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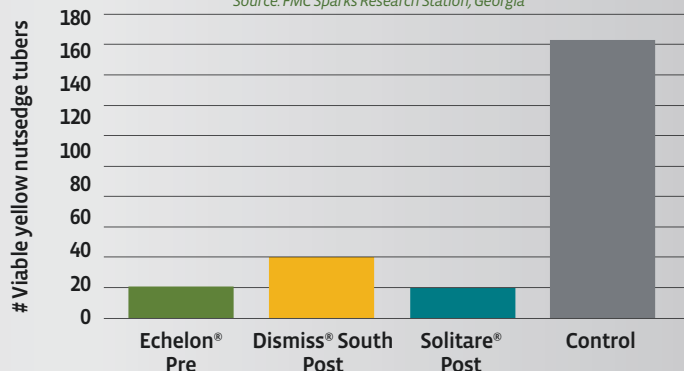
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rely on strategies from former careers
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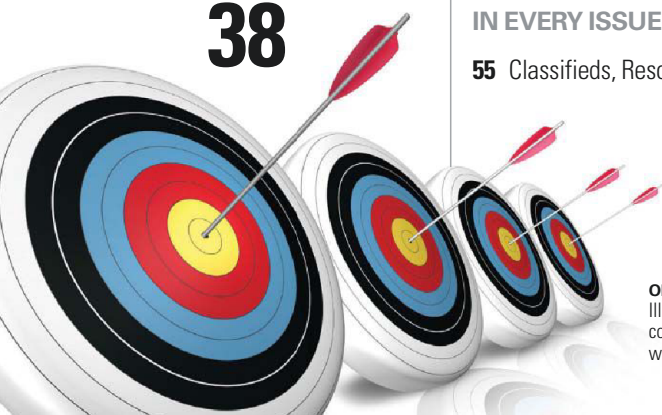
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Landscape Management

OUR MISSION: *Landscape Management* shares new ideas to inspire and empower readers to run more efficient, profitable businesses. We're the leading information resource for lawn care, landscape maintenance, design/build and irrigation professionals.

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NOW TRENDING: What a combined ValleyCrest, Brickman could mean for the landscape market

When word leaked of a potential ValleyCrest Cos. and Brickman Group merger, we took to social media to get the Green Industry's take on the possible deal and shared some of our own reporting on it (buff.ly/1n2Py8n). Stay tuned to LandscapeManagement.net for breaking news on this story.



LinkedIn reactions

- » **David Bonza:** They are the Home Depot of the landscape industry. Low prices for subpar work will hurt everyone.
- » **Dan Pestretto:** All things considered, this will bring, if it happens, more money, interest and recognition to our industry.
- » **Steven Cohen:** This will help reshape the attitude and thinking of how landscape services are procured by clients. Bigger doesn't mean better. (It's a) great opportunity for regionals and smaller companies to leverage market share.



Facebook Feature QUESTION OF THE WEEK

What are your thoughts on the potential Brickman/ValleyCrest merger?

- » **Adam Linnemann:** They will be the Walmart of lawn care.
- » **Seth Ambrose:** I think it's great for smaller businesses. A large army moves slowly. (A) small army is more agile. Not to mention, look what happened to TruGreen.
- » **Mike Perrine:** I'm OK with it because I do a ton of subcontracting work for Brickman.
- » **Matt Dingeldein:** Hopefully the humble roots of these two firms will prevent them from making the same mistakes of those that have tried this before. Only time will tell.



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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

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People are talking

Are your ears ringing? They should be. People are talking about the collective landscape industry, and it's a good thing. Who do I mean?

▶ Investors at private equity firms like KKR, which bought the Brickman Group last year for \$1.6 billion. KKR also is reportedly in talks to acquire ValleyCrest Cos. for around a billion dollars.

▶ Readers of *Forbes*, which recently published a report online by financial information company Sageworks. According to the study, average landscape company sales were up 12 percent in 2013 with profit margins at 7 percent.

▶ Global management consulting firms (Bain & Co. and others) that occasionally ping us for information on the landscape market for research projects.

You might say, "I don't give a hoot." Here's why you should care.

Image matters. Industry members have said for years that they could charge more if only the public put their craft on the same plane as other specialized vocations, like plumbing and electrical work.

Some landscape pros have suggested professional licensing as a way to command higher prices. Of course, some industry licensing already exists. But is licensing for all a panacea? Probably not for the red tape it creates. Others point to certification. It's beneficial to those who go this route, but is a voluntary initiative a true market lifter? Again, probably not.

Yet, the awareness that comes from investors' attention seems like a PR boost that can only help. Not to mention, it requires no association efforts, government intervention or the like.

Future of the market. Don't forget, these investor-connected communities have spheres of influence. Within those are their children, some of whom may one day wake up and say, "I'd rather be outside, than behind this illuminated screen all day." They may ponder the jobs they can do outdoors and declare to their parents they'd like to pursue landscape design or construction management as a career. And maybe, just maybe, mom and dad will recognize the landscape industry as a serious business, so they won't talk them out of a career here in favor of teaching or accounting.

Trickle-down effect. Finally, more private equity interest could create a shift toward a seller's market for owners looking to exit. But it's no secret these types of buyers are looking to scoop up large commercial maintenance firms. If your company's in a sweet spot, geographically or size/service-wise, that's excellent news. If you're not, think about how you can leverage the trickle-down effect of these regional or larger local companies that will be grooming themselves for an acquisition. Are you a small maintenance provider with a mix of residential and commercial accounts? Maybe a regional player would like to buy up your accounts to add to its service area or top line. Are you a lawn care, design/build or irrigation firm? Maybe you could pursue a subcontracting agreement or formal referral partnership with a maintenance-driven company that often fields calls for work that's not in its wheelhouse.

In any case, listen to that ringing sound. It's telling you to think about how the light shining on the landscape industry is an opportunity for you.

Landscape Management

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PLANET DOS 2014 spurs 90 project completions

Type #PLANETDOS into your Facebook or Twitter search bar and you'll see evidence the Green Industry was busy on Earth Day, April 22.

Off screen, the evidence was in the form of around 90 projects completed in 24 states at an estimated value of \$400,000 as part of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) Day of Service (DOS) 2014.

An initiative that encourages landscape professionals to plan, organize and do volunteer projects that benefit their communities on Earth Day, DOS 2014 drew 2,200 volunteers in its fifth year.

A couple of highlights include the following projects.

For the children

GrowinGreen, based in Kernersville, N.C., provided landscape maintenance support to Victory Junction Gang Camp, a free camp for children with serious illnesses.

HighGrove Partners of Austell, Ga., completed a landscaping project at the Special Needs Schools of Gwinnett.

LawnAmerica, based in Tulsa, Okla., along with G&G Lawn & Landscape installed new landscaping at Will Rogers High School, of which LawnAmerica Owner Brad Johnson is an alumnus.

"The old school recently enjoyed some renovations," Johnson wrote in a blog post on the project. "We wanted to do our part in renovating a somewhat bare landscape in front of the building."

A helping hand to nonprofits

New Milford, Conn.-based YardApes tackled multiple projects, including repairing walkways and a patio for H.O.R.S.E. of Connecticut, a nonprofit facility for abused and neglected horses. It also did spring cleanups for three homeowners and touched up the grounds at Northville Bap-



tist Church and the New Milford Bulls football and cheerleading field.

Landscape Management got its hands dirty, too, pairing up with Schill Grounds Management to work on McGregor, a nonprofit assisted living and retirement facility in Cleveland. (Visit buff.ly/1n2LkNX for more on the project.)

The National Hispanic Landscape Alliance (NHLA) and member companies provided a landscaping makeover to Good Shepherd Housing Foundation, a nonprofit housing facility for those who struggle with mental illness.

"The NHLA is proud our members are taking this opportunity to help an organization that cares for the often marginalized and underserved of our society by donating the manpower, equipment and plant material for this much-needed project," said Raul Berrios, NHLA president.

Giving back to those who gave

Sposato Landscape Co. of Milton, Del., did landscaping for the Home of the Brave, a vacation facility for families of combat veterans. Additionally, it worked in the garden at Just Sooup Ministry.



Photos of DOS projects, volunteers from Inside Out Design (left), Environmental Enhancements (center) and YardApes (right).

Also helping the armed forces was Professional Grounds, located in Lorton, Va. The company spruced up the property of a wounded veteran who served in Afghanistan in 2011 and was diagnosed with cancer.

Turf Appeal, based in Oklahoma City, joined forces with Balfour Beatty Communities, Full Circle Tree Service and John Deere Landscapes to work on Fort Sill National Memorial Cemetery. The group relandscaped the visitor's center and repaired trees and plants damaged by ice storms.

"We appreciate this opportunity to give back to those who have fallen for our freedom," Matt Doerr, president of Turf Appeal, wrote in the project description. He added it's the firm's fourth year to revamp the cemetery as part of DOS. "After year six, we will have completely refurbished one of our most sacred grounds in Oklahoma."

For a full listing of DOS projects, visit PLANETDayofService.org.

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FREIGHTLINER



BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at bwilson@wilson-oyler.com.

Help production managers produce

Are you getting the most out of your investment in production supervisors? In many cases the answer is no. The position has evolved into more of a firefighter or a gofer for account managers. To be effective, the person in this position needs to focus primarily on improving the effectiveness of the crew leaders he or she supervises.

I believe this skill set is much different from being a crew leader, which is the position from which most production supervisors have been promoted. The management of production supervisors is generally inconsistent as a practice. In some cases it's lacking entirely.

In select companies, account managers are supposed to manage and train production managers. In other companies, branch or operations managers are responsible for this task. Unless the person managing the supervisors has a passion for operations, the supervisors are left pretty much on their own.

The primary responsibilities of a production supervisor should be: 1.) quality control; 2.) improving crew efficiency; and 3.) crew leader development. Owners frequently look at how many crews a production supervisor can oversee effectively. I hear numbers wavering from four to 10. That's a big variable. The company that has a 1-4 supervisor-crews ratio has a much higher cost for supervisors than a company that has one supervisor for 10 crews.

I believe the key to getting closer to a 1-10 ratio lies in training the production supervisor and developing great crew leaders to achieve less supervision. It sounds simple, but it isn't or it would be more common.

There are several important factors to consider to make sure this position pays for itself.

▶ The production management side of the business should have targeted goals for lowering costs and increasing gross margins on work.

▶ Companies must develop best practices and/or standard operating procedures for doing work efficiently. The production managers must buy into them and ensure the work is consistently performed that way.

▶ Production managers should work along with crews, training them on the right way to do things and correcting mistakes in the field.

▶ Production managers should be trained on how to manage production. It's common for a company to take a good foreman and make him a production supervisor or manager, assuming he will be a good manager. We all know how well that works.

▶ Measure crews for performance and for delivering the quality work you desire within target hour ranges.

▶ Companies must have a measurable quality control program.

▶ A key piece of the equation is hiring the right people. I believe companies need to spend more effort finding employees who have the right qualities to become crew leaders and supervisors. Compromising on hiring criteria can perpetuate problems, resulting in incompetency.

It's an over simplification to state that unless the production managers can save enough in labor costs to pay for themselves, you may be better off letting the crews go unsupervised. For this reason, it's essential the position have very specific goals for increasing efficiency and controlling quality.

Company owners must get out of the office and watch their crews work so they can see what they're actually doing and then coach and mentor them to reinforce best practices. Crews respond favorably to recognition and they covet the owner's approval of their work.

If your company is going to be successful, your production managers must be able to observe their crews with an eye for efficiency and wasted or nonproductive activities. Next, they need to retrain their crews to help them develop the right habits.

They say money talks, and...

As legal tender, I know quite a bit about where money goes. For instance, billions of dollars have gone straight into the pockets of PermaGreen owners over the last 15 years. That's because PermaGreens come closest to the money making goal of one machine, all properties, every day... and that's no B.S. (walking or otherwise)!

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THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 25-year industry veteran. Reach him at kevinkehoe@me.com.

How to be a grinder

How do you sell more work? Relationships certainly help. Luck is a good thing, too. But it's good habits consistently executed that create results. This is true of almost everything in life. Develop and practice good habits and good things usually follow—like great relationships and a fair bit of luck.

The first habit of successful salesmen is to keep the sales pitch simple (see my last column at buff.ly/1hYh68M). The second habit is to be a grinder. This sounds awful, doesn't it? Yet of all the habits it may be the most essential. Selling is a process of rejection, rejection ... victory! It's long stretches of routine punctuated by moments of glory. In other words, it can be a grind. If your work plan does not take this into account, it's hard to achieve excellent results.

My favorite commercial landscape maintenance salesman in the industry is a grinder. He does *the math*, makes *a plan*, executes the plan and takes very little of the rejection personally. He doesn't rely on his good looks, boyish charm, relationships or luck. He gets up every day, makes his cold calls, keeps in touch with his referral sources, shows up for appointments, makes his presentations and asks for the order. If he gets it, he smiles. When he doesn't get it, he goes on to the next opportunity. Here's how he grinds it out.

The math

My goal is to sell	\$1,000,000	annualized new contract sales.
My close rate is	20%	I win one for every four I lose.
My bid requirement is	\$5,000,000	Sales goal/close rate
My target job size is	\$30,000	This is a \$2,500 per month job.
My qualification rate is	50%	I turn this % of my leads into a bid.
I need this many leads/prospects	333	Bids/job size/qualification rate
I need to touch each prospect	12	times to get an answer (yes or no).
I need to have this many touches	4,000	Prospects * touches
I have	46	"real" selling weeks to do it.
I need to make this many touches	87	every week. I need a plan for every week.

Touch = Phone call, email, qualification meeting or presentation meeting.

The plan

Vince Lombardi said the Green Bay Packers had only eight basic plays. There were many options on each of these plays, he said, but these options only became apparent as the play unfolded in real time. The key was to execute the basics flawlessly and take advantage of the opportunities the other guy provided you to run to daylight.

That's what it means to be a grinder: Execute the basics flawlessly and take advantage of the opportunities that arise naturally. Now, go do the math and make a plan.

» WEB EXTRA

For an editable spreadsheet of "the math" explained here, visit LandscapeManagement.net/downloads. Plus, read Kehoe's November 2013 column outlining the "6 habits of successful salespeople" at LandscapeManagement.net/6habits.

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SMUTGRASS

Sporobolus indicus

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This erect, bunch-type perennial grass commonly is found in warm-season turf and often is identified by a black fungus growing on the seedheads.
- ▶ Its collar is divided into two parts by the midvein, and its sheath is smooth and round. The seedhead is a narrow spikelike panicle.
- ▶ Smutgrass spreads by small seeds dispersed in wind and rain and by the transfer of equipment and grass clippings.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ A preemergent herbicide containing dithiopyr will control smutgrass prior to germination of seedlings.
- ▶ Because this weed can be tough to eradicate, consider making two to three sequential applications of dithiopyr, with the first application in spring and subsequent applications occurring six to eight weeks after the last application.
- ▶ Conduct cultural control practices, including proper mowing, fertilization and watering.



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STINKGRASS

Eragrostis cilianensis

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This grassy summer annual is best identified by its distinctive odor and grayish-green panicle.
- ▶ Seedlings develop into tufted plants relatively quickly.
- ▶ Leaves are rolled in the bud. The lower surfaces are smooth and glossy, while the top of the leaf is rough with hairs along the margins.
- ▶ Auricles are absent, and the ligule is a fringe of hairs. Sheaths are round and slightly flattened.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ For landscape or container-grown ornamentals, apply a labeled product containing both isoxaben and trifluralin.
- ▶ Apply labeled preemergent products in early spring and again two to three months later for season-long control.
- ▶ Hand-weed any plants that may have emerged prior to application.
- ▶ Stinkgrass is not a common problem in well-established turfgrass.

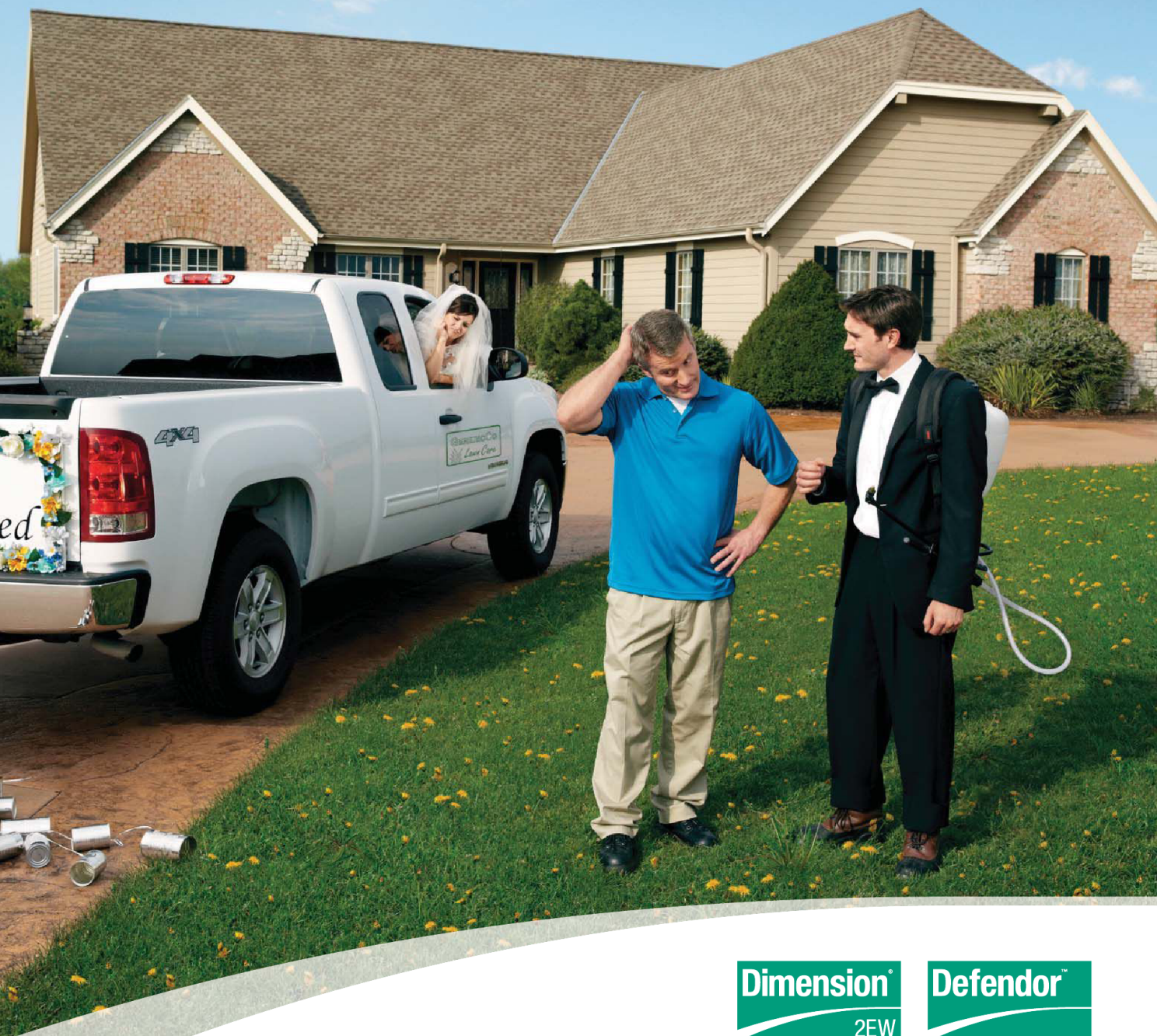
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Storing pesticides safely

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IMPROPERLY STORING PESTICIDES is not only a liability to your company, it's a danger to the health and safety of your employees. Landscape and lawn care companies that use pesticides and store them at their facilities need to take the proper measures to protect their company and their people.

The first step is to understand exactly what a pesticide is and how to use it, says Thomas Richey, vice president of property/loss control with Hortica Insurance & Employee Benefits. Sometimes when an applicator uses a product frequently, he or she gets comfortable with it and as a result may forget how dangerous the product can be. Adhering to regulations and understanding guidelines is an important part of the equation.

"The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires registration numbers on all products, indicating they are registered and its label was approved for sale," Richey says. "The contractor should go through applicator training yearly and fully understand the requirements of the EPA and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)."

While pesticide applications require great caution, many professionals make mistakes when it comes to proper product storage. That's because applicators are primarily involved with ongoing training about the use of the chemicals in the field. The focus on safety needs to carry over to the shop with safe storage measures.

Storage location is one possible problem area.

"What we commonly see is pesticides are stored in dark areas where the tem-

peratures fluctuate and the area is damp," Richey says. "Extreme temperatures can cause pesticide deterioration. Proper lighting helps ensure the correct pesticide for the task is chosen and if there are any leaks or spills they can be seen and cleaned up immediately."

Containers also can be an issue. Keep all pesticides in their original containers unless there's a leak and needs to be changed. Without the original container or a replacement label, you will lose valuable identifying and safety information about the pesticide. Another common mistake, Richey says, is when the technician leaves the product inside the application tool.

"This leads to confusion regarding the proper mixture before making the next application," he adds.

These are all important issues, considering improper pesticide storage and disposal can be hazardous to human health and the environment.

"Proper storage not only protects the health of people, animals and the environment, but it also prolongs chemical shelf life," Richey says. "The EPA has strict laws and regulations regarding the sale, use, storage and disposal of pesticides—and they need to be adhered to."

The best tool for promoting safe storage practices is ongoing education. He emphasizes it's important to conduct pesticide safety training for applicators and any employees who may come into contact with chemicals stored at your facility.

"Continued education is very important when you're dealing with a product that claims it can control, kill, eradicate and repel certain pests," Richey says. "When there are danger signs and the skull-and-bones symbol on the label, all warning caution, you can rest assured the product can be deadly. When it comes to something as serious as pesticides, you cannot be too careful."

9 MUST-DO'S FOR PROPER PESTICIDE STORAGE

- 1 Read the product labels for specific storage information.
- 2 Store pesticides in locked cabinets.
- 3 Keep pesticides in their original containers with their tops tightly closed.
- 4 Understand *what* a pesticide is and how to use it.
- 5 Never store pesticides in food or drink containers.
- 6 Store pesticides in cool, dry, well-lit areas.
- 7 Store dry pesticides above liquid pesticides.
- 8 Never store pesticides in application equipment.
- 9 Keep emergency numbers on hand.



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NEW DIREC

How landscape and lawn care pros use strategies from their first careers to improve their Green Industry operations.

BY **MARISA PALMIERI** EDITOR

For years, every Monday morning Bruce Ward boarded a plane from Columbus, Ohio, to Philadelphia to commute to his job as senior director of oncology sales for pharmaceutical company Cephalon. He'd fly home Thursday night either to Ohio or to an underused second home in Florida. Two weekends a month, he was off to a medical meeting. Such is the life of a corporate sales director.



TION

"Of the 26 years I worked in the pharmaceutical industry, I spent 22 of them in airplanes," Ward says. "As much as I loved the people I was working with and the good work we were doing in oncology, I was ready to be sleeping in my own bed."

On top of that longing for the comfort of home, Ward had the itch to be his own boss. In 2010, he and a Florida golf buddy in a similar situation teamed up buy a small business they could run together.

Within three months, Ward and his business partner Dan Buettin were owners of Florida Evergreen Landscape & Lawn Care in Fort Myers, Fla.

In the four years since Ward joined the Green Industry, the company has grown 50 percent. It has an anticipated 2014 revenue of \$3.3 million. That growth takes into account a considerable shift in client base from government contracts to more private work, including a push into landscape installations.

"It's interesting because it's a very different business from where I was, yet the fundamentals and how you behave and go about creating a vision for the future, those things don't change," Ward says.

He's not alone in this realization. Other professionals who've pursued a new direction in the landscape industry also discovered the skills they sharpened elsewhere are universal—and they've seen their companies benefit as a result.

Among the skills people in their second careers bring are wisdom, introspection and decision-making abilities, experts in "second-act" careers say.

"They usually come with a broader palette of skills and many times deeper expertise," says Dorothy Tannahill-Moran, a speaker, second career coach and author of *Career Mapping for*

Climbing Managers. "While the second career may not use all of those skills, they are an easier fit into a wide array of possible jobs."

In industries where second-act professionals aren't experts, they often have the self awareness and knack for networking to fill that gap with someone better suited for the job rather than try to do everything themselves, says Nancy Collamer, author of *Second-Act Careers*. "Those people have a good sense of their strengths, assets and abilities," she says.

The result of businesses being run by owners in their second careers is often a calmer, more structured environment, experts add.

"Fewer things upset or disturb this group, as they're better equipped to put things into perspective than many others," Tannahill-Moran says.

MANAGEMENT AND TRAINING SKILLS

Patrick Hawkins was unsure how things would turn out when he left a 20-year career at DHL Express to join his wife's family's lawn care company, Lawn Cure of Southern Indiana, based in Sellersburg, Ind.



BRUCE WARD

Co-owner,
Florida Evergreen
Landscape & Lawn Care
Fort Myers, Fla.

Former pharmaceutical
sales exec at Cephalon

"I was dealing with thousands of people and budgets in excess of hundreds of million of dollars," he says. "I didn't know what to expect at first, but within a few months I realized every skill set I learned at DHL—and they put a lot of time and money into their managers—was all transferrable."

For Hawkins, that meant focusing on people first.

"At DHL, I managed people every day. Here, I'm managing people every day," says the president and general manager of Lawn Cure, which was founded 36 years ago by his father-in-law, Larry Messina. When Messina wanted to step away from the business in 2009, he retained a

2 percent stake and gave each of his daughters 49 percent. Hawkins' wife Michelle and her sister Missy Fromme run the administrative side of the business and he came on board to handle operations.

continued on page 20

» WEB EXTRA

Read about a service quality audit program Hawkins picked up from his former career in the Web Extras section of [Landscape Management.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net).

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Q:

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT YOUR GREEN INDUSTRY ROLE COMPARED TO YOUR FIRST CAREER?

"When I was in the corporate world, for many of those years I had a staff of people to assist me and do a lot of the work. The scale is very different here. Now, as a business owner, you've got to be prepared to do everything."

—Bruce Ward

"It took me some time to adjust from a multibillion dollar corporation to a small, family-oriented business. Everything there was go, go, go—and very structured. We're a little more laid back here. It was different, but I think it made me take a couple steps back and put things in perspective."

—Patrick Hawkins

"A lot of the fixes we did in IT were, 'It's old, (so) throw it away and replace it.' We don't do that with a lawn. We take lawns that are a wreck and turn them into something beautiful."

—Nick Shaw



PATRICK HAWKINS

President/General Manager,
Lawn Cure of
Southern Indiana,
Sellersburg, Ind.

Former DHL Express
senior manager of
contract relations

continued from page 17

Part of Hawkins's background at DHL was training and development, and he brought that perspective to Lawn Cure, revising safety training, on-road training and redeveloping the compensation structure for lawn care technicians.

Part of managing people is understanding culture, and Hawkins was sensitive to this truth.

"I knew from day one I couldn't go in like a bull in a china shop," he says. To learn the business at a faster rate and earn the respect of the company's production employees, Hawkins became one of them for his first six months on the job.

"I came in every day in uniform, loaded up my truck and went out to spray," he says. "I was coming in off the street having never sprayed a lawn in my life. Doing this made me be next to the technicians every day."

For one thing, he learned their jobs aren't easy. Hawkins revamped their pay scale, tying incentives to productivity, to benefit the employees and the company. "They can work more, hit their targets and get additional pay and time off," he says.

Additionally, with some of his engineering and transportation knowledge from DHL, Hawkins improved route efficiency by 25 percent in terms of how much in dollar volume each technician sprays per day. The savings came from condensing routes and letting go of some business that was too far out of a newly defined service area.

The changes have yielded good results. Lawn Cure, which will do more than \$1.7 million in annual revenue this year, was

already a successful firm when Hawkins took the reins, he says. Still, it has seen double-digit growth over each of the last five years.

"What's important is we've kept it a family business, but we've put some corporate structure in place," he says.

CUSTOMER SERVICE SMARTS

In 2003, when Nick Shaw opened his Lawn Doctor franchise in Griffith, Ind., he was surprised how quickly he could translate his information technology (IT) and retail backgrounds to his newfound career caring for turf.

Shaw started his career in retail, first at Sears and then at Kmart. He later put to use the IT skills he picked up at his college work-study job as a campus Apple support technician when he landed a dream role in 2001 as one of the first Apple Store "geniuses"—before the establishment's employees were given that moniker.

"Apple was looking for nerdy Apple tech support people who also knew about retail, so it was a perfect fit," he says. After a temporary training period in California—and a stint opening two of the original five Apple Store locations—Shaw was back living in Indiana, "working for the coolest company in the world," but his job was in Schaumburg, Ill.—a 70-mile one-way commute.

"The job was awesome, the people were awesome, but it was retail," which he says he was sick of, and the drive was getting to him. When an opportunity for a corporate IT position arose, he took that job for a short time before pursuing owning his own business. By 2003, he bought into Lawn Doctor,

knowing his tech/retail background could be adapted to the customer service-oriented business of residential lawn care.

From retail and IT, Shaw learned he liked working with customers face to face. He also discovered he had a knack for communicating with them about the problems they needed solved.

"Computers are hard to understand," he says. "With IT, I'd sit down with somebody and figure out their concerns. Why were they getting this problem? It was about first learning what my clients needed to solve and then teaching them how to solve that problem."

Selling lawn care takes a similarly consultative approach, he says.

"We tell customers all the time, 'We can do everything 100 percent correctly, but if you're doing a few things wrong, your lawn isn't going to be perfect,'" he says, giving improper watering and mowing as examples. Like in IT, educating lawn care clients about the things within their control is key to being a great service provider, Shaw says.

His approach is working. He's grown his franchise from a one-van-one-man operation to six vehicles and 12 employees. He also has picked up two "Best of the Best" franchise awards from Lawn Doctor



NICK SHAW

Owner, Lawn Doctor of West Lake County (Indiana) Area

Former IT and retail professional, Apple Store employee

for outstanding sales and customer service practices.

LEADING THE WAY

The primary skill

Ward brings from his first career is a focus on leadership. In his corporate life, he had to ensure the people who reported to him were good managers and leaders, so he delved into management/leadership articles and books. He developed a clear perspective on leadership that carries over to his role today.

"I'm convinced you've got to be a manager and a leader, but never lose sight that people follow leaders, not managers," he says.

What does that mean from a practical standpoint? Ward says it's about carefully making decisions and then communicating to employees about why they make sense and your vision for implementing them.

To that end, Ward believes once you've hired good people, trained them and given them the resources they need, you should "get out of the way and let them do their job."

"I'm a believer in that micromanagement breeds distrust," he says. "I learned very early on you can get so much more out of

people by treating them great."

In Ward's current business, that goes for employees and customers. For example, team members at Florida Evergreen are expected to thank customers every time they see them on the job.

"I don't care if it's a homeowner or someone who owns 50 condominium complexes," Ward says. "Tell them thank you. Thanking customers every time you see them matters. It did when I was in corporate America and it does here." **LM**

Q ■ WHAT PROCESS OR PROCEDURE FROM YOUR PREVIOUS CAREER DID YOU IMPLEMENT AT YOUR CURRENT COMPANY?

"Focusing on a hiring process that brings in the right people. My business partner and I always knew there were areas of the business we wanted to improve upon with a focus on new business development and field quality control. Over the first three years we interviewed several people who expressed interest in these positions and we certainly could have hired some that would have done a *good* job. Instead, we waited, doing much of the work ourselves, until we found the right people that could do a *great* job."

—Bruce Ward

"I built a cost model, which is something we'd do at DHL to show our profitability for certain areas of the business. If I get a request for a large bid, I can plug in the square footage and other pieces of the job, and it will tell me how much it will cost me to do that job. We've learned that lawns between 4,000 and 10,000 square feet are by far our most successful product. Before, the mindset was the larger lawn the better, and that's just not the case. It also allows us to think through our marketing much better and that's what's helped us grow."

—Patrick Hawkins

"I am a gadget junkie. We have really embraced the advances in technology to make us more efficient. We use tablet computers in the trucks for mobile tracking and GPS to efficiently route vans from point A to B, but more importantly it's to get up-to-the-minute information about a customer's property. For example, you can see if there's a dog at the house and ask the homeowners to bring them in if necessary."

—Nick Shaw



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SNOW+ICE

GUIDE

Cargill's salt mines, like this one in Cleveland, weren't shy of supply this year.



An 'unprecedented' dilemma

Salt suppliers, experts quell snow removal contractors' concerns over what appeared to be a salt shortage this winter. **BY SARAH PFLEDDERER**

CASE SNOW MANAGEMENT staff made a 16-hour round trip to Maine to pick up an order of rock salt this winter. All the while, there were piles upon piles of the deicer at the company's local supplier, right down the road from its headquarters in Attleboro Falls, Mass.

Case Account Executive Neal Glatt says seeing the surplus through rearview mirrors not only rubbed salt in the company's wound, but it convinced him the snow management industry was not, in fact, facing a salt shortage, as some news headlines read. He identified the problem as a "supply chain issue."

"It's not like the salt industry fell on its face," Glatt says. "The problem was everybody needed the same thing at the same time on a more frequent basis."

His viewpoint aligns with what many experts and suppliers say created an apparent salt shortage this winter.

The root causes

Lori Roman, president of the Salt Institute, confirms there is a sufficient amount of salt available for mining, and it was

being mined this winter. The problem was the severe winter increased the demand for ice melts, and the extreme cold that came with it affected suppliers' transportation methods for those products.

"The modes of transportation we used were challenged by the same weather causing the demand," says Mark Klein, director of communication at Cargill. For example, the supplier has salt mines in Lansing, N.Y., Cleveland and Avery Island, La. The latter generally transports product on barges up the Mississippi River—these vessels can move the equivalent of 15 rail cars or 60 to 70 tractor-trailers, Klein says. The cold froze parts of the river, though, requiring the supplier to resort to ground transportation, which held equal challenges.

Rail cars had to travel at slower speeds to be cautious of the cold's effect on the air brakes, Klein says, and, when transporting by truck, Cargill faced the same winter roadway conditions as commuters.

Martin Tirado, CEO of the Snow & Ice Management Association (SIMA), says this isn't the first time the industry has encountered a "supply and demand issue" thanks to severe weather. He recalls a similar situation in the 2008-2009 winter and says it happens every four to five years.

What added to the dilemma this year, Tirado says, is contractors had no notion there would be extreme snowfall, given they prepare for average winters. Because there were relatively mild winters for the past two years, contractors underestimated how much salt to order at the start of the season.

"The government sector and the private sector pre-purchase based on averages (for the past) three to five years," Tirado says. "The reality is this winter the snowfall was much

SNOW + ICE GUIDE

higher than average in most locations.” (See sidebar for snowfall statistics.)

In addition to the high precipitation, states like Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri registered a top 10 coldest winter for the 2013-2014 season, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Statistics like that caused the high demand for salt. Case, for instance, used 50 percent more salt than average winters past, albeit the company also grew 25 percent more than last year, Glatt says.

Suppliers scramble to meet demand

“What we’ve seen this year has been wave after wave of snow and ice events across the snow belt,” Klein says. “That has caused demand unlike what most people have seen ever.”



Case used 50 percent more salt this past season than an average winter.

To compensate, Cargill’s salt miners worked up to 60 hours per week (compared to last year’s 32 hours per week), Klein says. The company quickly used up its excess supply from last season.

The result of that overtime covered only the company’s orders for contract-holding customers, though. And many of those contracts have maximums, meaning clients may receive 20 percent to 30 percent more product than originally

agreed upon and at the same price. Halfway through the winter, most customers already were into their maximums, Klein says, leaving little else for contractors looking to buy as they go.

Suppliers, like Cargill, are obligated to fulfill the orders of contract-holding clients before other customers. And some suppliers give government contracts precedence over private contracts because it’s viewed as a public safety issue.

Those scenarios left contractors like Glatt and Shayne Newman, president of YardApes, on the outs of receiving rock salt when it was sitting right in front of them.

“Municipalities or the state always take first dibs on salt,” Glatt says. “You’re not able to get in line and pick it up.”

Newman faced like challenges, saying at one point he called every supplier within 100 miles of the New Milford, Conn.-based company just to find none-

continued on page 26

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continued from page 24

had rock salt or none available to customers without contracts.

"It was unprecedented," he says. "I've never seen a situation like we've had this winter. It wasn't a shortage. There wasn't anything available for contractors."

Newman got creative in obtaining some product when a supply store a quarter mile from his office limited contractors to purchasing only five bags of salt until further notice.

He sent different employees to the store and provided them with cash instead of the company credit card so they would appear to be purchasing five bags for a separate company each time.

Seeing both sides of the problem was Dan Degan. He is co-founder of SharkMarx, an eBay- or Priceline-like buying platform that operates as a "reverse auction." Contractors submit requests

for products and dealers/distributors offer bids on their requests. Degan acted as the middleman this winter between disgruntled contractors hunting for deicers and suppliers (dealers/distributors) who were mum about having nothing to provide.

Come December few dealers were bidding on ice melt requests on the site. That raised a red flag to Degan and his business partner—as did the contractors communicating their concerns and "sheer panic" to the company if they didn't get their hands on ice melt.

"They were worried about slip-and-falls," Degan says.

SharkMarx dialed suppliers from the East Coast to some in Montana in search of ice melt. It eventually found some in Utah and Tennessee and facilitated the delivery process, subcontracting a trucking

Experts advise contractors to stockpile salt for each season.

company to transport the product to customers.

The longest delivery was from Salt Lake City to Worcester, Mass. The majority of transactions were bags of deicing blends and calcium chloride, Degan says. He adds contractors were paying 68 percent more than average for those when they became available on the website.

Tirado also saw price spikes.

"The price got ridiculous," he says. "We're hearing two to three times the price midseason (compared to) what it was to purchase in August or September."

For next year, Degan is encouraging contractors and dealers to communicate about ice melt earlier, suggesting getting those orders in place between June and August.

"Everybody wants to get to the Walmart model of just-in-time inventory," he says. "It's the nature of the industry. Nobody is thinking about buying in advance and in bulk to be prepared."

Playing the 'capacity-balancing game'

Stockpiling is the topmost advice experts offer to prepare for severe winters.

The Salt Institute encourages having one year's worth of salt stockpiled before the snow starts to fall.

"That means some of these private contractors may want to consider how they can store it properly, making sure they keep a supply under cover so it doesn't get into the elements and that it's stored on a concrete pad so it's not going into the soil," Roman says (see Web Extra).

Yet, the challenge to stockpiling is it takes a financial investment and requires storage space.

"That's difficult to do from a cash flow perspective for the majority of contractors," Tirado says. "As storms happen,



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contractors are able to bill and obtain more revenue, but really the best way to manage is to purchase above average for the year in advance."

He adds larger companies have the space to bulk up stockpiles, whereas smaller companies rely on suppliers to store the product until they need to purchase it.

Still, companies with stockpiles suffered this year, and Case was one of them. The company aims to have a two-week supply on hand at all times.

At one point it stretched that excess for three and half weeks, doing so by scaling back its pretreatments and only applying salt to high-traffic areas.

To stretch supply, Tirado suggests treating only high-traffic areas of a property, too, such as the main drag of a parking lot or building entryways. He also advises to use liquid applications as a pre-wet on a current salt inventory so it lasts longer. He notes it's important to educate employees on application rates so they know not to over apply (see sidebar).

"It's always a capacity-balancing game," Glatt says.

Some of Case's contracts prohibit it to raise customers' prices due to market issues. And for that reason it "absorbed some of the hit" from the shortage, paying out of pocket for the additional transportation costs to get salt.

YardApes doesn't stockpile, so it relied on customer communication and rationing to fulfill its contracts.

The company notified clients of the salt shortage and said only high-traffic areas would be treated for the time being. It rationed the amount of salt it had by creating a sand/salt mix to provide traction to properties versus melting the ice.

While for the most part customers were considerate of the situation, Newman says it has made him consider putting a clause in his contracts that the company isn't liable for slip-and-falls if the industry is in a salt shortage.

"Really, what we were worried about is liability falling back on to the contractor," Newman says. "Is there going to be any leniency if there's a salt shortage? It's a tough situation." LM

EMPLOYEE SALT SPREADING EDUCATION CHECKLIST

Here are a few things to make sure employees understand about salt spreading, according to Martin Tirado, SIMA CEO.

- 1 The effectiveness of rock salt depending on temperature and surfaces.
- 2 Identifying high-traffic areas on a property site map.
- 3 When it's appropriate to use alternative methods such as pre-wetting a salt supply or applying abrasives like sand.

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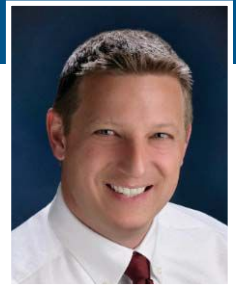
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BY PHIL HARWOOD

How to use *weather data* for sales, renewals

THE SNOW BUSINESS is full of unknowns. One of the biggest unknowns is, of course, the weather.

But there is one aspect of the weather that's 100 percent known: data for weather that has already occurred. Weather data are widely available for most communities in North America. It might require some digging to find, but with persistence you can track down data from a variety of public and private sources. In some markets, weather information is available for free. In other markets, free information is limited and may be unreliable or inconsistent. Fee-based weather services are an excellent source of information, especially where free information is not readily available or trustworthy.

Another source of weather data exists in the form of internal records. Snow professionals always should track their own weather data throughout the year so it's not a massive undertaking at the end of winter.

What to track

While there are many types of weather data available, this article will focus on precipitation in the form of snow. Finding good snowfall data will assist greatly during the sales and renewal process.

Regarding snowfall data, there are two types to gather, and you generally need not look further than the National Weather Service to do so. The first type is seasonal—not annual—snowfall totals, for as many years as possible. In my home market of Detroit, seasonal snowfall totals are available going back to 1880. Seasonal totals include an entire winter season (for example, November through April). Annual totals include a calendar year from January to December. Seasonal snowfall data are generally easy to locate. Seasonal totals are extremely valuable to calculate seasonal service pricing and seasonal caps, which often are based on seasonal numbers.

The second type is daily precipitation data. These reports typically show the type and amount of precipitation daily for each month. Armed with this information, it's possible to determine the number of events and the type of event for each occurrence.

The importance of accurate weather data cannot be understated. By incorporating updated and reliable data into your sales and estimating process, you'll instill a higher level of confidence

with your customers and prospects during renewal and sales processes. When you educate and inform during the sales process, you build trust, break down barriers and sell more work at higher closing rates.

How to incorporate

To incorporate weather data into your renewal and sales processes, develop a historical overview of seasonal snowfall data for your market(s). A bar chart on a single page is a nice visual presentation of this information (see "Web Extra"). Be sure to show seasonal totals on the chart. Along with this and using the same set of information, it's helpful to determine and show the average and probability of snowfall totals at various percentiles.

The average is straightforward, easy to calculate and easy to understand. It provides a guidepost or reference point for comparative purposes. Any given season may be quickly compared to the average to determine the variance, whether under or over the average. This variance is another way to present seasonal snowfall information on a bar chart.

Calculating probability is not all that complicated, although it's not quite as easy as calculating the average (see "Web Extra"). Probability is the likelihood of occurrence in terms of a percent. Information is power and statistical information equips the salesperson with enormous power going into a sales opportunity.

Daily precipitation data are equally powerful during the renewal and sales process. Knowledge of historical weather data regarding the type and number of events helps to reassure the buyer that estimating models are accurate.

So what does all of this mean? Discussions with your customers and prospects about probability, based on historical weather data, lead to discussions about risk/reward trade-offs, liability and pricing. All too often customers and prospects are uneducated about these matters and the sales process becomes very difficult for the snow business professional. Showing the above information to your customers and prospects in an educational manner will immediately position you as a professional and inject confidence into your proposal.

Now is a great time to evaluate your use of weather data in your renewal and sales processes. What are you already doing well? What needs improvement? Who is going to spearhead these improvements? What are the deadlines? The selling season for snow will soon be in full force. The time to prepare is now.

Harwood, LIC, CSP, is president and CEO of Pro-Motion Consulting. Reach him at phil@mypmcteam.com.

» WEB EXTRA

To learn how to calculate the probability of snowfall totals or for examples of the charts Harwood references, visit the Web Extras section of LandscapeManagement.net.

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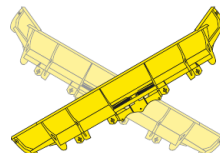
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WINDROW

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Plow Terminal Cleaners

The Plow Terminal Cleaners are designed to clean plow electrical connectors. This three-piece set is made for removing corrosion from common round pin (male and female) plow connectors found on electrohydraulic grill-mounted plow connectors. The set is housed in a leather-type holster with magnetic clasp.

Innovative Products of America // IPATools.com



Front Mount Snow Blower

The KIOTI Front Mount Snow Blower offers quick hitch, front mount to a sub-frame and operates on a mid-PTO drive. There are four models, with cutting width ranging from 50 in. to 72 in. The loader joystick controls lift, lowering and chute rotation. Each snow blower operates on PTO horsepower ranging from 15 to 40 hp, has four blades and has auger diameter ranging from 14 to 15 in. It fits all CS and CK and most DKSE models.

KIOTI // KIOTI.com



Central Enhanced Ice Melter

Central Enhanced Ice Melter is a new private-label ice melt line and, according to the company, is safer than higher grade ice melters on vegetation, concrete and pets. The pellets are triple-screened and stay dry to prevent clumping in spreaders, thus reducing maintenance. Color-coding makes it easier to monitor how much ice melt is being spread, which reduces waste.

Central Turf & Irrigation Supply // CentralTIS.com



Fabric buildings

Legacy's fabric buildings incorporate structural steel beams instead of open web trusses. This engineering concept provides a cost-effective, long-lasting solution for salt and sand storage facilities, the company says. Legacy offers assistance with renderings, foundation design, installation and project management.

Legacy Building Solutions // LegacyBuildingSolutions.com

I Series snow blowers

The I Series, part of the SnowLogix line of snow blowers, includes four models of industrial-duty, tractor-mounted units—available in 9- and 10-ft. widths for efficiently moving large amounts of snow. Engineered for large tractors with tall tires, all models in the I Series offer a two-stage design, with 16-in.-diameter augers and 36-in.-diameter fans. Maintenance is simple, the company says, with easy-access shear bolts, extra-large skid shoes and a bolt-on cutting edge.

Loftness // Loftness.com



SS-4000 snow broom

Powered by a 160cc Honda GXV Series engine, the SS-4000 features a floating pivotal broom head with five angle settings to adjust the trajectory of snow and other materials. The 16-in.-diameter broom is centrally driven, allowing the unit to work against curbs, walls and other obstacles from either the left- or right-hand side. For heavier snow conditions, the operator can install a front-mounted blade attachment, which comes standard. The 40-in. blade uses an exclusive pin system for easy installation and removal.

SnowEx // SnowExProducts.com



DL300-3 and DL350-3 wheel loaders

Advancements to the Doosan DL300-3 and DL350-3 wheel loaders include improved lift capabilities, increased fuel efficiency and enhanced cab comfort, the company says. This interim Tier 4-compliant machine also delivers higher horsepower.

Doosan Infracore Construction Equipment America // DoosanEquipment.com



Skid-steer loaders

JCB skid-steer loaders feature an exclusive single-arm "PowerBoom" and side-entry door for safety. The spacious cab offers 270° visibility. They feature Tier 4 Final engines that use 16 percent less fuel, while meeting emission standards without diesel particulate filters (DPFs). More than 31 attachments are available, including snow blades, snow pushes, snow blowers and snow buckets

JCB // JCBVision.com

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5/14	Mike Caprio , Vendor, <i>Lawn Doctor</i>	Extend the Life of Your Equipment	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>
5/21	Mark Adamson , Vendor, <i>Douglas Dynamics, LLC</i>	How to Deal with Angry Customers	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>
5/28	Michael Deo , Contractor, <i>NatureScape Lighting</i>	My Lighting is Better Than Yours	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>
6/4	Jim Huston , Consultant, <i>J. R. Huston Consulting, Inc.</i>	Estimating the Right Way	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>
6/11	Demi Fortuna , Vendor/ Contractor, <i>Atlantic Watergardens</i>	Make Easy Profits With Waterscaping	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>

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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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IRRIGATION

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MAINTENANCE

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DESIGN/BUILD

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LAWN CARE

PG 44

MARKETWATCH

SERVICE SEGMENT SNAPSHOTS

Irrigation pros hash out how to make service pricing profitable for themselves, fair for clients.

PAGE 34

PHOTO: ANDY'S SPRINKLER, DRAINAGE & LIGHTING

Keeping it fair

A look at how companies approach irrigation service pricing—with a flat rate or charging on time and materials—and why they favor their method. *By SARAH PFLEDDERER*

Only irrigation professionals had X-ray vision. It would eliminate that part of the service call that takes an inestimable amount of time. The part when they must dig up the yard to locate the underground glitch they were called to repair.

That might hearten more of them to charge on a flat rate for irrigation services like Colleen MacKinnon does.

While the co-owner of Able Irrigation in Vancouver, Canada, lost hope for X-ray vision a time ago, she has a hard stance on employees getting paid for every bit of time it takes to complete a job and giving customers no leeway to dispute it.

Flat-rate pricing accomplishes just that, MacKinnon says.

“Clients have a stopwatch mentality, but they like flat rates knowing what the cost is per repair,” she says. “Billable hours never amount to eight in a day,” she adds with mention that the average is five and a half billable hours per day, but you must account for “windshield time,” or travel to the job site, and allow employees some flexibility to locate buried problems, such as for pipe and wire repairs. “I’ll never go back to time and materials.”

FAIRNESS TO THE COMPANY

A 40-year-old company, Able Irrigation converted to flat-rate pricing five years ago and spent four years prior preparing for the switch.

“It’s not easy,” MacKinnon says. “I’ll tell you that from the start.”

continued on page 36

Some companies, like Able Irrigation, opt for flat rate service pricing to get paid for 8 billable hours per day.



The Ticker:

IRRIGATION

John Deere Landscapes (JDL) acquired **Eljay Irrigation**, located in Calgary, Alberta.

While JDL didn’t disclose terms of the deal, President Dave Werling said the company expects to make more acquisitions in 2014.

Netafim debuted its line of Netafim Landscape Controllers. Developed by



Tucor, the web-based smart controllers incorporate weather and soil moisture data to determine watering needs.

With the U.S. General Services Administration approving the U.S. Green Building Council’s **Leadership Energy & Environmental Design v4 (LEED)** and the Green Building Initiative’s **Green Globes** rating programs as standards for green buildings, the



Irrigation Association (IA) outlined the differences and overlaps of the programs, primarily regarding point allocations. Visit buff.ly/1jepvrh for specifics.



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the minutes and materials it took to complete the job.

"You're going to lose some customers because your pricing is going up," MacKinnon says. "It's not an avenue to gouge the client. Really, what you're doing is running your business so you can make a reasonable profit."

Michael Oliveto uses a similar reasoning to justify why he charges on time and materials for service.

The vice president of operations at Rainfree Irrigation in Mt. Pleasant, S.C., says the company has used the structure for more than 25 years to "keep the customers honest" about the time employees are at the job site and to ensure employees are paid fairly for their time.

From their trucks, employees log in to a computerized network to report when they arrive and depart a job site. This way Oliveto always has an eye on them, and clients can't dispute the time they're charged for.

"When the guys get to a job I know they're working constantly," Oliveto says. "We get paid for almost all our time. I'm not losing money on hourly

continued from page 34

She enlisted the help of contractor consulting firm Grandy & Associates to create her model, which includes flat rates for basic repairs, primarily those above ground, and "custom flat rates" for more complex jobs. Technicians provide clients a "good case, bad case"

price for custom flat rates, meaning they estimate the bottom and top price for the job upfront and, when the job is complete, present the actual price that can't exceed the "bad case" cost, which is calculated from

Josh DePauw (pictured) favors time-and-materials pricing for irrigation services.

The Goods: IRRIGATION

GROUNDSKEEPER TECH'S SPRINKLERMAPS

Designed for landscape and irrigation managers, this mapping software provides an alternative to paper landscape maps. Users can plot irrigation and utility systems with a live satellite map.

TOOL TIME

SprinklerMaps features a square footage estimator, sprinkler radius viewer and global precipitation measurement (GPM) tallies.

GET IT DONE

The program allows landscape managers to flag markers for repair, map out assigned tasks and track progress.



THINK BIG

Among those already using this product are major universities, golf courses and several pro sports teams.

employees or jobs that take longer or are harder than they initially appear.”

The company includes travel time in its hourly rate, charging \$75 for the first hour on residential jobs and by 15-minute increments after that.

Still, Rainfree Irrigation gives customers an anticipated amount for a job before it begins work.

Oliveto keeps clients in the know if a job will cost 10 percent or more than the estimate, informing them before they receive their invoice.

JUSTIFYING THE APPROACH

The downside to time and materials, Oliveto says, is the intricacies of the invoice because you “must justify your time” to the customer.

“What we constantly struggle with is getting the technicians to be as accurate and descriptive as possible,” he says. “That’s something we’re always trying to drive home is you have to be accurate in what you’re saying. You can’t leave things out.”

Josh DePauw is another advocate for time-and-materials pricing, but the regional manager for Andy’s Sprinkler, Drainage & Lighting can pinpoint some challenges to it, too.

“A lot of customers like to hear that upfront cost being less,” he says, and adds how Andy’s gets over the hurdle. “Our office staff is the frontline of that phone call. We have girls who explain what we do and why we do it real easily. That’s a big deal.”

The Dallas-based company charges \$109 for its first hour, including the travel time to the job site and, like Rainfree Irrigation, charges in 15-minute increments thereafter.

DePauw says he never sees the company going to a flat rate because the

time-and-materials approach is what’s most fair for the company and customer.

On the other hand, profitability partly drives Robin Luce’s decision on service pricing. By the yearend he plans to switch to flat-rate pricing versus charging on time and materials as he has for the past 11 years.

“What it boils down to is what’s profitable for the company and what’s fair to the customer. Every time we get into an extended project, the hours can get high. (Clients) see that meter running and they’re freaking out.”

—Robin Luce, JubileeScape

“What it boils down to is what’s profitable to the company and what’s fair to the customer,” says the president of JubileeScape in Mobile, Ala. “Every time we get into an extended project, the hours can get high,” he says. “They see that meter running, especially a job that goes on two to three days, and they’re freaking out. The customer starts seeing these high prices.”

Luce recognizes the advantage of time and materials is it’s accurate. On the downside, it can leave the customer surprised if you charge them more than expected. With a flat rate, he anticipates customers will feel at ease knowing the job cost up front; plus, employees can’t get skimped on their time.

No matter the approach, Oliveto says customers should be the top priority.

“We make sure we’re fair to the person we work for,” he says. “Nobody likes surprises. Unless you’re like my wife—the only surprises she likes come in little boxes.”

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Out with the old

A Washington firm streamlines operations with a marketing overhaul. *By EMILY SCHAPPACHER*

Thanks to a total revamp of his company's marketing strategy, Rick Longnecker now knows his ideal clients are family-oriented homeowners in their late 30s to early 70s who have lived in their homes for at least 10 years. These clients aren't looking for the best price but the best service and value they can get from trained professionals. Since uncovering this intel, life has been easier for the owner of Buds & Blades Landscape Co. in East Olympia, Wash.

"We were just beating our heads against the wall every spring," Longnecker says. "We would have a flush of work come in to bid and we were either running around trying to do everything for everyone or we were taking work just to have work."

"It started to become clear that by doing certain types of jobs and working with certain types of customers we deliver a better product more consistently, and that just makes good business sense."

Longnecker began analyzing his company's practices at the end of the busy season last year. He evaluated

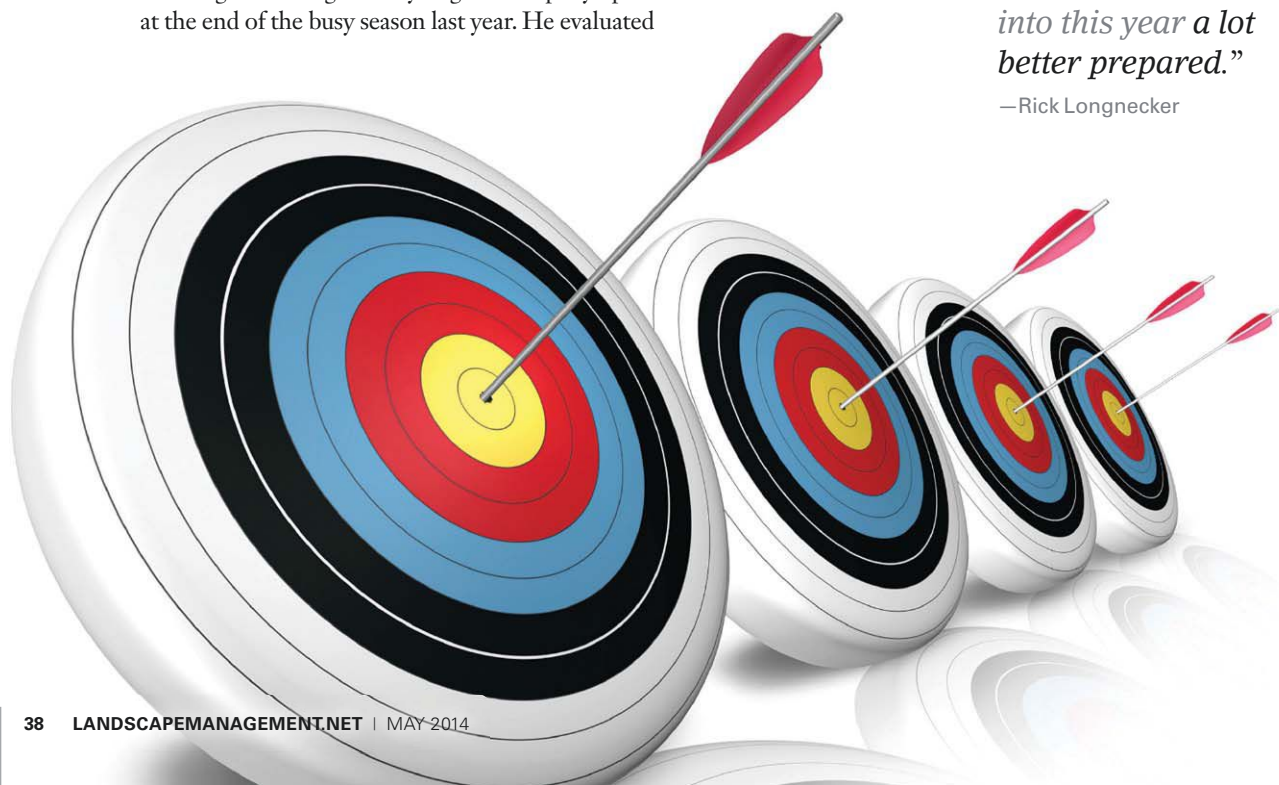
each step of his client interactions—from the initial phone call to collecting the check—and noticed similarities between accounts he thought were successful and accounts that weren't. Longnecker also determined the design/build services his company offered did not make the best use of his crews' time and skills, so he decided to strictly offer landscape maintenance to his 90 percent residential, 10 percent commercial clientele. Buds & Blades does about \$350,000 in annual revenue.

Once Longnecker had pinpointed the type of clients he wanted more of, he reworked his company's messaging to speak directly to them. He spent a little more money on a fine-tuned direct



"It has allowed us to go into this year a lot better prepared."

—Rick Longnecker



The Ticker: MAINTENANCE

Malvern, Pa.-based **Merit Service Solutions** acquired **SunTerra Landscape Services**, based in Austin, Texas. While terms of the deal weren't disclosed, SunTerra COO Judy McNew said the company hopes to expand nationally thanks to the acquisition. SunTerra, which is on track to hit \$14 million in 2014 revenue, hopes to jump to \$40 million annually within five years.

The **North American Equipment Dealers Association (NAEDA)** ranked **ECHO** and **Shindaiwa** at gold level status in its annual Manufacturer Relations Survey. The designation is determined by dealer

evaluation data exhibiting exceptional performances in product quality, technical support, parts availability, marketing and advertising support, among other categories.



Exmark published a new propane mower white paper, titled *Transitioning Mower Fleets to Propane*. Free for download at Exmark.com/propanepower, the white paper provides background on propane-fueled

equipment, including the progression of engine technology, and details existing options for landscape maintenance professionals to switch to propane.

Laytonsville, Md.-based **Ruppert Landscape** acquired **A R Star Services**, which services Baltimore. The transaction includes the purchase of select commercial contracts and equipment for sweeping—a service Ruppert has been looking to expand, said President Phil Key.



mail list and was more selective about the areas he reached out to. The firm's direct mail pieces now promote the fact that the company is locally owned and operated, telling clients how it can save them time and explaining the type of customer it wants to work with.

"Before, we would have sent something out that said: 'Here we are. Here's what we do. Call us for a quote.' And we would have picked a geographic area, sent out several thousand pieces and hoped for the best," Longnecker says. "Now we have dialed it down and are sending our customers direct mailings that connect with them."

CUSTOMERS' VOICE

Longnecker then purchased memberships to Angie's List and Yelp to collect sales leads and see user-generated comments and reviews. He's testing both sites this season to determine which one works best for his company and will discontinue membership of the other at the end of the year.

"An unsolicited testimonial or review goes a long way, and fortunately

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for us the reviews have all been great so far,” Longnecker says. “I know sooner or later that bad review will come up. We will have to cross that bridge when we come to it.”

Buds & Blades also hired a marketing firm for help with sending email newsletters to a “tight and clean” list of about 500 current and potential customers six times a year.

Each email has two goals: to provide landscaping tips and to share company news. Longnecker says he often gets positive feedback on the emails, which have an average open rate of almost 60 percent, and even have helped recruit new clients.

“We have found this even works several months out,” Longnecker says. “It’s kind of like a drift effect—we keep sending information and, hopefully, we can eventually meet their needs.”

BREAKING IT DOWN

Longnecker says the cost of his new marketing strategy was “not as much as you’d think.” The company spends roughly \$1,500 a year on a direct mail list. On top of that cost, each mailing it sends to the list costs \$1,500 to \$2,000. The company sends three or four mailings per year. Longnecker spends \$5,000 on memberships for Angie’s List and Yelp—a cost that will be cut in half when he drops one service—and \$255 per email newsletter. The company still plans to invest about \$3,000 to redesign its website and \$500 to \$750 to create a professional marketing video that will include client testimonials.

While Longnecker says it’s too early to quantify the results of his efforts, he says so far gross margins per job have gone up 5 percent to 10 percent due to increased pricing and

reduced labor costs. Additionally, total profit margins have increased at least 5 percent. Longnecker also is seeing the benefits of simplifying his service offerings. By sending the same guys with the same trucks and equipment to do similar jobs each day, the crew is quicker and more efficient, providing a better customer experience.

“We have seen a return on the front end by working with people who are going to buy and use our services and return on the back end because it’s a lot easier to manage and execute each job,” Longnecker says. “It’s been really great that we got started while things were fresh in our minds from last year. It has allowed us to go into this year a lot better prepared.”

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Charlotte, N.C.

The Goods: MAINTENANCE

JOHN DEERE MULCH ON DEMAND MOWER DECK

The Mulch On Demand (MOD) mower deck is now available in John Deere’s 2014 QuikTrak commercial mower lineup, which includes the 652R MOD and 652R EFI MOD models. Previously, the MOD was only available in the John Deere ZTrak line.

QUICK SWITCH

Convert from wide-open-side-discharge mode to a full-chambered mulching mode or any position in-between by holding down the electric switch located on the dash.



SIT TIGHT

MOD allows an operator to switch between mulching and side discharging without leaving the mower.

SPEC IT OUT

The 652R MOD and 652R EFI MOD are equipped with seven-gauge, 52-in. decks.

A second set of hands

Independent landscape design firms fill the role of staff designers for a fraction of the cost.

By EMILY SCHAPPACHER

Last June Patrick DuChene quit his full-time landscape design/management position to offer his services as an independent designer. DuChene Design Solutions, based in Branchburg, N.J., currently meets the design needs of 20 regular clients and counting, all whose businesses have grown and improved since bringing on DuChene as an extra set of hands, he says. It's a win for everyone, DuChene adds. He's able to offer his landscape design skills to multiple firms, while the company owners receive professional designs without the overhead costs of a full-time employee.

"That's the business model that makes this such a benefit to me and to the landscape company," DuChene says. "I saw what the economy is doing, and I saw a real need for what I'm doing."

Cooperative Design Resource (CDR) is another independent landscape design firm. Since last

year, the five-person cooperative has offered design and sales services to landscape contractors, suppliers and architects in the Denver metro area. About 90 percent of its jobs are for residential clients.

"Our part is to take the workload off the contractors so they can do what they need to do to build the design," says Jennifer Verprauskus, a CDR partner and the firm's marketing manager. "The projects they're getting are going to be really good, and they don't have to have a hand in it and micromanage. They can trust us it's going to get done."



Patrick DuChene



Patrick DuChene (designs pictured here) has about 20 regular clients.

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HOW IT WORKS

DuChene Design Solutions provides landscape designs and presentations for primarily residential projects to design/build firms throughout the U.S. Via conversations with clients and by using file-sharing services like Dropbox, DuChene can analyze his clients' properties through photographs and land surveys no matter where they're located and get a good feel for the job. His services cost anywhere from \$45 to \$100 an hour, depending on what the design entails.

For example, DuChene will charge more for jobs requiring 3D modeling or animation. Regardless of the hourly fee, DuChene's services are a "humongous savings" for landscape contractors, particularly those who are in a period of growth but are not in the position to hire another employee, he says.

"The average salary of a landscape designer is \$35,000 to \$45,000, and if

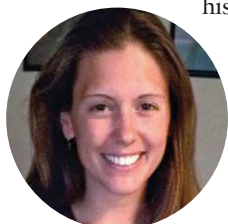
you add in the expenses that go along with that—a vehicle, cell-phone, benefits, uniforms, a computer—that number goes up into the \$60,000s," DuChene says. "If my clients aren't selling landscape jobs, they don't need me. I approach each job as if I am an employee of theirs, but I'm not. I'm there to help them."

CDR charges a design fee up front, a minimum of \$750 depending on the complexity of the design, and then a flat percentage of the project's total cost if the design is sold. The firm touts a combined 135 years of landscape design and sales experience.

Both DuChene and Verprauskus agree the biggest benefit of outsourcing landscape design work is the cost savings for the company owner. Verprauskus also has found many of CDR's clients value the sales services the firm offers, as it's another piece of the puzzle they don't have to worry about.



Sample projects from Cooperative Design Resource, which serves the Denver Metro area.



Jennifer Verprauskus



"The sales part is a huge part of our model," Verprauskus says. "Some contractors weren't confident in sales or design but could do a good job with the install. When we go out to a project we are representing that company, and when we make a sale we are selling on behalf of that company."

One aspect of outsourcing design jobs that some contractors find challenging is having less control during the design process, Verprauskus adds. While

The Goods: DESIGN/BUILD

KICHLER 2700K DESIGN PRO LED FIXTURES

The warm-white 2700K color temperature option will be available in two Design Pro LED 12V two-in-one water and accent lights, three Design Pro LED 12V wall wash accent fixtures (pictured here), 18 Design Pro LED 12V deck and patio fixtures and 46 Design Pro LED 12V path and spread fixtures.

STAY WARM

This warm, white option is ideal for enhancing yellow, orange and red hues in foliage or the natural earth tones found in siding or other building materials, Kichler says.



WHITER WHITE

A 3000K color temperature option is already available for all of these fixtures, giving customers an additional pure white option.

STICK TO IT

The new fixtures adhere to tight LED binning tolerances for color consistency.

CDR offers clients the opportunity to tweak or modify a design, some clients find it difficult to not be involved each step of the way. DuChene agrees this can be an issue, so his design process includes what he calls a “progress proof,” which is a black-and-white design concept he offers clients during the early stages of a project to make sure he’s on the right track.

Other hesitations some clients face is that working with a third-party company will make communication more difficult or that they’ll be overcharged if they don’t have visual proof of how much time was spent on a design, DuChene says. But building relationships and establishing trust can ease these uncertainties and establish a long-term partnership that works for everyone.

“It is a subcontractor relationship, but we see ourselves as partners because we help them and they help us,” Verprauskus says. “The clients’ best interests are our best interests.”

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Charlotte, N.C.

The Ticker: DESIGN/BUILD

Proven Winners named the Rockcastle River Trading Co. its first Proven Winners Botanical Trail, a designation bestowed to a property that integrates Proven Winners plants into a landscape containing indigenous plant material. Rockcastle River Trading Co. is located in Livingston, Ky., on the family property of **Jon Carloftis**, who maintains the grounds.

Now available on the **Landscape Management** website is a free, editable spreadsheet from **LM** columnist expert **Frank Ross** and **A Better Way 2 Learn**. Visit LandscapeManagement.net/downloads to access Ross's estimate summary spreadsheet, which allows you to plug in direct costs, overhead and net profit to determine job break-even point, gross margin and more.

a better way 2 learn			
Estimate Summary Sheet			
Job Name	Estimate Date	Estimate By	Estimate For
Contract Amount	\$ 40,000.00		
Direct Costs	\$ 12,000.00		
Overhead	\$ 2,000.00		
Net Profit	\$ 26,000.00		
Gross Margin	65.00%		
Net Profit Margin	65.00%		
Break-Even Point	\$ 12,000.00		
Job Cost per Hour	\$ 12.00		
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Tricks for techs

Brickman's Joe Ketterer shares five pointers for lawn care applicators to increase efficiency with landscape bed weed control.

By MARISA PALMIERI

When it comes to effective and efficient application techniques for landscape bed weed control, Joe Ketterer has a few shortcuts up his PPE-approved, long-sleeved shirt.

Ketterer, a certified pesticide applicator with a bachelor's degree in ornamental horticulture from Pennsylvania State University, is a 30-year veteran of the Brickman Group. He serves today as a regional production specialist for the Rockville, Md.-based national landscape company, providing in-house training and research/development capabilities in the areas of labor, materials and equipment.

Ketterer presented, "Best Practices of Weed Management in Landscape Beds," during an April webinar hosted by *Landscape Management* and sponsored by Nufarm.

He covered many of the basics, such as the importance of reading pesticide product labels, but he dove deeper to encourage attendees to think differently about product selection and application techniques.

"There are some (chemical) products small companies see and say, 'That's too expensive—I can't afford it,'" he says about product choice. "But if you take the time to apply the products properly and it drastically reduces the amount of hand weeding you have to do, you can afford it."

Regarding techniques, Ketterer offers five tricks to make landscape bed weed control applications easier.

1 Think custom. ACME Spred-Rite granular spreading tools are a staple in Ketterer's operation for precision granular material application in beds (typically preemergent herbicides). The standard tool comes with a green plastic paddle and a clear plastic tube. Ketterer has aluminum paddles custom made to "bulletproof" them for commercial use and extend their life spans.



2 Consider premixed products. Many lawn care operators (LCOs) overlook consumer-oriented, store-bought pesticides, but not Ketterer. He likes to keep a few jugs of this type of specialty product at the ready for specific situations, such as treating an unexpected poison ivy patch. Keeping in-house prepared products on hand is an alternative; however, it's important to remember bottle labeling requirements and to keep the product labels and MSDS on the truck.

3 Fabricate solutions. When working in beds, it's vital to protect nontarget plants adjacent to spray areas. Ketterer does so by modifying the top of a 32-ounce sport drink bottle and affixing it to the end of a spray wand to create a drift guard.

He starts by cutting the bottle along the top ridge and drilling a hole through the bottle cap (slightly smaller than the spray tip threads). Next, he removes the spray tip from the wand, screws the bottle cap onto the wand and replaces the spray nozzle. Finally, he screws the trimmed bottle into the bottle cap. At that point, if the plastic interferes with the spray pattern, he'll remove more of the plastic. "You can buy a drift protector for \$7 or \$8 apiece or make one with a recycled sport drink bottle in under two minutes," he says.

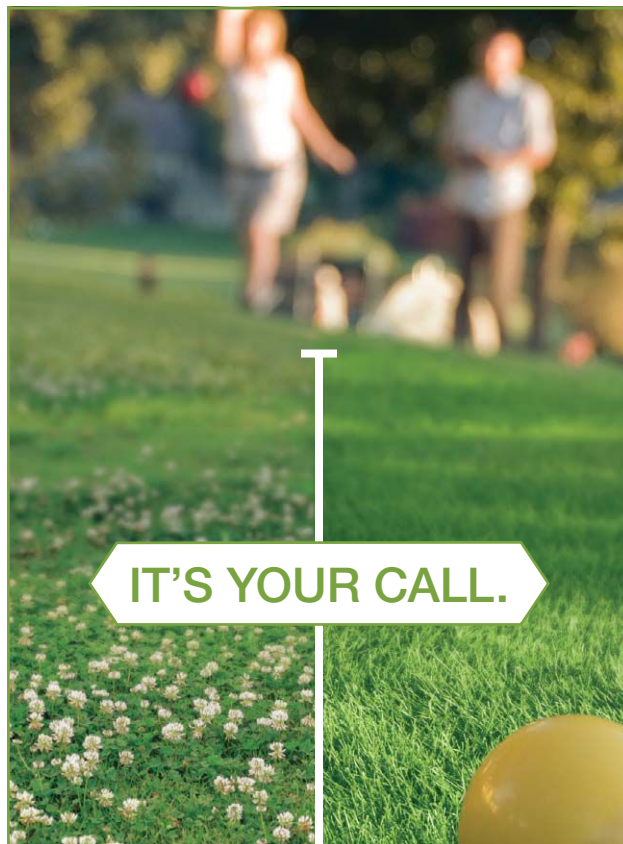
» WEB EXTRA

To view a recorded version of the bed weed control webinar, presented by Brickman's Joe Ketterer and Virginia Tech's Jeff Derr, Ph.D., visit LandscapeManagement.net/webinars.

The Ticker: LAWN CARE

The **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** and **Army Corps of Engineers** proposed a rule under the Clean Water Act that would regulate fertilizer and pesticide use on properties near any water, including man-made water bodies, ditches and flood plains. Aaron Hobbs, president of **Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE)**, opined on the new rule, noting professionals would need to obtain permits to treat such properties and that could cause additional difficulties. The rule is open for public comment until July 21 and viewable at buff.ly/1fx80Zv.

■
Bayer CropScience opened the doors to its North American Bee Care Center in Research Triangle Park, N.C. The \$2.4 million facility will act as an educational resource and research hub for stewardship and best management practices pertaining to honeybees. While research has been focused on agriculture so far, projects are in the works related to urban settings, primarily the impact of pesticides and like products on bee populations.



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4 Wick on. Don't forget about specialty equipment for targeting specific weeds in sensitive situations, Ketterer says. A wick applicator, for example, looks like a hockey stick

with a paint roller on the end. "You can wipe glyphosate onto the weeds to selectively take them out," he says. "It's a pretty cool little tool that comes in handy."

5 Top it off. Filling Spred-Rites with granular herbicides directly from product bags can be tricky, causing spillage and waste. Ketterer recommends using a 5-gallon paint bucket with a lid and pour spout to keep the product dry and make the task easier. **LM**

SAFETY FIRST

It goes without saying that lawn care professionals always should follow personal protective equipment requirements listed on pesticide labels, says Joe Ketterer, regional production specialist with the Brickman Group. Still, everyone needs a reminder, he says. Here's his must-have safety gear checklist.

Don't forget

- ✓ Safety vest
- ✓ Safety glasses
- ✓ Gloves
- ✓ Boots
- ✓ Eye wash bottle (solution and cups)
- ✓ Spill cleanup kit

Wear when applicable

- ✓ Long-sleeved shirt
- ✓ Ear protection
- ✓ Chemical gloves
- ✓ Dust mask

The Goods: LAWN CARE

FMC TRIPLE CROWN T&O INSECTICIDE

Triple Crown is a three-way combination of bifenthrin, zeta-cypermethrin and imidacloprid, offering multiple modes of action on pests, including ants, fire ants, grubs (masked chafer, European chafer and Japanese beetle), chinch bugs, annual bluegrass weevils, ticks, mites, billbugs, mole crickets and more.

APPLY AWAY

The product is labeled for broadcast lawn treatments, mound treatments and landscape applications.



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It's registered for use on lawn and landscaped areas around residential, institutional, public, commercial and industrial buildings, parks, recreational areas and athletic fields.

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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.

Beyond commercial bid/build

Q We do a lot of residential and commercial maintenance. We also do residential design/build work. Business has been good, but we're always looking for additional sources of revenue. Got any ideas?

A Many landscape contractors have a mix of residential maintenance and design/build work as well as commercial maintenance, but there's one category of business that has been overlooked for years that has profit potential. Let's see if you can figure it out what's missing from your business.

- Residential maintenance
- Residential design/build
- Commercial maintenance
- Commercial _____/_____

Hopefully you figured out that the missing opportunity for your business is commercial design/build work. Not commercial bid/build work but commercial design/build. Give it a minute and the concept will hit you like a ton of pavers.

I came up with this concept about 10 years ago when we did a design/build installation project for a client who happened to be the facilities manager at one of the corporate campuses we maintained. After his project was completed he told me the property owners where he worked wanted to redesign the building entrance and create an outdoor lunch area for the employees. He told me he was interviewing architects, landscape architects and landscape designers about the project and asked me if we wanted to bid on it when the drawings were ready.

I said: "I have a much better idea that I think can work for all of us. Since you already know us and the work we do, why not let us design and build the project instead of hiring a separate designer and installation contractor?" He agreed that made perfect sense and so began our foray into commercial design/build work. We never looked back.

Believe it or not, facility managers have difficult jobs. Regardless of the size of the properties and building(s) they manage, they're responsible for creating and maintaining a budget, managing a

support staff, sourcing service providers, interpreting business contracts and much more. It behooves you to help make their lives easier. Here are some ideas to help get you started

Where to start

First, contact the commercial property owners and facility managers you currently do maintenance or snow plowing for, and let them know you've created a new commercial design/build division specifically for your commercial clients. A colorful and informative marketing piece would be great, too. If not, an introductory letter or initial phone call is a good start. They already know you, depend on you and have a working business relationship with you, why wouldn't they be interested?

Next, set up a meeting with the facility manager and any other influencers to take a walk around the property to discuss existing problems and/or future opportunities. If you really want to impress them, start off by showing them how they can save money on their maintenance bill or snow contract. That should get their attention.

Toward the end of the meeting, ask them to prioritize all the things you discussed and maybe pick the top three. Finally, offer to provide them with some numbers for the proposed work so they can put it into their 2015 budget. This way when they're ready to pull the trigger on the project, the money is already there. Who knows, maybe you'll get lucky and they already have a project in the pipeline just waiting for someone to design it and make it happen.

Facility managers really do have a lot on their plates and would appreciate a helping hand from a friendly face who's already a qualified and trusted partner. When you look at it this way, you can understand how valuable a commercial design/build landscape contractor can be to a facilities manager when faced with outdoor issues or potential projects.

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

Taking a stab

York Landscape opts for verticutting to remove thatch and ramp up revenue.

AMONG THE GREATEST nemeses of a lush lawn is thatch, a layer of dead, organic debris that develops between the blades of grass and the soil surface. While contractors commonly turn to power raking to tackle thatch, Pinellas Park, Fla.-based York Landscape takes the high road with its verticutting service, removing thatch and excessive top growth from turf using a machine to slice rows into the ground for new seed to drop in. Owner York Somerville has been verticutting for about 30 years, and says he's seen only a sliver of the Green Industry adopt the add-on, too.

"Customers don't understand what it is or what it does," says Somerville, who first learned the practice in Long Island, N.Y., where he used a verticutter for overseeding lawns. "It's something golf courses do all the time, but it's not as common for residential landscape."

The buildup of thatch can occur on many turf varieties, but it's especially prevalent in creeping-type grasses like St. Augustinegrass, which Somerville often maintains. Thatch accumulation can increase disease and insect problems, cause watering issues and create an undesirable "spongy" feel to the grass, among other complications.

Compared to power raking, Somerville chooses verticutting because it opens up the soil so well.

"Contrary to popular belief, and even information you may find on the Internet, a power rake will not remove thatch," he says. "It only will remove surface debris. The best way to remove thatch is by investing in a verticutter."

GETTING STARTED

Somerville notes some verticutters simply make cuts into the ground while others (overseeders) make cuts and drop seed. He operates a machine that doesn't distribute seed. Those in the South may have trouble finding a suitable machine, he says.

"The verticutters seem to be built for Bermudagrass or grasses you find up North," he says. "I'd been using a machine that was more than 30 years old and it just recently broke. I bought two newer ones but had to modify them to work on St. Augustine."



Verticutting removes thatch and excess top growth from turf.

York Landscape puts a two-man crew on its residential verticutting duties for the four months out of the year it offers the service (typically two months in the spring and two months in the summer). "Larger commercial sites certainly could use verticutting and you'd need a bigger crew," Somerville says.

You can't do much damage to a lawn with a verticutter, he says, but there are some hazards to look out for.

"You just need to be careful to always mark your sprinklers and be prepared to fix one if you break it," Somerville says, adding that's a practice most maintenance companies likely are already familiar with.

Somerville prices his verticutting jobs based on the size of the lawn. In other areas, companies will give consideration

to weather variances and whether their verticutting involves seeding. Although he didn't disclose financials from the add-on service, Somerville says it's proven to be popular among clients and a bit of a revenue booster for the company.

Even so, York Landscape doesn't heavily market verticutting outside of its mention on the company website and through upsells to existing customers.

"You don't need to be a wonderful salesman to pitch this," Somerville says. "It's one of those things that can have a pretty dramatic effect on how a lawn looks and that's always an easy sell to people who are already investing in their lawn."

In addition to being a sure way to remove thatch and thin a lawn, Somerville says verticutting also allows a lawn to breathe, stimulates new growth, aerates and prepares it for seeding. "Verticutting is important to all types of grasses because all lawns create thatch," he says. "It's really a no-brainer."

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

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY: York Landscape

LOCATION: Pinellas Park, Fla.

SERVICE: Verticutting

WHY: It's the best way to remove thatch, Somerville says, which is a huge problem in his region.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: Finding equipment. "I have yet to find a piece of equipment built to work well on St. Augustinegrass," he says. "I've always had to make modifications."

BEST TIP: "Look for the best machine you can find," Somerville says. "If you're in a region where St. Augustine is not your primary grass, you shouldn't have an issue with finding a piece of equipment that works great on your lawns."

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Gordon's Professional //

GordonsProfessional.com



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Nufarm // Nufarm.com

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Quali-Pro // Quali-Pro.com



Tribute Total

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Bayer CropScience // BackedByBayer.com

Monument

Syngenta supports a FIFRA Section 2(ee) Recommendation for Monument herbicide with a use rate of one single-dose 0.5-gram pack per 2 gal. of water. The label allows treatment for larger areas, increasing coverage from 1,000 sq. ft. to 2,000 sq. ft. to reduce treatment cost per 1,000 sq. ft. Monument controls all major sedges, kyllinga and *Poa annua* in Bermudagrass and Zoysiagrass. For broadcast applications, the 0.5-gram packets offer the lowest price point. See the Section 2(ee) Recommendation to confirm that the recommendation is applicable in your state.

Syngenta Professional Products // SyngentaProfessionalProducts.com



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Powercoup

Infaco's battery-operated Powercoup features interchangeable saw or hedge-trimmer heads and a variety of extensions, eliminating the need for ladders, the company says. The saw head's clean cut minimizes the risk of tree disease, while the hedge-trimmer head uses an incline-adjusting system that allows landscapers to work quickly, easily and comfortably.

Infaco-USA // Infaco-USA.com



40V MAX Pole Saw PS250

The cordless 40V MAX Pole Saw PS250 features an 8-in. bar and uses Oregon's lithium ion technology. Its tool-free telescoping shaft offers up to 15 ft. of reach. It weighs just 13.5 lbs. with battery and boasts a mid-mount motor design. An integrated branch hook allows for easy limb removal.

Oregon Cordless Tool System // OregonCordless.com



K-6770

Combined with Metallo's telescopic poles, the K-6770 pruner is the solution to prune at height. Thanks to its "gear power" transmission, limbs with a diameter of 1.9 in. can be pruned without significant effort. Spare parts are available for these products, as well as a 10-year guarantee on craftsmanship.

Earth & Turf Products // EarthAndTurf.com



CORE Elite

CORE Elite, the latest addition to Core's suite of GasLess equipment, currently features a higher performance string trimmer and handheld blower—more products will be introduced, including a lawn mower and hedge trimmer. Weighing 11 lbs. with power cell, the new E 400 trimmer features up to a 16-in. swath, .095-in. diameter trimmer line and torque equivalent to a 45CC gas engine. The 10-lb. E 420 handheld blower produces wind speeds of up to 130 mph with airflow of up to 500 cubic feet per minute (CFM).

Core Outdoor Power // CoreOutdoorPower.com

AR 900 Battery Backpack

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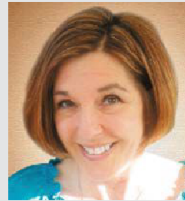
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Tom Canete

CEO of Canete Snow Management, Wayne, N.J.



Who's your mentor? I've learned a lot through consultants. I'm currently working with Bill Pate. He owns Integrity Management. He really got us on track and doing things a little different. Another consultant I used mainly for snow is John Allin. He snow plowed the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics in 2002.

How did this snow removal season shape up to others for your company? We had a record year. We ended up signing MetLife Stadium, which hosted the Super Bowl. That was huge. I'm contracted to have on standby anywhere from 200 to 500 people to shovel out the stadium.

Leading up to the game, you mentioned in an interview with LM that people tried to persuade you from taking that contract because it would affect normal business operations. Were they right?

No. I only hired one person from my core company. Everybody else was new. I had from May until November/December to get all my ducks in a row. I hired a project manager to help. He took a big brunt of it. (Allin) actually was one of the people who told me don't take the account. He has a radio show I've been on about MetLife (listen at buff.ly/1mUVos8). "The hero," he calls me because I pulled it off.

How do you balance such a large commitment to snow removal amid running a landscape business (Canete Landscape & Garden Center)?

This year, I spent a lot of time during our landscape season working on our snow company. I try to dedicate four hours a week. At the worst scenario, it's two. We don't just think about it as "the winter thing we do." It may work for some, but it causes problems for us because there are a lot of things to improve. Another thing is to always be open to other people's suggestions. You don't need to have this big ego. People that work for you, you really should listen to what they say. They're the ones working in the business while you're back overseeing things. This year, while snow was fresh in everybody's minds before we started landscaping, I had a meeting with all my people involved with snow. We ended up spending four hours on this meeting. We talked about problems this year and how to correct them. We came up with a big list of things I'm going to work on throughout the year to make sure, come November, we're ready to roll.

With the rigid winter, did you have to deploy any new business or operational tactics? We started having a second shift of office people for big storms. We did the same thing with drivers. These guys can push for 24 hours but when you start getting past that, they want to go home. Another problem we had was with sidewalk crews. We started getting more involved with sidewalk machines, Ventracs. We bought one and were able to take a four-man crew down to one guy.

OFF THE CLOCK

WHAT'S THE BEST PART OF SNOW REMOVAL?

Seeing all the equipment working. I'm an equipment junkie.

DO YOU HAVE ANY HOBBIES? I'm a bodybuilder. I used to compete, not anymore, but I'm still at the gym two hours a day.

HAVE YOU ALWAYS LIVED IN NEW JERSEY? Born and raised here.

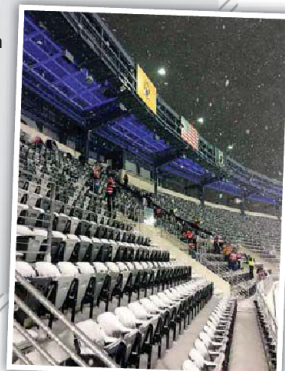
DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE MOVIE?

I like the "Rocky" movies and "Gladiator."

ARE YOU AFFILIATED WITH ANY ORGANIZATIONS?

I do a lot of speaking for the Snow & Ice Management Association (SIMA) and for the Accredited Snow Contractors Association (ASCA). I'm president of the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association (NJLCA).

MetLife Stadium



PHOTOS: CANETE SNOW MANAGEMENT ©ISTOCK.COM/KIRSTYARGETER; ILLUSTRATION: ©ISTOCK.COM/DARKLORD_71

For more on Canete's Super Bowl undertaking, visit buff.ly/RPhzDn.



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