

"Construction was going crazy. We could not get enough seed in the ground."

Then the recession hit hard in 2008, and the housing market plummeted. Going down with it was the number of lawns installed, thus the demand for turfseed declined.

Suppliers, like DLF Pickseed USA, were left with an overhang of inventory, says Leah Brillman, director of product management and technical services at DLF Pickseed.

"Companies ended up having to sell that seed for less than it cost them to buy it," she says. "Companies lost money. Growers lost money."

Suppliers began scaling back turfseed production and growers replaced grass seed with crops offering better yields and more money, such as wheat, corn, soybeans, forages, hazelnut, hops and cover crops.

Turfseed suppliers now have run out of their excess supply and growers don't have plentiful acres set aside to grow their products. Hence, suppliers are struggling to get their product in the ground due to too stiff of competition from the aforementioned crops.

The bottom line: Supply is not meeting demand and end-users, like landscape and lawn care professionals,

are paying for it. In Brillman's words, "Everybody is in a big pickle."

"In order to get our growers to plant seed, we have to offer them a higher price," she says. "We have to get more money from the customers to offer more to farmers."

Murray Wingate, marketing manager at Lebanon Turf in Lebanon, Pa., says, "That's the most underlying change for prices remaining higher."

SUPPLIERS RESPONDING

"The competition for acres in Willamette Valley is tougher here than I've ever seen because there's more commodities (replacement crops) for farmers," says Keith Laxton, service manager at Landmark Turf & Native Seed. "While the demand for grass seed is pretty good, the supply is pretty tight."

The notion of replacing turfseed wasn't one that came overnight to growers, though, adds Laxton, who is based out of Albany, Ore.

"In the past few years, those commodities have gotten to levels where farmers can make more money growing those things than they could growing grass seed," he says.

As a distributor who buys seed from around 10 suppliers, Jump has seen the

The Ticker: LAWN CARE

quandary trickle down to his customers first-hand, saying he's seen a 30 percent to 40 percent increase in grass seed prices over the past four years.

Slightly adding to the equation of shortages is poor weather conditions, which can negatively affect yields, Wingate says.

With all these considerations working against suppliers, Laxton says, for suppliers to get their product planted, they must be in a customer-service mindset similar to that of a landscape contractor, building strong relationships with growers rather than competing on price because everyone can do that.

"We begin to think of (growers) more as customers than vendors," Laxton says. "We have to distinguish ourselves with reliable communication."

EXPECTATIONS FOR 2014

Supply, Brillman says, won't meet demand in 2014, especially for high-quality seed.

"We always say you don't know what you've got until you've got it in the barn," she says. "If we'd hit the correct amount of yield on all the species, we would not be where we are right now."

Suppliers say in 2014 landscape professionals should plan ahead for shortages of the following varieties:

- › perennial ryegrass;
- › tall fescues;
- › some Kentucky bluegrasses;
- › fine fescues; and
- › hard fescues.

To combat the shortages, Jump says customers should be placing early orders with their distributors now. Landscape contractors, he says, also should be open-minded to using varieties in higher supply.

Tell distributors what you're looking for out of the grass, he says, not the specific variety you normally use.

"What do you want your seed to accomplish for you? Have those agronomic discussions," Jump says. "The earlier you can have those conversations, then we can get your seed locked in."

Plainfield, Ill.-based **Spring-Green Lawn Care** hired Jeff Shufelt as its new director of franchising development. He will work with new franchisees and head up efforts to continue franchise expansion. A former Barefoot Grass Lawn Service executive, he most recently worked for Blue Sky Group as a mergers and acquisitions intermediary.

Dow AgroSciences' Defendor specialty herbicide received registration in New York and Massachusetts, adding to the 45

other states the postemergent herbicide is usable in. Registrations still are pending from Arizona, California and Hawaii.

The **Oregon Department of Agriculture** (ODA) issued six civil penalties totaling \$2,886 in connection with four bumblebee kill-off incidents in 2013. Clackamas-based **Collier Arbor Care**, a division of Bartlett Tree Experts, was cited, as were several of its applicators, for two separate instances of applying insecticides to European



linden trees in bloom, an act that violates the products' labels. In addition to investigating and enforcing the state pesticide laws, Oregon has taken other measures following the bee deaths, including education and new state pesticide registration requirements for 2014.

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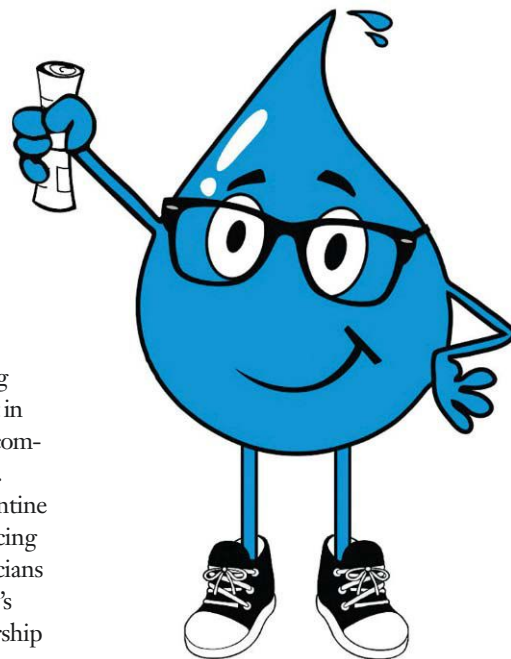
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Marketing moguls

Virginia contractor comes out on top of Smart Marketing Contest *By SARAH PFLEDDERER*



In a state where water conservation may be more of an afterthought than a leading concern, Glen Allen, Va.-based James River Grounds Management (JRGM) acknowledged the matter from a marketing standpoint better than any other contractor in the country, as seen by the Irrigation Association (IA).

The full-service company, which is 10 percent irrigation, won the contractor category of the IA's 2013 Smart Marketing Contest.

In its fourth year, the contest recognizes irrigation professionals who most creatively and efficiently promote water conservation within their companies and to water end-users during Smart Irrigation Month in July.

JRGM pulled out a marketing tactic it had seen success with in the past to get its community pepped about its campaign: Creating a mascot.

Kelly Valentine, sales and marketing administrator, designed Drip, a mascot in the form of raindrop, who guided the company through Smart Irrigation Month.

Spearheading the campaign, Valentine kicked it off with a blog post introducing JRGM's team of six irrigation technicians and Drip as a friend to the company's mascot, Pip, which stands for partnership in planning.

Taking a content marketing approach, she called on the expertise of Roger Barden, CLIA, irrigation manager at JRGM, to get out the most pertinent information to water end-users.

Smart irrigation fundamentals, Barden says, were the most important education elements for the company.

"In Virginia, really, we're not in the stage of having to do a whole lot of water conservation just yet," he says. "We're just trying to get ahead of everyone on that theme. It just makes sense."

A chief message the company relayed, Valentine says, was about irrigation technology, such as rain sensors, precision nozzles and soil moisture sensors—products that simplify the irrigation process and save time and money.

Throughout the month, Valentine composed a total of three educational blog posts—the first, introducing the campaign; the second, providing product breakdowns; and the third, wrapping up the outreach with a video of an irrigation audit, which garnered nearly 200 views on YouTube.

She also posted multiple tips per week on smart water practices to the company's Facebook page. Some of those included:

- ▶ Creating water zones for plants;
- ▶ Adjusting watering schedules depending on weather conditions;
- ▶ Maintaining and examining sprinkler systems; and
- ▶ Ways to improve conservation habits in daily routines.

Additionally, as a play on smart irrigation, JRGM distributed to clients bottles of Glacéau Smartwater with a Smart Irrigation Month koozie and tag about Drip.

"Our efforts did not go unnoticed, that's for sure," Valentine says. "Our concept itself and our creativity helped draw more attention to the idea of Smart



Roger Barden (right) accepts James River Grounds Management's 2013 Smart Marketing Contest award at the Irrigation Show & Education Conference from Smart Irrigation Month committee chair Lowell Kaufhold.

Irrigation Month rather than increasing our contract sales for irrigation.”

Increasing sales, though, was never JRGM's reason for participating in the contest, Valentine says.

“Our goal was to educate, inform and then enable our clients to know the technologies and tactics we have to provide them with not only a smaller water bill, but a greener landscape,” she says. “It's not just cutting grass anymore. As a company, we have the ability to impact our community around us.”

From an internal perspective, Barden says the contest boosted “team morale” within the irrigation division.

“All the production team was on board with this, helping to look for



things that could help the clients save money,”

he said at the Irrigation Show & Education Conference in Austin, Texas, where he traveled to receive the award Nov. 6.

Reflecting on JRGM's efforts, he said at the show: “Our clients now know we care. We care about our environment and we care about them.”

James River Grounds Management promoted Smart Irrigation Month through Facebook, a company blog, client gifts and a mascot named Drip.

The Ticker:

IRRIGATION

Tucor and **Netafim's** landscape division partnered to develop web-based smart control systems, which will be marketed by Netafim. The controllers will feature multifunction capabilities, including conventional, two-wire (decoder) and hybrid operation.

The **Irrigation Association** developed three new spreadsheets to assist irrigation designers and auditors: developed pipe sizing, dripline and scheduling calculators free for download by IA members at ow.ly/ruNPu.

The **Rain Bird Academy Boot Camp**, taking place now through April, is a four-and-a-half-day training program for the IA's Certified Irrigation Technician (CIT) exam. At the end of each event, Rain Bird hosts the IA CIT exam.

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Spotlighting spaces, locking in leads

Through its Outdoor Living Spaces Tour, Tussey Landscaping markets itself amid giving back. *By SARAH PFLEDDERER*

Arla Bratton had only one product in mind to add to her landscape when she set out on Tussey Landscaping's Outdoor Living Spaces Tour two years ago: Bubbling rocks.

"That's what I was interested in to begin with, just the bubbling rocks," she says. "Then I saw the pondless waterfall."

The annual, self-guided tour features about 10 homes landscaped by Tussey Landscaping, a Hollidaysburg, Pa.-based, design/build firm with a 95 percent residential client base.

By Bratton's last stop, bubbling rocks were at the bottom of her list of backyard additions.

"It turned into a total makeover," says Bratton, who became a client of Tussey Landscaping shortly after.

Walk out Bratton's backdoor today, and you'll step onto a stone porch extension complete with a fire pit, built-in pizza oven and that pondless waterfall surrounded by landscaping.

Clients like Bratton are the ROI Tussey Landscaping has earned since starting its Outdoor Living Spaces Tour eight years ago, says

Steve Martin, owner.

"The people that go on the tours, they just rave," he says. "We always see a number of calls and folks that will set up a consultation after the tour."



PULLING IT TOGETHER

Profits from the ticketed event go to The Arc of Blair County, an Altoona, Pa.-based nonprofit that serves individuals with disabilities.

Last year's tour, held Sept. 14, raised \$1,200 for the The Arc. Tussey sold more than 200 tickets at \$10 per couple and \$18 per group, with no limit to the number of people per group. The company spent about \$1,500 marketing the event.

"It's just an extra layer that goes into our marketing," Martin says, and recalls the first year of the tour, in 2006, drew about 70 people. "I think it's very effective that proceeds go to a charity. ... It's a way to give back to the community that's fun for everybody."

Martin adopted the idea for the Outdoor Living Spaces Tour from the pond tours put on by Chicago-based Aquascape Designs, for which Tussey Landscaping is a certified contractor.

Tussey Landscaping began with just pond tours as well. A couple years later it changed the name to the Outdoor Living Spaces Tour to draw better attention to hardscaping featured. Two years ago, as a callout to the landscape lighting featured, it tagged onto the tour a "Moonlight Walk."

The tour typically runs from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., allowing attendees to begin and

About 10 homes, landscaped by Tussey Landscaping, are featured on its Outdoor Living Spaces Tour.

continued on page 36



Steve Martin

LANDSCAPE



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DATE	SPECIAL GUEST	PROGRAM TOPIC	SPONSOR
1/8	Kathryn Dager , Consultant, <i>Profitivity Inc.</i>	How to Create a Profitability Team	
1/15	Tim Hionis , Vendor, <i>Hionis Greenhouses</i>	Growing with your Grower	
1/22	Gene Stickley , Vendor, <i>Ball Horticultural</i>	Annuals - Selecting, planting, growing	
1/29	Vinnie Stigliano , Vendor, <i>Fleet Track</i>	Fleet Management and Tracking	
2/5	Maria Semple , Consultant, <i>The Prospect Finder, LLC</i>	Leveraging LinkedIn for Prospecting	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>
2/12	Matt Moskowitz , Vendor, <i>American Profit Recovery</i>	Diplomatic Debt Collection	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>

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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MARKETWATCH

continued from page 34

end at their leisure and swing by as many homes as their schedules allow.

"It is totally self guided. They can start wherever they want to, end up wherever they want to," Martin says. "At any point in the day, there's people at all locations. That's how it works."

Tickets are sold on Tussey Landscaping's website and over the counter at its supply center Tussey Mountain Mulch. Upon purchase, ticketholders may print off directions to the featured homes as well as descriptions of the landscaped properties.

Included in the tour stops every year are Martin's home and the Tussey Mountain Mulch facility, where chefs prepare food for visitors throughout the day. Martin aims to debut a range of landscapes and will cycle out three to five new homes every year on the tour.

"We send a letter out or ask clients if they're interested," he says. "Normally these kind of people would like to showcase their backyard."

Bratton's home made the list of tour stops last year and, as a customer, she says, it was flatter-



Profits from the Outdoor Living Spaces Tour benefit The Arc of Blair County. Tickets are sold at \$10 per person or \$18 per group.

ing to be asked to open up her space to the public.

"It was a compliment that they wanted to feature my house because mine is more family-oriented landscaping," she says. "It made me feel very good."

The concept of homeowners opening up their spaces is pleasing to Martin as well—especially from a sales standpoint.

"Some (homeowners) actually have refreshments out and they just tell everyone all about their project and how it went," he says. "They turn into our salespeople."

The Ticker:

DESIGN/BUILD

John Deere added two skid-steer models, 318E and 320E, and two compact track loader models, 319E and 323E, to the E-Series line introduced in 2013.



Aquascape Designs opened two new educational portals this month: Aquascape Academy Online and Aquascape Academy Hands-On. The online training includes video sessions, iPad tutorials, PowerPoint presentations and quizzes. Hands-On is free, instructor-led classroom and training sessions held at the company headquarters in St. Charles, Ill.

Bobcat Co. released its first Tier 4 loaders. These machines debuted with new Bobcat-branded, non-diesel particulate filter engines. The new engines, used in 500 frame-size loaders, have a 4 percent to 12 percent increase in torque over previous models.



The 2013 Outdoor Living Spaces Tour drew more than 200 people and raised \$1,200 for The Arc of Blair County.



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WORKING TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

Together with key industry partners, Project EverGreen has established the following programs to help make a greater impact, sooner:

GreenCare for Troops SnowCare for Troops



- Project EverGreen connects military families with lawn and landscape companies, as well as snow removal companies to receive free services while their loved one is serving overseas.
- More than 3,500 contractor volunteers and 12,000 military families have signed up for GCFT, while 1,100 contractor volunteers and 1,500 military families signed up for SCFT.
- These popular programs have garnered attention on TV and in newspapers across the nation including Mike Rowe's *Dirty Jobs* and NBC's *Nightly News*.

Community Based Revitalization Projects

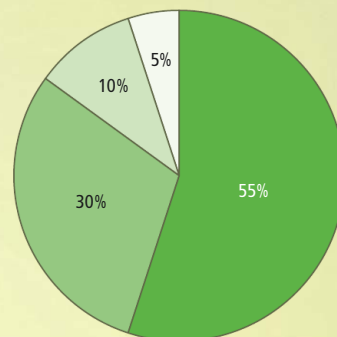
- Focused community revitalization and renovation projects across the United States encourage industry professionals, consumers and anyone who's passionate about healthy green spaces to work together to improve their city and surrounding areas.
- Over the last seven years, our message has made a positive impact in: Akron, Ohio; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Greensboro, Raleigh and Charlotte, North Carolina; Ft. Myers, Florida; Toronto, Canada; and San Antonio, Texas.
- Maintained green spaces generated community engagement, involvement and communication among residents, city leaders and visitors.

GreenCare for Youth

- By reaching out to children of all ages, we can create a greener tomorrow.
- The Art of Green Spaces Competition, sponsored by Birds and Blooms, encourages students to use all forms of art to share how they feel about the green spaces in their lives.
- Golf bag tags, featuring messages on the benefits of green spaces, are given to participants of the GCBAA Sticks for Kids program.
- Youth sports field renovations make playing surfaces better and safer.

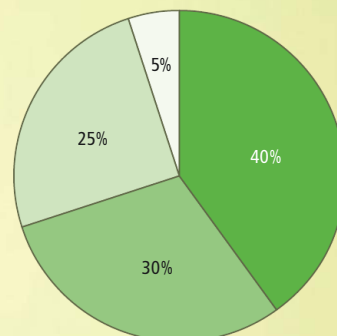
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Fields of green

A contractor uses crop-sensing technology to save money and improve athletic turf conditions.

By JONATHAN KATZ

The athletic fields Pat Hester's Clintar Landscape Management franchise maintains near Barrie, Ontario, have never looked greener, thanks to technology commonly used in agriculture. Last spring, the company began using GPS and crop-sensing equipment to record data about turf health each time it mows a field.

The data allow Hester to analyze turf conditions remotely, eliminating extra on-site visits. The company also uses the GPS-enabled location information to target areas that require fertilizer rather than performing blanket applications.

The system has helped Clintar save about \$1,800 per fertilizer application on athletic fields, Hester says.

"Before, we would fertilize the whole field and apply the same amount every time," Hester says. "Now, before we go out fertilizing we'll pull out the readings, print them and outline the areas where

we're going to direct our fertilizing and areas where we're going to go lighter."

Fuel expenses have declined as well, with fewer trips to the sites, though Hester has not tracked those exact savings. The system cost approximately \$13,000. Hester says he expects to see a return on the investment within three years.

SENSING A PROBLEM

Hester first heard about the technology at sports turf seminars. He wanted a way to more efficiently manage his properties, some of which were three hours apart.

"For me to check on them was a full-time job, which I don't have the time to do," says Hester, who purchased a system called GreenSeeker from GPS technology provider Trimble Navigation. The system comes with a sensing unit, which the company mounted to a mower, and software.

The sensing unit shoots a beam of light from the front of the mower, takes a reading and stores information about the field. Hester downloads the data into the software program, which plots the readings on a satellite image. From there, he can see any stressed turf areas. The readings are color coded and graded on a scale of zero to one. For instance, a dark green reading of 0.9 indicates healthy turf. A yellow reading of 0.4 represents unhealthy turf.



"It's a critical heads up that allows us to tailor the care of that field," Hester says. "I know I have to do something to get that grass growing properly, whether it's fertilize or treat for pests or adjust the irrigation schedule."

He says the system has had a positive impact on customer satisfaction. The ability to quickly address problems reduces the need for his clients to conduct costly field renovations.

"We learned a lot about the condition of our fields and were able to put together a proper maintenance plan," said Rick Mutuchky, central operations supervisor, Simcoe County District School Board, for whom Hester maintains 18 fields. "The technology is very impressive."

The only challenge Hester says he's faced with the system is the number of steps required to read the data. "It's a lot of clicking to get the info from the tractor into where I can see it," Hester says. He expects the system to become less complex in the future with software updates. **LM**

Green, healthy plants reflect light differently than stressed plants do, resulting in different data readings.

The Ticker: MAINTENANCE

Polaris Industries will supply **Ariens Co.** with a work vehicle under the Gravelly brand. Polaris has executed similar partnerships in the past, such as its ongoing partnership with **Bobcat Co.**

Texas landscape firms **Greater Texas Landscape Services** (GTL) and **Hadden Landscap-**

ing merged. Terms weren't disclosed. The firms will exist as individual corporate entities and will share resources. Tucson, Ariz.-based The Groundskeeper will be the parent company of both. Hadden has locations in Plano and Fort Worth. GTL is based in Lewisville and has other service locations in Waco, Austin, San Antonio, Rio Grande Valley and Houston.

Katz is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

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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.

Do more sales calls = more sales?

Q I worked with a consultant who told me the best way to improve my design/build sales was to go out on more sales calls. What are your thoughts?

A I've heard this theory for many years and used to believe it—it seems to make sense. But let's assume on average you meet with 30 new clients a month and close with about 10 of them, around 33 percent. Not a great closing rate. Now let's also make the assumption your average sale is \$6,000 on the jobs you close, thus your total sales for the month are \$60,000. Therefore, if you want to increase your sales by 20 percent and make \$72,000 a month instead of \$60,000, you just need to make two more sales at \$6,000 each. Seems easy enough. But wait: To make those two additional sales you will need to see six more customers or 36 total, based on your closing rate.

Before we go any further, let's do the math another way. We'll make the same assumption that you see 30 customers a month. Instead of dividing the \$60,000 in sales by 10, giving you an average of \$6,000 per customer, divide the \$60,000 by the total amount of customers you saw for the month (30). Your average sale per lead is only \$2,000. You see, those 20 customers who didn't buy anything from you still count. You still had to meet with them, invest time in an estimate and possibly a design, plus you had to have a minimum of two meetings (the initial consultation meeting and the follow-up or sales meeting). That's quite a bit of time per lead. To be honest, 30 design/build leads a month is a lot for anyone, let alone setting a new goal of 36.

Next, let's look at how much time each lead takes you. Once again, we'll start with 30 new leads a month. If we assume each lead takes six hours of your time, we come up with 180 hours a month or 45 hours a week. Some leads may just be a one-hour meeting and others may require a design and proposal plus two or three meetings. Once you add everything up, this process can take up to 20 hours (or more). Six hours per lead is conservative.

Now, let's consider you want to increase your sales by 20 percent. Using your consultant's "more is more" theory, you'll need to see six more clients a month, which is an additional 36 hours a month or nine hours a week. This brings you to a total of 216 hours a month or 54 hours a week. Still doable, but we're getting pretty high in man-hours. Don't get me wrong, during busier times of the year 54 hours a week is not unheard of for a salesperson, especially considering many appointments are on weekends and evenings when most people have finished their regular eight- or nine-hour workdays.

This brings up another point. Every salesperson I know does not just go on appointments, do design work and sell. Many do the estimating, some do job costing, but all of them are required to go out in the field during the installation to make sure the design is being installed as they envisioned it. This means painting out patios and walkways, laying out bed-lines, confirming elevations, moving plants around and making field changes as needed. Plus, time is required to meet with your clients during the project to make sure they're happy with the work.

Factor in all of that time, and your 54-hour week becomes 70 or 80 hours. And what about next year when you want to grow another 20 percent? How many hours a week will that be, and is it humanly possible to work that much?

By now I think you realize I whole-heartedly disagree with the "more is more" theory from a logical perspective and personal experience.

The better solution is the contrary. Reduce the amount of calls you go on and increase your sales per customer. This approach can be achieved by having a better client-screening process, charging for your design work and servicing your paying customers better. Instead of working 80 hours a week, you'll be doing 40, and selling more work than ever before. You might even go on a vacation.

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

Indoor holiday decor

McHale Landscape Design's move toward interior holiday work has strengthened client relations.

MCHALE LANDSCAPE DESIGN, based in Upper Marlboro, Md., promotes itself as a "property management" company. As such, its crews handle a slew of services for clients in a "one-stop shop" effort—everything from gutter cleaning to fall annual installations and exterior holiday lights for clients throughout Maryland, Virginia and Washington D.C. A few years ago, one of McHale's exterior holiday displays led to an interior job for a residential client's second home in St. Michael, Md. That job has become an ongoing account and a service the business plans to grow.

"(They) asked if we could take over their interior holiday decor since they liked what we were doing on the outside and trusted our crews," says Samantha Fischer, Maryland Eastern Shore maintenance regional manager for the \$21 million company. "We're not as busy in the winter with landscape maintenance, so we have the extra time to focus on interior decorating."

While McHale's Virginia division has completed three indoor projects, this was the first for its Maryland Eastern Shore division.

The company, Fischer says, is content with the service's slow growth, though.

"There's a fine line of getting too many clients for a service like this," she says. "Three or four clients could make it a nice, profitable service, but too many more would mean we couldn't devote the time needed to do the job right. The client and I start throwing around holiday ideas in the spring."

The service is more of a customer service builder than a major moneymaker, Fischer says. The client sets the budget, from which Fischer buys decorations and factors in labor.

In terms of adding interior holiday work to the company's service lineup, there weren't any additional costs or equipment needed—the service only required ladders, which the company already had for hanging exterior lights.

"We just needed to train staff to be extra cautious while working on the interior,"

Fischer says. "Working inside requires just a little more care."

Fischer says any company could add a service like this, but it does require having at least one staffer with an "eye for design" to oversee the work. "It's not just sticking a Christmas tree in the corner; we do every single room," Fischer says. "Last year, the (St. Michael's) client wanted a wonderland theme and we incorporated the entire house."



McHale begins planning its interior holiday decorating jobs in spring.

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY: McHale Landscape Design

HEADQUARTERS: Upper Marlboro, Md.

ADD-ON SERVICE: Interior holiday decor

WHY INTERIOR HOLIDAY DECOR?

Doing interior holiday decorating was a natural extension from doing exterior holiday lighting—particularly for clients with vacation homes who aren't regularly on the property to do it themselves. This service is more of a customer service builder than a huge revenue driver.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE? The timeline—there are typically only three full weeks to have the decorating complete.

BEST TIP? Have your theme decided before Thanksgiving, giving yourself plenty of time to prepare.

That effort even included importing fake snow and putting it in the children's rooms. Poinsettias also were brought in, wreaths and garland were hung and two decorated Christmas trees were installed.

Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, Fischer devotes a lot of her time to the project, utilizing extra staff as needed to hang items and follow her plans. "It takes a crew of about five people, though they're not at the property every day," she says.

Once the holidays pass and the clients return to their full-time home, the crew comes back in for clean-up. "We wrap up the decorations and store everything in tubs in the client's attic so it's ready for future use," Fischer says. "We have the client's cleaning service lined up to come in right after us and do a good cleaning."

From an internal standpoint, Fischer says the interior holiday decor service has been really enjoyable for her, as well. "Throughout the year, I'll get ideas from landscaping shows and magazines," she says. "I really enjoy seeing it all come together."

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

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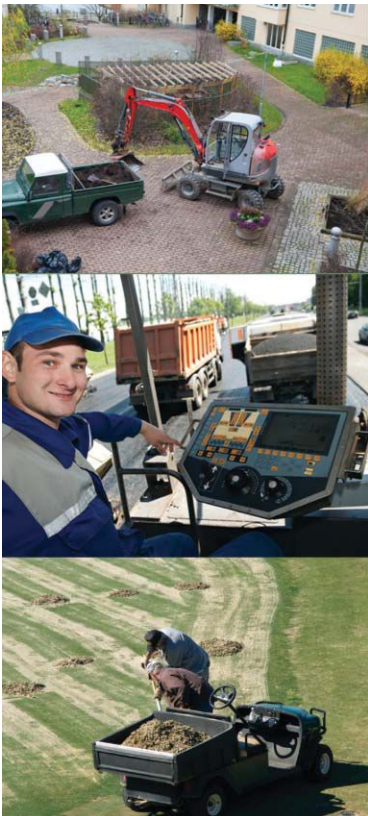
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YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH

PREEMERGENT HERBICIDES



Specticle

Bayer received an Agrow award in the best new crop protection product category for indaziflam, the active ingredient in Specticle preemergent herbicide. Specticle controls more than 90 grasses, broadleaf weeds and annual sedges with residual at low-use rates—up to 40 times less than current standards, the company says.

Bayer Environmental Science //
BackedByBayer.com

Barricade

Barricade is a long-lasting preemergent herbicide for crabgrass control, Syngenta says, noting even fall applications can withstand snow and heavy rains to remain effective throughout the season. Low water solubility and high affinity for soil particles means Barricade stays where most weeds germinate—in the top half-inch of the soil. The product is backed by a performance guarantee.

Syngenta // *GreenCastOnline.com*



Prodiamine 4L

Prodiamine 4L, a liquid formulation, provides preemergent control of crabgrass, goosegrass, *Poa annua* and other small-seeded broadleaf weeds. It may be applied for season-long control, Quali-Pro says, and has low solubility and volatility. It's also available in as a water dispersible granule.

Quali-Pro // *Quali-Pro.com*



Echelon

Echelon, which delivers preemergent sedge control, is the first herbicide in its class with a dual mode of action. It controls weeds from the foliage down and from the root up with residual for preemergent crabgrass. It also controls pre- and early postemergent goosegrass. Echelon is available as a sprayable application or as a dry application on fertilizer for most cool- and warm-season grasses.

FMC Professional Solutions //
FMCProSolutions.com



Dimension

Dimension specialty herbicide provides preemergent control of more than 45 annual grassy and broadleaf weeds, including crabgrass, goosegrass, bittercress and *Poa annua*, as well as early postemergent control of crabgrass. Dimension can be used over the top of more than 440 landscape ornamentals and in noncrop areas, including roadsides. It also can be used on established cool- and warm-season seeded, sodded or sprigged turf without staining surroundings.

Dow AgroSciences // *PowerOfMORE.com*

TURF SPRAYERS/SPREADERS

RS7200E

The new unit boasts an electric start, adjustable electric spray pump and a hand-held spray wand. It's driven by a 7-hp Subaru EX210 engine with electric start and a 0.95-gal. fuel tank. A 17-gal. tank system has a single port for easy filling and a balanced design for enhanced stability. The RS7200E is backed by a two-year limited warranty; the engine features a five-year warranty.

TurfEx // TurfExProducts.com



T3000i

Turfco's T3000i spreader/sprayer features hands-free speed control and trim-lock speed for consistency and an intuitive experience. The spreader/sprayer features 12- to 18-ft. spreading widths, 6- and 9-ft. spraying widths and a 4-ft. trim spray, as well as a wand for spot treating. It has the ability to cover 124,000 sq. ft. per fill and fits through a 36-in. gate.

Turfco // TurfcoDirect.com

Triumph

The 2014 PermaGreen Triumph Spreader Sprayer has improved power steering technology, which offers control on difficult properties. A drop-down handlebar system and articulating joints help operators ride or walk through difficult terrain. The machine treats up to 1 acre per fill, resulting in fewer trips to the truck. Two set-ground speeds and fixed spray widths offer instant recalibration and greater precision when broadcasting or trimming.

PermaGreen // PermaGreen.com



Z-Spray

LT Rich's Z-Spray machines have liquid capacities from 18 gal. to 89 gal. and granular capacities from 100 lbs. to 300 lbs. They are powered by a 16 hp twin cylinder electric-start engine and feature a 4 gmp pump, hydrostatic drive system, locking caster system and hydraulic hopper motor.

LT Rich Products // Z-Spray.com

SALT SPREADERS

VBX spreader

This V-box spreader features an 8-ft. poly hopper with 2 cu. yds. of capacity. Choose from pintle chain or auger feed options. Powered by a completely sealed, 0.5-hp motor, the stainless-steel drivetrain components are corrosion-resistant for reduced maintenance and longer life. A rear-mounted dump switch allows operators to quickly dump remaining material to cut down on waste. The spinner assembly is removable.

THE BOSS Snowplow // BossPlow.com



Economizer line

Performance improvements to ACE Torwel's Economizer gas-over-hydraulic pickup truck spreaders target more efficient, reliable snow and ice control in its 1.3-, 1.7-, 2.5- and 3.0-cu. yd. models. Made in the U.S., these V-box spreaders are lightweight and feature stainless steel or painted 14-gauge steel construction. They feature a quiet 5.5-hp Honda gas engine with electric start.

ACE Torwel // ACETorwel.com



Drop Pro line

These two new tractor-mounted spreaders offer controlled application of bagged ice melters and bulk rock salt. Model SD-600 has a 6-cu.-ft. capacity with a 36-in. spread width; model SD-1400 has a 14-cu.-ft. capacity with a 48-in. spread width. Both units include a polyethylene hopper and variable-speed auger feed system, which is run by a self-diagnosing digital controller.

SnowEx // SnowExProducts.com



Comparison charts

SaltDogg's CompareSaltSpreaders.com offers comparisons on same-level salt spreaders from 10 brands. Users can find side-by-side product specifications and features for SUV; tailgate gravity-fed; vertical-auger; two-stage; 2-yd. polymer; 3-, 4- and 6-yd. polymer auger; electric stainless steel chain-drive; and under-tailgate electric salt spreaders.

Buyers Products // CompareSaltSpreaders.com



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[Coming in February]

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Be sure to check out next month's issue of *Landscape Management*, where we highlight the books that have had the greatest impact on landscape professionals' companies.

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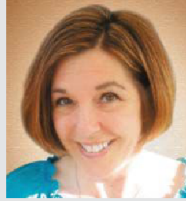
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Pam Berrios

secretary of the National Hispanic Landscape Association board of directors, owner of Alexandria Lawn Service, Alexandria, Va.



Who is your mentor? It's been a lot of people. My total years in business have been 17 years. Six years ago, I bought my partner out. I knew everything on the back end as far as the billing and customer service, but I didn't know anything about the field, (so) my mentors became the crew members I have. I went outdoors to see what they do on a day-to-day basis.

What led to your involvement with the National Hispanic Landscape Association (NHLA)? My brother Raul Berrios,

who is the current president, is a founding member. He's been extremely involved in the NHLA and he got me involved as well.

As a woman in the Green Industry, how do you get a leg up on your male competitors? (Being a woman) has its advantages and disadvantages. A lot of times, because of personality and being a woman, it will open doors for me and I'll be able to quell difficult clients. On the other hand, when you're dealing with suppliers and vendors and people who are used to dealing with a hundred males a day, when you walk in it's like "OK, what is she doing here?" I just take it as a challenge. It's been really rewarding to set foot in the industry as a female business owner.



You're also a real estate agent. Does that profession cross paths with the Green Industry? I started being a real estate agent 10 years ago, looking for my own home to buy and then people started looking for me. It was right at the boom of the real estate industry. My clients knew I had my real estate license and they started saying, "You service our lawn and, at the same time, you can list our home for sale." Throughout the years, it's something I've been able to keep side by side. It's worked out perfect.

What do you expect to be the main initiatives and topics of discussion in 2014 for the NHLA? We're dealing a lot with immigration reform. There are a lot of questions about that in the industry. (But) our biggest campaign is getting people to the GIE+EXPO. When I went three years ago, for the first time, most of the people I saw were American business owners. We know for a fact there are thousands of Hispanic business owners and they're not aware yet of the GIE, that there's training courses, resources for us to use. We're trying to build awareness to those types of events. We want people to go there.

OFF THE CLOCK

WHO MAKES UP YOUR FAMILY? I'm a single mom of three teenagers. A lot of my spare time is spent with them. They're wonderful kids.

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST INDULGENCE? Volleyball. I love to play. I even coach kids. I steal time from work to sometimes get lost there.



DO YOU HAVE A DREAM VACATION SPOT? I would like to go to Paris.



WHAT TV SHOW DO YOU HAVE TO TUNE INTO EVERY WEEK? The only thing I watch is the serial killer show "Dexter."

WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING IF YOU WEREN'T IN YOUR CURRENT CAREER? Between the Green Industry and real estate, I wouldn't have it any other way.



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