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November 2021 VOL. 60, ISSUE 11

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[STATE OF THE INDUSTRY] Industry Pulse

As we enter the last segment of 2021, we want input from you, our readers, on how 2021 has been for your business. Where do you think the green industry is headed in the next five, 10 or even 15 years? Let us know and you may be included in December's Industry Pulse story. Please contact LM Editor Christina Herrick at cherrick@northcoastmedia.net if you'd like to participate in the story. The interviews and corresponding survey will be published in the December issue of LM.



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Back on the bike

From Oct. 18, 2019, to Oct. 19, 2021, is exactly 731 days. Two years and one day. That's how long the time span was between the end of the 2019 GIE+EXPO and the beginning of the 2021 GIE+EXPO, the international landscape, outdoor living and equipment exposition that takes place in Louisville each year (minus a global pandemic).

I wondered, would we remember how to do this trade show thing? Would it come back like riding a bicycle, or would it be awkward, like those days in 2020 when you didn't know if you were supposed to shake hands, fist bump or just wave from a comfortable distance?

Turns out in this industry, we ride bikes — hard.

That feels-like-the-good-ol'-days moment came for me as I was standing in the Echo booth on day one of the show, there for a toast to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the company. I was standing on the fringe of the booth, happy to stand to the back of the crowd (I'm kinda tall and don't like being the blockhead in everyone's view.) Someone from Echo pushed me to move up front because, "You're media!"

Once I got there I saw a bunch of familiar faces and started shaking hands with folks I hadn't seen in quite a while. A few words were spoken over a microphone, and then plastic champagne flutes of sparkling grape juice were handed out for a toast. We may have been toasting Echo's 50th at that moment, but it felt like at the same time we were toasting being back together.

The 2021 GIE+EXPO, the last time the show will use that name (see story on page 14), was a smashing success. Booth to booth, face to face, it was like we were all making up for lost time. And the crowd was incredible.

"The show was outstanding. I've done this show for six years and we didn't know what to expect coming in after COVID," Harry Brennan,

“The 2021 GIE+EXPO, the last time the show will use that name, was a smashing success. Booth to booth, face to face, it was like we were all making up for lost time.”

director of sales for the professional channel for the Fountainhead Group, a manufacturer of pump sprayers, backpack sprayers and mosquito foggers, told me as he was packing up at the end of the show. "Right from the start, it was just incredible. We've seen more foot traffic than we've ever seen at the show. It's exciting because it's good to see people trying to get back to a normal life."

Others echoed these comments:

"It's been fantastic," said Julie Scott, senior brand manager with Belgard. "I believed it would be busy, but it's far

exceeded that. There's been so much excitement."

"I've been to GIE the last five years with Greenworks, and this is our best show yet," said Vince Constantine, commercial sales manager for Greenworks.

Kris Kiser, president and CEO of OPEI, who hosts the show, told me afterwards that the show was exactly what they were hoping to see.

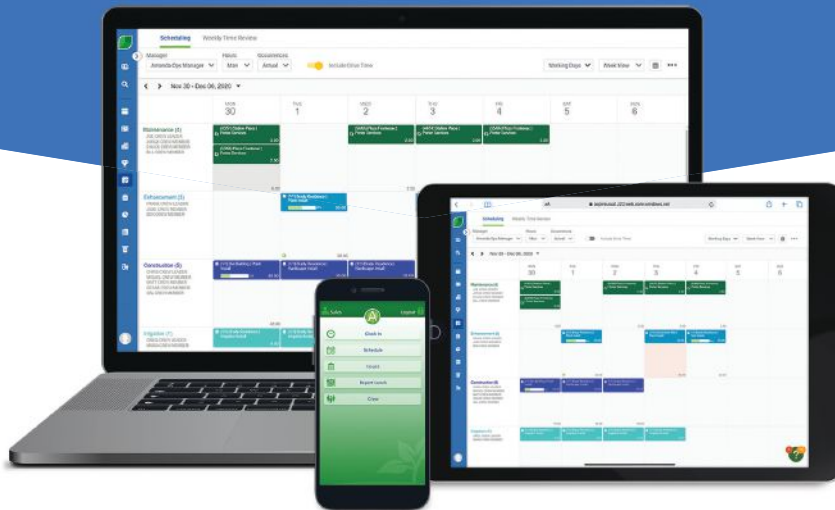
"We were very pleased with the sheer number of landscape contractors and the fact that many stayed for the entirety of the show," Kiser told me. "There was a lot of uncertainty, but the numbers were terrific. We did better on landscape contractors from 2019 — our record year — by a couple hundred. That second day outside was insane. I've never seen it that busy."

What was the theme of the show, aside from, "We're back!?" That's easy: Batteries and robots, batteries and robots. It seemed like the folks who have a hard-line attitude of "the way dad used to do it" have softened. Maybe it was a year off, or maybe it's California law AB 1346, banning the sale of new small gas engines in 2024. Other popular topics include the challenging supply chain, rising prices and labor.

Either way, we came back from GIE+EXPO with a renewed energy and notebooks full of content that we can't wait to share with you. It was great to be back. 🏍️



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What does water management mean to you?

“In the Northeast, we are above average this summer in rainfall, including several large storms. We managed it through increased attention on plant health care and lawn disease management. We also trained our mow crews to document washouts while on-site to help sell a larger number of small repair enhancements. It has also involved cross-training irrigation techs who were less busy doing system repairs to other tasks so we can retain them.”



Landscape Professionals

Richard Bare
Arbor-Nomics Turf
Norcross, Ga.

Troy Clogg
Troy Clogg Landscape Associates
Wixom, Mich.

Paul Fraynd
Sun Valley Landscaping
Omaha, Neb.

Luke Henry
ProScape Lawn & Landscaping Services
Marion, Ohio

Chris Joyce
Joyce Landscaping
Cape Cod, Mass.

Aaron Katerberg
Grapids Irrigation
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Jerry McKay
McKay Landscape Lighting
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Phil Harwood
Grow the Bench
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Kevin Kehoe
3PG Consulting
Laguna, Calif.

Jeffrey Scott
Jeffrey Scott Consulting
New Orleans, La.



“Water management is treating water as the precious resource it is. From intentional and intelligent irrigation to managing and utilizing rainwater in the landscape, it’s our role as landscape professionals to be stewards of the environment and teach our clients about the benefits that these practices provide.”

“Water management to me means the efficient and responsible use of water, not too much, not too little, just right. Water is money. Treat it like that.”



“Using technology intelligently to deliver water with precision and without waste.”



“It means offering the very best in irrigation service in-house and collaborating with a good installer if needed — water management is a very profitable and win-win-win business when done right.”



“Providing a service that reduces client water costs by matching service clock management with plant selection.”



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LM GALLERY

Check out a few of the places where the *LM* team made its rounds recently



1

1 A gaze at Graze John Vlay (left), a 35-year veteran of the landscape business, is now CEO of Graze, a fully autonomous electric commercial mower manufacturer. At GIE+EXPO, he gave *Landscape Management* Associate Publisher Craig MacGregor a demo of what the Graze mower can do. Expect more on the company and their mowers in a future issue.



2

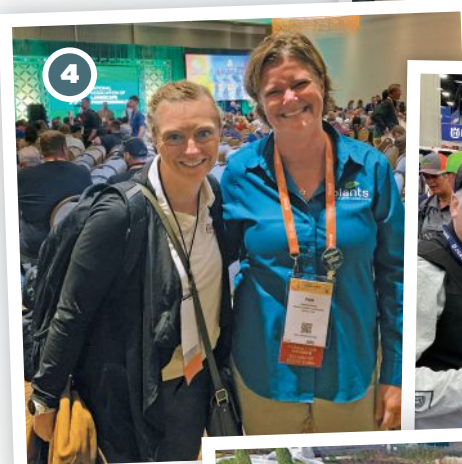
2 Equipped for success (Left to right) *LM* Editor-in-Chief Seth Jones, Publisher Bill Roddy, MacGregor, OPEI President Kris Kiser and Rebecca Kirk of The Davey Tree Expert Co. at the new Equip Exposition office in Louisville.



3

3 Price to Sell (Left to right) Ryan Price, Joe Majerus, Joe Sell and Jesse Majerus of Sheboygan Falls, Wis.-based Landmark Landscapes take in the outdoor demo area at this year's GIE+EXPO. Joe Majerus, owner of the company, was kind enough to give us a 5 Questions interview right there on the spot — check out page 41 to learn more about his company and how he's had success retaining great employees.

4 Hi, Pam! While at Landscapes, *LM* Editor Christina Herrick stopped to say hello to Pam Dooley, owner of October's cover subject, Plants Creative.



4

5 Happy 50th! Jones and Herrick toasted the 50th anniversary of the founding of Echo with sparkling grape juice alongside Michael Bedell (left), owner of Bedell Property Management in Milford, Mich., and Danny Lanier, owner of Lanier Lawn Care in Archie, Mo. (in orange).



5

6 Tastes like Winning *Landscape Management's* Jake Goodman (left), MacGregor and Kevin Stoltman (right) take in the view at Churchill Downs with FMC's Evan Parenti and Allan Dufoe. The race track was closed, but Matt Winn's Steakhouse, located at the track, was open and delicious.



6



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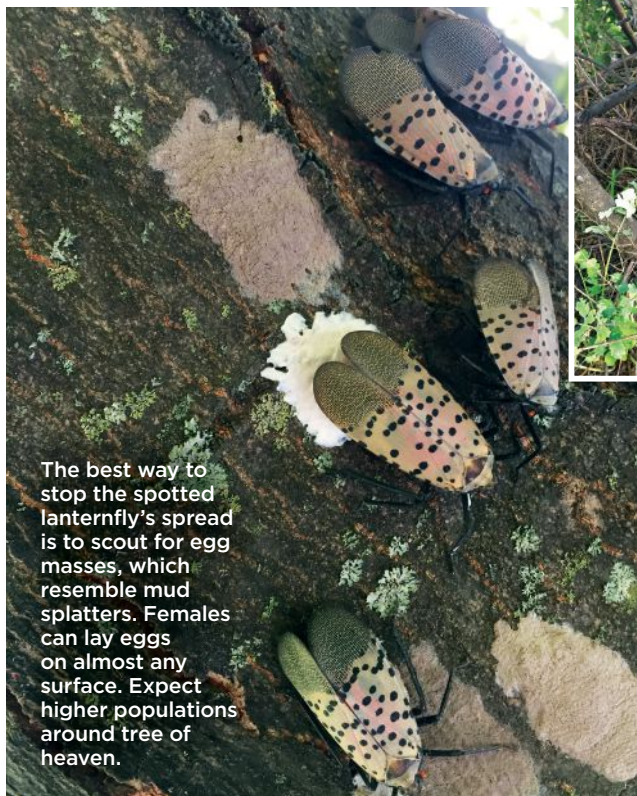
THE 411 ON SPOTTED LANTERNFLY

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

Spotted lanternfly has been in the news lately for its threat to agricultural commodities. In terms of the spotted lanternfly's threat to turf and ornamental plantings, experts say it's more of a nuisance. So far, spotted lanternfly has been found in the Mid-Atlantic region and some Midwestern states.

When lanternflies feed, the adults secrete a sticky substance called honeydew. This honeydew, aside from being messy, can attract yellow jackets and other stinging insects. Sooty mold is also present in areas of large spotted lanternfly populations, and sometimes, a distinguishable smell comes along with the spotted lanternfly feeding.

"This really sour smell develops, and it has to do with the microbes that are present because of all the honeydew," says Emelie Swackhamer, Penn State Extension horticulture educator. "It can really stink."



The best way to stop the spotted lanternfly's spread is to scout for egg masses, which resemble mud splatters. Females can lay eggs on almost any surface. Expect higher populations around tree of heaven.

The spotted lanternfly feeds on a myriad of plants and weeds, such as tree of heaven, Oriental bittersweet, wild grape, walnut, *Styrax*, *Evodia*, river birch, willow, Staghorn sumac and red and silver maple trees.

"Landscape managers that work with high-value ornamental trees want to be monitoring those trees," she says. "We want landscape managers to understand and help their customers know that we don't expect the spotted lanternfly to kill a lot of landscape trees."




Emelie Swackhamer



Spotted lanternflies amass in forested areas on properties.

Swackhamer says landscape managers need to use integrated pest management practices, which may include using chemical controls based on the population numbers and the value of the trees threatened. There also needs to be an expectation that treatments are not eradications as lanternfly populations often congregate in forested and wild areas on properties, she says. Expect fluctuations in populations, too, as these pests move into new areas, much like gypsy moths.

"There is no one-size-fits-all program for spotted lanternfly management," she says, noting many turf pests and diseases have standard treatment programs. Swackhamer says the first line of defense against new populations should be trapping and scouting for eggs and the pest itself. She recommends circle traps because sticky bands can catch other insects, birds or animals. Swackhamer says landscape professionals can help slow the pest's spread through trapping and communicating to customers about its threat. 

FieldRoutes expands software service into lawn care

Pest control software providers PestRoutes and Lobster Marketing have rebranded as FieldRoutes. As part of this move, FieldRoutes developed several new solutions for lawn care service providers and has unveiled a new company website: **FieldRoutes.com**. The companies say this rebranding will enable expansion into new verticals.

FieldRoutes officials say the company has serviced lawn care service providers that also offer pest control. According to the company, lawn care customers using the operations suite, on average, report growing their customer base by up to 44 percent within their first year using the software. The company also said lawn care customers using the FieldRoutes sales and marketing suite have seen strong year-over-year returns on their marketing investment.

The product lineup now includes FieldRoutes' operations suite (formerly PestRoutes), FieldRoutes' sales and marketing suite (formerly Lobster Marketing) and FieldRoutes Payments, an integrated payment solution that delivers enhanced payment functionality, such as the account updater, which automatically updates lost, stolen, expired or closed customer payment card information.

Landscaping company sets up GoFundMe to help injured employees

Highland Landscaping in Southlake, Texas, is raising money for the family of four employees who were driving home from work and were hit from behind by a hit-and-run driver.

According to a GoFundMe page set up by Highland Landscaping owners Ian and Jason MacLean, a husband and wife who work at Highland were in the back seat of a vehicle on July 2 driven by their sister and brother-in-law, who also work for the company, when the vehicle was struck from behind by a hit-and-run driver and catapulted into a concrete pillar.

The couple in the back seat were ejected from the vehicle. The male passenger died, and the female passenger suffered extensive injuries. The male driver lost mobility in his lower half, and the female in the passenger-side front seat suffered several broken bones.

In an article from local publication *Southlake Style*, the McLeans said, "We will be forever grateful for whatever financial help you are able to provide. No donation is too small."

So far, more than \$20,000 has been raised for the family at the GoFund me page: <https://gofund.me/3fe71580>.

Cub Cadet to release semiautonomous commercial mowers in 2022

Cub Cadet is introducing its first semiautonomous commercial mowers. The Cub Cadet Pro Series Pro Z 960 S and 972 S SurePath units are outfitted with GPS technology and an exclusive four-wheel steering system.

The operator sets the preliminary cut line, and the Pro Z SurePath units will perform straight cutting paths with an auto-zero-turn at the end of each pass. By utilizing high-precision GPS technology, SurePath Auto Steer reduces overlap and cuts perfect stripes, allowing the operator to cover a property in less time while producing superior cut quality.

Built on the Pro Z 960 S and Pro Z 972 S platforms, the SurePath units are outfitted with 16-cc transmissions, 26-inch rear tires and a high-performance FX1000v Kawasaki engine. They are backed by a three-year, no-hour-limit warranty or a five-year 1,750-hour limited deck warranty. Cub Cadet Pro Series Pro Z 960 S and 972 S SurePath units will be available at dealers in select markets starting in spring 2022.

SEED COMPANY PLEADS GUILTY TO ROLE IN FRAUD SCHEME

ProSeeds Marketing of Jefferson, Ore., pleaded guilty to a count of concealing a felony in defrauding Jacklin Seed Co., a subsidiary of J.R. Simplot Co.

The *Statesman Journal* reports ProSeeds contracted with Jacklin Seed Co. to purchase grass seed. These contracts were negotiated under the supervision of Christopher Claypool, Jacklin's general manager.

Claypool was convicted of wire fraud and money laundering earlier this year and was sentenced to three years in prison. Claypool incorporated an LLC called Green Pyramid to

pose as an independent grass seed broker and collected fraudulent commissions payments, according to the *Statesman Journal*.

ProSeeds also booked sales diverted from Jacklin with markups and then kicked back the bulk of the markups to Claypool. Court records show ProSeeds booked 12 diverted and bogus sales, which generated more than \$474,000 in markups on Jacklin Seed. ProSeeds retained more than \$78,000 in revenue from the transactions.

The *Statesman Journal* said the company faces five years of probation and a \$500,000 fine.



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INTRODUCING

EQUIP

The former GIE+EXPO show rebrands with a new name, headquarters and commitment to Louisville

BY SETH JONES | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Don't call it a divorce, but for professionals in the lawn care and landscape industry, starting next year, they might be getting two Christmases.

It was announced at last month's GIE+EXPO that next year's event in Louisville will be different. It will be held without the National Association of Landscape Professionals' (NALP) annual Landscapes show, it will have new educational partners (including this magazine) and it has a new name: Equip Exposition.

PHOTO: ALLIE FILLEY



Left to right: Lee Sowell, president, outdoor products group, Techtronic Industries; Cleo Battle, president and CEO, Louisville Tourism; Mike Clancy, CEO, Chervon North America; Tom Duncan, CEO, Positec; Brian Melka, group president – power, Kohler Co.; Joe Wright, president and CEO, Excel Industries; Mike Berry, secretary, Kentucky Tourism, Arts & Heritage; Tim Dorsey, president, Echo; Kris Kiser, president and CEO, OPEI; Rick Olson, chairman of the board, president and CEO, The Toro Co.; Greg Fischer, Mayor, Louisville; Dan Ariens, CEO, Ariens Co.

Meanwhile, NALP's event Landscapes, which had coincided with GIE+EXPO for the last 15 years, also announced a new name and location. Now known as Elevate (see sidebar, page 20), it will rotate locations beginning in September 2022. The first Elevate will be hosted at the Gaylord Palms Resort & Conference Center in Orlando.

THE NAME GAME

Kris Kiser, president of Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, says the new name, Equip Exposition, defines what the show is all about.

"It's simple; it captures us," he says. "We have quite a bit of diversity of product from golf cars to trenchers, portable generators and mowers to chainsaws. It's quite a mix. All that stuff equips you to do your job. Equip is both noun and verb. It's all-encompassing."

"I love it. I think it hits the bull's-eye," Dan Ariens, chairman and CEO of the Ariens Co., and Equip Exposition show chairman, says of the new name. "Equip is who we are. We're equipment from construction and installation to mowing

Continued on page 16

OPEI recently celebrated the opening of Equip Expo's headquarters in downtown Louisville. "We have a very significant investment in this office, it's a beautiful office," Kiser says. "(Equip Expo) is a year-round effort. That's why you have a year-round staff."

Continued from page 15 and maintenance to any of the handheld products. It talks about all the equipment that we all know is helping a customer be more efficient, more productive and reduce the labor on the job.”

Beyond the new name, the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI), owner of the trade show, announced further developments, including the opening of its new facility in downtown Louisville; a partnership with *Landscape Management* magazine, Bob Clements International and the Professional Grounds Management Society to host a series of educational seminars; and the announcement of country music star Trace Adkins as the marquee concert for 2022 and golf funnyman David Feherty as the 2022 keynote speaker.



“Louisville has been our home for 40 years, and we hope it’s our home for another 40.”

—Kris Kiser, OPEI

“We want to grow our show, and my board of directors want to grow this show,” Kiser says. “They’re adding significant resources for us to invest in the show. We’ve stepped up the talent. We hope over time, people identify our show, and they know what that show is and where that show is.”

THINGS CHANGE

Also at the show, the NALP announced the future plan for Landscapes, along with its new name: Elevate.

Kiser stresses it was an amicable separation. “It was NALP’s decision. We work with (NALP) all the time, and we support each other with political things, like paying for a lobbyist,” Kiser says. “The decision was NALP’s alone. I think it wanted to return to its earlier format of rotating around, generating membership therefrom. It chose to leave at the end of the contract term, which is this year.”

Roger Phelps, communications manager for Stihl, was on the board of directors for NALP prior to the decision being made to separate from GIE+EXPO. He says he thinks it all comes down to being time to try something else.

“The fact that there was that long of a run together, I think is a real testament to both organizations and how well they did,” Phelps says. “Sometimes I think there’s a need for change. The NALP first and foremost has to serve its membership. If the members are asking for something different, it has to respond.

“Everything has a life cycle,” Phelps continues. “GIE+EXPO itself has tried a couple things, ran with it then said, ‘You know that was good, but it’s nothing we need to continue to do.’ That’s the great thing about

Continued on page 19

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EQUIP EXPOSITION

Continued from page 16
our industry — we are always adapting and innovating to make sure we're effective and efficient in the market. This is just one of those things. No one has to lose sleep over it."

TOP 10 EVENT

OPEI committing to stay in Louisville was welcome news for the city, which has come to depend on GIE+EXPO's massive attendance and massive dollars.

The 2019 GIE+EXPO was the sixth-largest in the U.S., according to the Gold 100. It attracted more than 20,000 attendees hailing from all 50 U.S. states and 54 countries. The show has an economic impact on Louisville of more than \$20 million. It co-locates with Hardscape North America (and will continue to in 2022).

The 2021 event was also a hugely successful show, however,

as of press time attendance numbers were not yet released. (For more on this year's show, see page 4.)

Cleo Battle, president and CEO of Louisville Tourism, says that more than 850 meetings, conventions and events visited Louisville in 2019. Based on the size and scope of GIE+EXPO, now Equip Exposition, Battle says the event easily holds a spot in the top 10 of most important events to visit the city each year.

"You think about the participants of the show and the opportunity for our city to have the diversity of people who attend that show is huge for us," Battle says. "You take a handful of shows like (Equip Exposition), and you really create a partnership. What can we do more as a city so it's sustainable? We want the show to grow and have more depth for its own members."

Continued on page 20



"Equip is who we are. We're equipment from construction and installation to mowing and maintenance to any of the handheld products."

— Dan Ariens, chairman and CEO of the Ariens Co., and Equip Exposition show chairman

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Continued from page 19

OPEI believes that having an office in Louisville year-round will only be good for Equip.

“We have a very significant investment in the office,” Kiser says. “It’ll be an OPEI office as well. I’ve hired Karen Williams, former CEO of Louisville Tourism, and she’ll be a senior vice president. Louisville has been our home for 40 years, and we hope it’s our home for another 40. Part of our job is to promote Louisville in a more meaningful way. It’s a year-round effort. That’s why you have a year-round staff.”

Dan Ariens says the future for Equip Expo is bright and adds that OPEI’s Kris Kiser has his “arms around” what Equip Exposition needs to do to be successful.

“I talk to Kris Kiser more than ever before because of this change,” Ariens says. “Putting a presence in the heart of Louisville is one of the changes that will allow us to go forward. We want to be part of the energy in the city. We’re changing 40 years of personalities and management. Fresh eyes, fresh energy are always good for business.” 📧

NALP ANNOUNCES ELEVATE EVENT

Conference set for September 2022 in Orlando

The event previously known as Landscapes has separated from what was known as GIE+EXPO, and will now change locations each September. The new conference will be called Elevate.

“We are ready to get the industry engaged and motivated,” NALP CEO Britt Wood said to a packed room at what was the final Landscapes annual meeting last month. “We’re going to bring back site visits and we’re going to educate, inspire and entertain.”

The event draws landscape and lawn care professionals from across the nation. Next September’s event will take place at the Gaylord Palms Resort & Conference Center in Orlando. The 2023 event will be held at the Gaylord Texan Resort & Conference Center in Dallas.

“Elevate will do exactly what its name says; it will provide crucial education and networking to enable contractors to elevate their businesses,” Wood said. “After 15 years in Louisville, our members and attendees wanted a change. So, we’ve created an experience that will educate and inspire lawn care and landscape contractors from across the U.S.”

Wood said there will be a trade show element to Elevate, but it will be a much smaller affair than what attendees see at GIE+EXPO.

“We deliberately designed our Expo to be a more manageable size to enable attendees to find the right tools for their businesses and have focused conversations with industry suppliers that can truly make a difference,” Wood said.

Come next fall, lawn care and landscape professionals will have a choice to make: Orlando for Elevate or Louisville for Equip. Or, as Roger Phelps of Stihl speculates ... both.

“Nothing is preventing (NALP members) from coming to (Equip Exposition) in the future,” Phelps says. “In fact, I’d expect many of them to do that because it’s unique — you’re not going to get that experience anywhere else.”

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SAVED BY

Irrigation contractors share just how much water — and money — smart irrigation saves

BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR

Countless man-hours, a slew of headaches, 140 million gallons of water and \$600,000 — that's what's been saved by just one of Par 3 Landscape's commercial clients since it switched to a smart irrigation system in 2016.

Thomas Raden, landscape irrigation manager at the Las Vegas company, says he can't say enough about the benefits of implementing the technology.

"First and foremost, Par 3 wants to be sustainability driven," Raden says. "We don't necessarily want to be cost driven, but in the end, that's what makes the world go around. We want to ensure that our customers have the best-looking landscape, the healthiest landscape, with the most efficient amount of water."

Raden, along with Max Moreno, director of water management at Harvest Landscape Enterprises (HLE), and Mark Ballenger, president of Ballenger & Co., describe how far the industry has progressed, the benefits of using smart irrigation and what it takes to get clients on board.

From humble beginnings

With 50 years in the irrigation industry under his belt, Ballenger says he has seen it all: including gate valves that were adjusted manually, finicky weather stations and now, fully automated smart controllers.

Ballenger & Co., based in Pinellas Park, Fla., manages large homeowner associations and started seeing smart irrigation devices about 30 years ago.

"The first smart irrigation devices dealt with very complex weather stations," Ballenger says. "The programming was somewhat difficult to understand, and the operation was also difficult to understand. Now, the products are more cost effective, more reliable, require less maintenance and are rather easy to use. Smart irrigation is simplistic in what the device is capable of doing with little to no interaction from the user once it's set up and functioning."

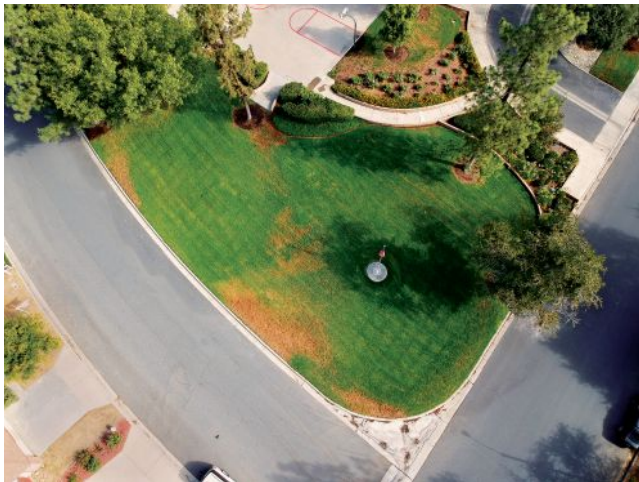
Ballenger recalls being impressed when a system hooked up at one of his company's testing facilities sent him an automated text message letting him know that the irrigation system canceled the watering sequence scheduled for the next day because a small amount of rain was predicted for that evening.

"The system is telling you on a daily, weekly or monthly basis how much water you've conserved," Ballenger says. "A lot of the smart controllers also report right to a maintenance firm that says, 'Hey, we've detected on zone 2 that you've exceeded the water flow of the parameters we set. It'll shut the irrigation system off and notify someone.'"

Raden, who has been in the irrigation industry since the late 1980s, also sees the benefits of the controllers that feature predictive analytics to forecast what water use will be in the future.

With more than 500 controllers operating on 55 customers' sites, Par 3 currently uses Weathermatic Smartlink, Rain Bird IQ 3 & IQ 4, Calsense CS3000 & ET2000e, Weathertrak Pro 3 & H2O 2 wire, Baseline

THE MILLIONS



3200, Jain Unity, RainMaster I-Central, Toro Sentinel and Aqua-Management.

“Out here in the desert in Nevada, you could go from one day in the 90s to the next day being 110 and the wind’s blowing hard, and you can’t afford to be trying to catch up on water loss,” Raden says. “Let’s apply what is predicted for the future. You may have a very small deficit or a very small surplus, but at least you are not trying to catch up.”

The pros

In addition to saving on the obvious — gallons of water and dollars — Moreno says smart irrigation products have been eye-opening for him because they’ve also

helped Orange, Calif.-based Harvest Landscape Enterprises save on labor.

“With the labor shortages, having a smart controller helps us route our guys better,” Moreno says. “It takes on the task of adjusting to weather patterns, where in the past, we would send our irrigation techs to adjust to weather.”

The company has implemented hydropoint WeatherTRAK controllers, Flomec ultrasonic flow meters for measuring flow and sensing irrigation breaks, the CST Pathway for adding master valves and flow sensors

BEFORE AND AFTER
Aerial images show the impact of installing a smart controller on the turf at one of HLE’s sites.

Continued on page 24



Continued from page 23
when trenching wire isn't available or applicable and Rain Bird RD 1800 sprayheads with a flow shield to help limit the amount of water when a nozzle breaks off.

Moreno notes that in California, irrigation firms also have to consider the allocations given by certain water agencies.

"When we don't have smart controllers, we have to be on-site increasing and reducing water," Moreno says.

Moreno says overall, smart controllers have saved HLE's clients between 20 and 40 percent on annual water usage, and the company, in turn, has saved close to 50 to 70 percent on man-hours.

While around 50 percent of its clients' properties use smart controllers currently, Moreno says HLE's goal is to have 100 percent of its sites on smart controllers by the end of the year.

Moreno adds that using smart irrigation technology is also better for the plant.

"By using smart controllers, we're also applying only what the plant needs, making for a healthier plant," Moreno says. "With landscape, 50 percent of the water is normally lost. We try to conserve as much as we can

using smart controllers by reducing water runoff, putting in proper schedules and watering only what the plants need."

What to keep in mind

Raden, Ballenger and Moreno all agree that a smart irrigation controller is worth nothing if it's installed improperly or if it's used in conjunction with a "non-smart" system.

"I would recommend contractors educate themselves and use irrigation designers who specialize in that field," Ballenger says. "Just changing the controller out doesn't make the irrigation system smart. You have a smart controller, but it needs to be matched properly with the irrigation system."

Moreno says HLE makes sure it matches the smart controller with high-efficiency nozzles that create larger water droplets and a uniform spray.

"It's important to also know the product and the property you're working with," Moreno says. "If the property doesn't match the products, it's not going to be successful. It's important to do a site inspection to make sure these products will have the best impact and the best overall water savings."

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Relaying the benefits

Ballenger says he brings up the conservation benefits to clients who are on the fence about implementing the technology.

"It costs money to save money, but if you can get the client on board with conservation and the fact that over irrigating is worse than under irrigating, we don't have much problem convincing clients to switch," Ballenger says.

Raden notes that clients who are hesitant to install a smart controller often have had bad experiences in the past with a contractor not properly setting up the system.

"Some contractors don't understand how they work and how to set them up," Raden says. "They turn them on, set them up the best they think, and their landscape starts drying out or it's flooded, or they have all these problems with the controller, and they just turn it back to standard mode. Then, it just becomes an expensive paperweight. The irrigation industry needs to focus on education all the way down to the boots on the ground."

A high initial investment, often around \$15,000, Moreno says, also deters some clients from wanting to

"IT'S IMPORTANT TO KNOW THE PRODUCTS AND THE PROPERTY YOU'RE WORKING WITH. IF THE PROPERTY DOESN'T MATCH THE PRODUCTS, IT'S NOT GOING TO BE SUCCESSFUL."

— MAX MORENO



implement a smart irrigation controller. HLE also brings in before and after photos of sites irrigated using smart controllers. The after shots show healthy, lush landscapes, all irrigated with less water.

"What I basically tell them is that there is a return on investment," Moreno says. "We're going to reduce labor because we're not having to send our irrigation tech to find breaks that the controller would find. We're not having to pull out additional weeds because the controllers are watering to specific plant needs. When I start applying those numbers to man-hours, the return on investment starts to grow and the customer starts to see a large dollar amount. Once they see that, the customers change their mind and want a smart controller." 📍



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Modern irrigation controllers can use weather station data to manage water flow.



TIPSHEET

Using on-site data to manage landscape irrigation

Massey Services Vice President Adam Jones discusses the benefits of weather data and the limitations of soil moisture sensors

BY ROBERT SCHOENBERGER | LM SENIOR EDITOR

Managing light switches and kitchen faucets with Amazon's Alexa and activating a home security system with smartphone apps, the connected world has arrived.

Adam Jones, vice president and director of quality assurance for Florida-based home services contractor Massey Services, sat down with *Landscape Management* to discuss how best to use connected technology to manage residential green spaces.

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT: WHAT SENSOR TECHNOLOGY IS BEST SUITED TO RESIDENTIAL IRRIGATION?

ADAM JONES: We recommend sensors that aid in understanding conditions that are driving moisture levels within the landscape. You may have in your mind sensors buried in the ground that measure soil moisture, but we have not recommended that technology in the residential marketplace.

It's limited in its ability to manage microclimates in a landscape. In a residential home, you don't have an open field.

You have a lot of different soil types amalgamated into that landscape.

LM: WHAT DO YOU RECOMMEND?

AJ: We prefer an on-site weather station that collects the data that drives evapotranspiration in the landscape. It's the equation that determines water loss in soil profiles. We recommend smart controllers that can receive data and adjust run times, based on weather patterns and conditions on or near that site.

In an urban landscape, when they plant a house on the left or right of you, or when a tree develops a canopy, soil conditions change over time. Soil moisture sensors could be reading the wrong information as conditions change. The way to get around that would be to install multiple sensors in different locations of the landscape. The expense and maintenance of that become greater, and the potential for technical failure goes up exponentially.

LM: WHAT SORTS OF DATA SHOULD WEATHER STATIONS COLLECT?

AJ: Most of those stations will measure solar radiation, temperature and humidity. You can add to them a wind gauge, and wind is one of those factors that influence evapotranspiration. The final piece would be adding actual rainfall data, so a tipping rain gauge.

The more of those variables (for which you can collect on-site data, the more accurate your calculation is going to be. Without that (data), those are going to take theoretical and historical data to calculate that loss of moisture in the soil. Anything that you can do that's real time is going to improve your accuracy and maximize your potential conservation and your growing conditions.

LM: WHAT'S THE BUSINESS MODEL FOR THAT TYPE OF SERVICE FOR IRRIGATION CONTRACTORS?

AJ: We maintain the sensor package, and that's particularly important in areas where we have absentee landowners. In Florida, we get a lot of snowbirds. During the summer, when they're not there and the property is vacant, this allows us to better manage the landscape.

It's less about the add-on revenue and more about efficiently and effectively managing the health of that landscape.

LM: HOW DO YOU TALK TO THE CUSTOMERS ABOUT THE VALUE OF SENSOR-BASED IRRIGATION?

AJ: A lot of people are interested in this initially because they think they're going to save money on the cost of irrigation. From our perspective, it's really about managing the real-time conditions and what we can do to reduce overall inputs into the landscape. Fungicides might be one of those things. The other side may be the cost of additional fertilizer because we have an area that thins out because of drought stress. We focus on the quality of the landscape, not just how much irrigation you're going to save. 🌱



Adam Jones



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PLAN AHEAD

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MAINTENANCE SHOP

Do's and don'ts of winterizing irrigation systems

Contractors share how to avoid costly freeze damage on irrigation equipment

BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR



Before temps dip below freezing, irrigation contractors need to properly shut down their customers' irrigation systems. That means reserving air compressors for commercial properties and prioritizing which sites need to be winterized first. Follow these 12 do's and don'ts to prevent costly freeze damage.

DO

Schedule out shutdowns. List how many properties need a shutdown, the number of technicians needed, how many weeks until you expect a freeze and which sites are priorities (most likely to freeze first), says Matt

Coombs, irrigation manager at Dennis' 7 Dees in Portland, Ore.

Educate your team and customers.

"Make sure techs know where the components are and that they aren't skipping over anything," Coombs says. "Actively talking to customers about components that need to be in place helps avoid damage and can be a revenue stream for us."

Watch weather patterns. "Pay attention to extended weather forecasts, so you'll know when to have it completed (before the first frost)," says Anthony Parsons, irrigation/enhancements manager at Landtech Contractors in Aurora, Colo.

Shut down from the point of connection and source. "Most systems will come from the point of connection to the backflow to the irrigation box," Parsons says. "The mainline from the city will typically be in a basement or crawl space. Grab a bucket and port to unscrew and extinguish the water back through the wall to get it out of the pipes outside where it could freeze."

Open as many valves as possible. "The most important are the ones downstream and uphill to get the air moving through," Coombs says.

Hook up the compressor, and run each valve. Once the mainline is clear, start working on the valves back toward the compressor. "Make sure you're blowing out through lateral pipes," Parsons says. "When the heads

stop misting, that's when you'll know you've got the water out of the lines."

Plan for elevation changes. "Put the air compressor at the highest point of the property and hook it in there to push water down to the lowest area," Parsons says.


Check air volume. "Put a pressure gauge on a coupler," Parsons says. "Go in through the quick coupler port on the mainline to get the volume needed to blow the heads out."

DON'T

Fail to put the valves at a 45-degree angle. "The side piece will catch water. Water will drain out through pockets on the side if they're left perpendicular or parallel with the pipe. It will freeze every time," Parsons says.

Run too many lines at once. That could cause you not to have enough air volume in the lines, Parsons says.

Stop before the last head finishes. "Watch the zones to make sure they get all of the water out of the system and push the heads down to make sure they're stiff."

Forget to get the volume out of all of the valves. "Copper splits in one area, but on a PVC system underground with a hard freeze, you could have spiral cracks 200 to 300 feet. You'll have to trench a whole new line," Parsons says. 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.



Be sure no irrigation head is left behind. All water should be pushed out of the system.



EVERY DROP COUNTS

What is the future of irrigation and water management?

A look at where the irrigation industry is headed **BY CHAD SUTTON | CONTRIBUTOR**

They say the only constant is change, and after 25 years in the irrigation industry, I have to agree. Here are some predictions — some bold, others downright sci-fi — on the future of irrigation and water management.

WIRES

Say goodbye to wires. The days when an errant excavator slices through a bundle of 50 wires will be behind us. Wireless valves will be the norm someday for larger installations. They'll use a long-range, low-power, wide area network, which is wireless technology. Batteries will be replaced by inline, turbine-based generators, providing juice to supercapacitors. On top of all that, wireless valves will have great features such as ultrasonic flow sensing technology—in every valve. Ultrasonic flowmeters use sound waves to determine the velocity of a fluid flowing in a pipe. With this technology, you'll get very detailed alerts telling you exactly which valve is stuck open or weeping and how much water each zone of the landscape has used.

DRONES

Say hello to your drone. Drone-based irrigation inspections, with automated artificial intelligence reports, will help alleviate the ongoing labor crunch. Just as we use many of our human senses to inspect irrigation, such as sight, sound and touch, the drone will be equipped with a bevy of sensors to replicate our


abilities and then far exceed them. Your irrigation drone will fly to every station and will use infrared, thermal and acoustical sensors to determine where any irrigation problem is located. It will use its submeter GPS to pinpoint the problem on a geographic information system-based (GIS) map. A history of problems (with photos) will be logged in the GIS for reference. This data will be used to make automated suggestions to upgrade system components that fail most frequently or convert areas experiencing above-average damage. Included in the report will be a heat map to show areas affected by runoff and a list of expected materials needed for repair with an estimate of labor hours to complete the task. This data will flow automatically into software and instantly create work orders pending your review and approval.

Say goodbye to dragging hoses. Drones will use automated water generators (AWG) to deliver precise supplemental irrigation. The AWG will extract water from humid ambient air, using condensation—cooling the air below its dew point. This water, created from thin air, will be used to irrigate plants that need it most, rather than overwatering the whole zone. The drone's AI will use machine learning and stereo vision to evaluate color and appearance to prioritize plants needing supplemental watering. Drones also will come equipped with an army of helper drones inside. The team of tiny drones will replace

catch cans, instead utilizing droplet rate sensors and moisture probes to give a real-time readout of distribution uniformity and water movement through the soil. Super slow-motion video will count water droplets from each nozzle, compare the current rate to the known baseline and then report exactly which nozzle is clogged. This data will be fed into the AI, and a report will come across your screen telling you why your zone is dry in certain areas.

ALTERNATIVE SOURCES

Say hello to new water sources. As our water supply becomes scarcer, we can look to sources like condensate from air conditioning. The constant drip that used to run down the drain will now be collected and stored in on-site tanks to provide much-needed water. Filters will clean this water and then deliver it through highly efficient subsurface drip irrigation. The good news about condensate is that it is produced in the greatest quantities when it is typically hot and evapotranspiration is high.

While these predictions may turn out to be fact or fiction, the sure bet is that change is right around the corner. 



Chad Sutton

Chad Sutton is the water resources manager for Gachina Landscape Management.

BUSINESS BOOSTERS

How spreader-sprayers save contractors time

Lawn care operators share how using spreader-sprayers help cover more ground with less wear and tear on their bodies **BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR**

Jamie Hageman, manager of GreenLawn Lawn Care in Ossian, Iowa, bought his first Turfco T5000 stand-on spreader-sprayer in January. In April — two weeks into the season — he bought another for the primarily residential turf care business.

“We’re just covering that much more ground with it,” he says. “We’re in more of a rural area, and our lawn sizes vary

from 3,000 square feet to 800,000 square feet. One machine can do it all.”

Lawn care operators (LCOs) say the ability to cover more ground while eliminating the wear and tear on their bodies is part of the allure of purchasing a ride-on spreader-sprayer.

TIME MANAGEMENT

For Jason Creel, owner of Alabama Lawn Pros in Trussville, Ala., his Z-Spray LTS



and Ground Logic Pathfinder stand-on spreader-sprayers are perfect for granular applications for his residential fertilization, weed control and mowing business. He says the efficiency makes up for ever-increasing input costs.

“As the cost of doing business and the cost of supplies continue to increase, one way you make up for cost is by efficiency,”

PHOTO: LEFT SIDE LAWN CARE

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Caleb Gettle, owner of Left Side Lawn Care, says he has two Steel Green SG36s, one for liquid and one for granular applications.

he says. "One way you make up for lack of labor is to make you or your employees more efficient."

Caleb Gettle, owner of Left Side Lawn Care in Evansdale, Iowa, uses two Steel Green zero-turn spreader-sprayers for specific applications of liquid with the SG36 and the SG46 to cover more ground. He has an additional SG36 strictly for herbicide and granular fertilizer applications.

"For one person, three machines are quite a bit, but I feel like during the growing season, each season has a machine," he says. "A granular has its place; a liquid has its place. That's allowed me to be versatile in my operation."

Thanks to his spreader-sprayers, his business has grown by 30 to 35 percent every year for the past three years. He's

the sole operator for his 40 percent commercial, 60 percent residential turf care and fertilization business.

"I've probably tripled my clientele in the past three years," he says. "It's allowed me to expand my service route and be able to take on more properties with less time. Even on the smaller units, the 8-foot boom coverage increases production rates and decreases time spent on properties, and the accuracy of these units is unparalleled."

BETTER EXPERIENCE


Creel says pushing a spreader up a hill all day will undoubtedly tank his productivity, and this is where a ride-on spreader-sprayer has an advantage. While he still sprays some yards with a truck-mounted tank sprayer, ride-on spreader-sprayers

speed up granular applications.

"It allows you to be faster and keep your productivity up as you get tired," he says. "I'm pretty much the same speed on the first yard as the last yard because all I've got to do is press the throttle."

Hageman agrees, noting a ride-on spreader-sprayer "saves the wear and tear on your body because the landscape industry is not an easy industry."

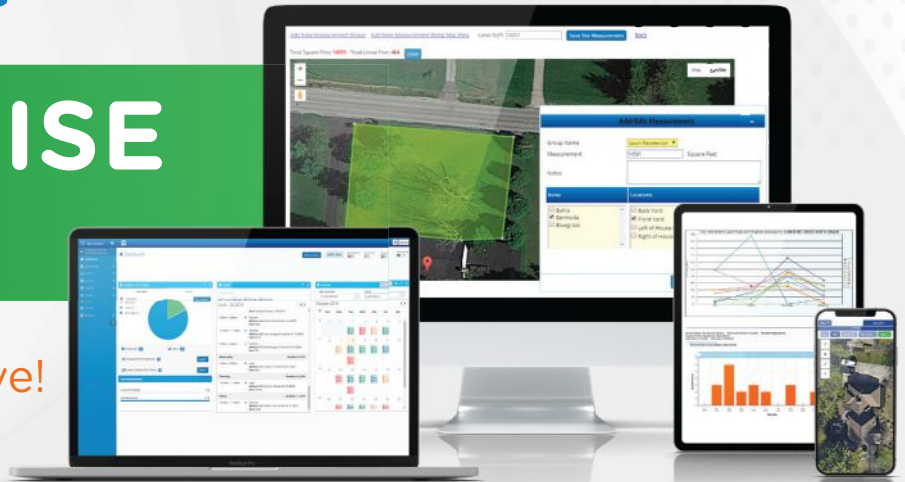
He says it's also important to understand how valuable your time is as an operator. Hageman says he used to have to work until late evening to cover all his accounts in a day.

"Now, you can get the same amount done by 4:00 in the afternoon, your productivity so much higher and your profitability is higher because you're more efficient," he says. 



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FERTILE GROUND

Slow and steady

Although interest is slowly growing, selling organic lawn care to commercial clients can be an uphill battle **BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER | CONTRIBUTOR**

Fred Peratt says he is the first to acknowledge that selling organic lawn care services to commercial clients isn't easy.

"It's like pushing a big boulder up a hill — you go up a few inches and then fall back 3 feet," says the owner of Environmental Enhancements, a \$5.6 million full-service company in Sterling, Va.

There are several reasons for the hard sell. One is cost. Peratt says his company's organic program can cost 10-to-20 percent more than traditional

lawn care services. Also, commercial clients are often less tolerant of weeds than residential clients are, and they don't have the patience to allow an organic program to take hold. A third reason is a resistance to trying something new.

"A lot of property managers don't have the time to understand an organic program, and they just stay with the same thing they've always done," Peratt says.

Peratt says his company has had the most success selling organic services to homeowner associations, but he notes



Educating property managers is a key step in the organic management of commercial properties.

that only 10 percent of clients currently opt for organic. The company also offers a hybrid program that is 90 percent organic and 10 percent synthetic.

Marketing is an important component of the company's organic program, Peratt says. Environmental Enhancements has several brochures and videos that highlight the benefits of going organic.


CUSTOMIZED PROGRAMS

Schill Grounds Management in North Ridgeville, Ohio, offers its commercial clients a bionutritional program, which includes a mix of organic and synthetic products for what President and CEO Jerry Schill calls a more responsible application. Schill began offering this hybrid program about 10 years ago and says his love for Lake Erie inspired him to want to use fewer chemicals that may harm waterways.

"Sustainability is no longer about doing less harm; it is about doing more good, and we want to do our part."

Lawn care is part of the company's full-service commercial maintenance contracts, so all Schill's customers receive the organic-heavy program. Like Peratt, Schill says requests for organic services have recently begun to increase. One of Schill's main selling points is customization. Schill takes soil samples by region and adjusts the product "recipe" for each client based on the results.

"One approach does not fit all," he says. "We can dial up our recipes through trial and error and science and get the right amount of synthetics and organics, reducing the need for synthetics by as much as 70 to 80 percent."

Schill says most of his commercial clients already have sustainability initiatives in place, so an organic approach to lawn care fits into that narrative. 

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Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

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– Jamie Hageman, Manager, GreenLawn



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THE BIG ONE

Thinking green

LOCATION Chapel Hill, N.C.

COMPANY Myatt Landscaping

DETAILS With 1,600 acres, 1,650 residents, 20-plus preserved parks, two schools and a shopping center, Briar Chapel was designed as a large, planned community of National Association of Homebuilders-certified green homes.

Myatt Landscaping started performing full-time maintenance at the site in 2011. Now, three crews of 14 staff members are on-site year-round and take care of mowing, fertilization, seasonal color rotation, weed management, pruning and snow removal.

“Briar Chapel was our first large community,” says John Davis, maintenance account manager. “It started on the install side of things. That led to us maintaining those areas we installed, and it blossomed from there.”

Challenges include working around other trades because the community is still under construction; considering water restrictions; and community regulations stating that only organic products can be used. Having dedicated crews on-site every day allows the company to take care of the weeds in the turf and beds without traditional chemical controls and to accommodate the limitations on irrigation.

“Briar Chapel has always had a ‘green’ mindset, so we’ve adjusted,” Davis says. “We’re also trying different electric and battery-powered equipment to see if that’s a good fit.”

The project won Myatt Landscaping a Silver Award from the 2020 National Association of Landscape Professionals’ Awards of Excellence program.

See more photos from this project at LandscapeManagement.net/thebigone.



Captions |

1. The visitors’ center and pool area are important features of the community due to the high volume of foot traffic from both residents and future residents. Crews keep the hard surfaces clean, maintain the turf, landscape beds and street trees and keep seasonal flower beds and containers looking great with weekly and seasonal services. **2.** In addition to seasonal flowers and shrubs, there are extensive perennial plantings in many of



the public parks and along the roadways. These are maintained by hand weeding, organic fertilization and yearly pruning. **3.** There are multiple playgrounds incorporated in the 20-plus parks within Briar Chapel. Crews keep these areas clean, make sure the mulch remains at regulation levels and maintain the turf areas, which undergo a lot of wear and tear both from children playing and from community events hosted in the parks. **4.** Deer are a constant challenge when it comes to seasonal flower plantings. Many of the beds are netted to help prevent damage, and other beds are treated with animal repellent.

Easy, breezy blower maintenance

Use this checklist from blower manufacturers to keep your equipment running well

BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR

While blowers may not feature chains and cutting attachments like other handheld equipment does, contractors still must maintain them properly to ensure their lifespan.

“Whether you’re a seasoned veteran or a new guy on the block, it’s important that you properly maintain and use the equipment,” says Andrew Johnson, product manager at Stihl. “Taking care of your equipment is rewarding in the long run. If you commit to regular and proactive maintenance, most major challenges can be avoided down the road.”

Johnson, Jack Easterly, brand manager at Husqvarna, and Jason Wilk, senior product manager at Echo, break down what landscape professionals should do when it comes to properly using and maintaining blowers.

CHECKLIST

- 1 Carefully read the user’s manual** before operating or maintaining the equipment, Johnson, Easterly and Wilk say.
- 2 Perform a visual inspection** of the machine before using it to check for leaks and missing or broken pieces, Johnson says.
- 3 Confirm the brand and ratio of fuel/oil mix** is the same as what’s recommended by the manufacturer, Easterly says.
- 4 Use high-quality, two-stroke engine oil.** “Some people will go with cheap quality oil to save a few bucks, but that’s not designed to hold up over long periods of time. That oil can actually break down and cook itself to create a tar inside the engine,” Wilk says. “Try not to cut corners by

saving a few bucks on oil because all that savings will go out the window when you have to bring the blower in for repairs or buy a new one.”

🔧 CLEAN IT OUT
The air filter should be part of your daily engine checks. At the least, replace it every 90 hours of operation.



UP AND RUNNING
Performing maintenance checks on blowers ensures they are ready to go for fall cleanup season.

- 5 Check the air filter for clogs, dirt and tears.** “When dirt gets through the air filter and into the engine, it acts as a gritty abrasive, and it just wears down the engine,” Wilk says. “It’s like taking a high-speed grinding wheel and grinding down that engine.”
- 6 Never use compressed air to clean the filter.** It can damage the filter material, Johnson says.
- 7 Avoid heat and dirt.** “There are two enemies of small two-stroke engines, which are what you find on handheld blowers: heat and dirt,” Wilk says. “Look for areas that may cause overheating of the engine or dirt ingestion of the engine. With leaves, especially dry ones, they can get sucked up into the air intakes.”
- 8 If something is obviously cracked, rattling or making unusual sounds, stop and take a closer look.** “It’s better to pause and fix a problem, when possible, rather than using a machine that’s damaged and risk having to repair or possibly replace it, especially during an important time of year for generating revenue,” Easterly says.
- 9 Check spark plugs.** “We recommend installing a new spark plug about every 100 hours or earlier if the electrode on the spark plug is showing any corrosion,” Johnson says.
- 10 Clean or replace the spark arrestor screen.** A dirty spark arrestor screen can increase fuel consumption, causing the unit to run poorly and users to have a difficult time starting it, Johnson says. 🗣️



PHOTOS: STIHL (TOP), ECHO (BOTTOM)

PRODUCTS THAT WORK



18-INCH CHAINSAW



COMPANY: Ego

URL: EgoPowerPlus.com/Commercial

Ego's 18-inch chainsaw is powered by a 56-volt arc lithium battery. It's equivalent to a 42-cc gas saw. Able to cut 300 limbs the size of four-by-fours on a single charge or fell 50 trees, this chainsaw also has tool-free chain tensioning, automatic oiling, a chain brake, steel biking spikes and LED lights. It comes with a five-year warranty on the tool and a three-year warranty on the battery.



CS1500

COMPANY: Oregon Products

URL: OregonProducts.com

The CS1500 from Oregon Products is an easy-to-use, corded, professional-grade saw that starts instantly and features an 18-inch chain that can be sharpened on the saw with the pull of a lever — all in about three seconds. Tensioning the chain is simple — tighten the ring on the side cover to activate toolless tensioning. The CS1500 does not require any gas-oil mixing. Its automatic oiler distributes oil to the bar and chain while you cut.



M18 FUEL 16-INCH CHAINSAW



COMPANY: Milwaukee

URL: MilwaukeeTool.com

The Milwaukee M18 Fuel 16-inch chainsaw outperforms small gas engines up to 40 cc and provides a high work per charge. Featuring a Powerstate brushless motor, the chainsaw is faster than gas, delivering an instantaneous throttle response that reaches full speed in less than one second and has the power to cut hardwoods without bogging down. When equipped with a High-Output HD12.0 battery, the tool can power through up to 150 cuts in 6-by-6-foot cedar on one charge.



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HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

Making the most of a tiny space

LOCATION Whitefish Bay, Wis.

COMPANY LandCrafters

DETAILS This project started as a front yard and entryway for a duplex and later expanded to an outdoor living area on the south side of the home. LandCrafters is also slated to work on the small backyard of the property, located in a historic neighborhood of suburban Milwaukee next year.

Challenges to the project included navigating a small staging area and working with city building officials to get plans approved. David Guthery, landscape designer for LandCrafters, says as the team started to work on the new entrance, LandCrafters had to update the footings of the masonry porch to a 4-foot depth with the help of a Bobcat mini excavator. The company also used New Holland skid-steers to execute the project.

What really sets the project apart, Guthery says, is how the south side of the home functions on such a small footprint with a Tudor-style pergola that matches the look of the home. LandCrafters designed a small space for the client's mother who lived on the first floor.

Other noteworthy elements of the project include masonry that reflects the older home's look and a permeable courtyard. Guthery added a high-branched *Fastigiata* European hornbeam to soften and shade the area.

"How do you get a tree to be successful in a 3-by-3-foot pit that's not really going to limit the tree?" Guthery says. "The solution was to open it up to being permeable so that its roots would have access to water and oxygen and be able to expand into the farther planting areas over time."

LandCrafters won a Gold Award for this project in the 2020 National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

See more photos from this project at [LandscapeManagement.net/hardscapesolutions](https://www.landscapemanagement.net/hardscapesolutions).



1



2



3



4

Captions | 1. The entertaining space on the south side of the property connects to a small patio for guests of the first-floor resident. **2.** In June, Summer Cascade wisteria and lilac flowers dangle over the pergola. The vine adds color, fragrance and additional shade to the patio area. **3.** FX Luminaire LED lighting features include downlights in the pergola, under-ledge lights in the new masonry pillars and well lights that uplift the hornbeam tree. **4.** Before, the south part of the property was the only area suitable for the installation of an entertainment area due to its large size. The area was stark and also extremely hot in the summer.

BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Picking the right mini excavator

Landscape contractors talk about how they chose their equipment and offer advice on how to add excavators **BY ROBERT SCHOENBERGER | LM SENIOR EDITOR**

Mini excavators can add versatility to landscape design/build operations, giving companies the opportunity to tackle projects that need more digging or carrying power than a skid-steer can offer. Getting the most out of that iron requires careful decision-making at purchase time, users say.

Speaking from the cab of his Bobcat E35 compact excavator while clearing brush to create fire breaks in forest-fire prone central Washington, Cory McGuire says he rented excavators for years before investing in his own.

“I paid attention to what the rental companies used,” McGuire says. “If you go to the rental yards around us, 90 percent of their equipment is Bobcat, so that says something.”

McGuire’s Landscaping & Winter Services is a small design/build company

in South Cle Elum, Wash., a town on the eastern edge of the Cascade mountain range. About 90 percent of his summer business is residential, while 90 percent of his winter business is commercial snow removal.

McGuire says rental users typically have little training on equipment and push machines harder than they should because they don’t have to worry about maintenance. So, he reasons, anything that can stand up to that kind of abuse must be pretty durable.

In Plano, Texas, Firefighters Landscape & Design’s Chad Self says his company primarily uses its excavators for trees. Self is the operations director for the residential design/build company that generates about \$6 million a year in revenue.

“Digging holes for trees, moving materials, carrying trees — especially the bigger, heavier ones — we needed excavators for that,” Self says.

BRAND LOYAL

New equipment pricing is the No. 1 concern for Firefighters Landscape, and Self says he’s been happy with Takeuchi mini excavators. He

KNOW THE BRAND

Staying loyal to one brand helps standardize maintenance and part replacement.

BUYING ADVICE

• Check your local market.

The more dealers for a brand in your area, the more access you’ll have to parts and technicians trained on your machines.

• Customize equipment.

Excavator manufacturers and aftermarket companies offer massive numbers of buckets, cutters, trenchers and other attachments that could suit your needs.

• Talk to an accountant/financial adviser.

Whether to lease, buy or finance will depend greatly on each company’s cash flow and tax situation; there’s no one-size-fits-all approach to paying.

• Work your network.


Someone you know probably has gone through this purchase decision and can share what worked for them.

• Understand your needs.

When choosing power levels and sizes, make sure the excavator can lift what you need lifted, carry as much weight as you expect to face and offer attachments for the tasks you need completed.

adds, however, that experience with a brand is a close second to price in purchasing decisions.

“You may have a run of bad luck with a brand, so you make a change,” Self says. “Someone else might have a bad experience with your brand. Talk to people and listen to what they say, but everyone’s going to have their own experience with equipment. We were using one brand, and every time we had to take it in for maintenance, it was something — some little thing that needed to be repaired or replaced. The costs started really adding up.”

A few years ago, his company standardized on one brand for its equipment — four skid-steers with a fifth on order and two mini excavators. Sticking with one brand eases maintenance and the company can buy oil filter, belts and air filters in bulk. Self adds that standardizing has its own challenges, but it works well for Firefighters. 





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MAINTENANCE SHOP

How pond aerator maintenance can become a revenue stream

In addition to being vital for pond health, aerator maintenance can lead to long-term service contracts **BY ROBERT SCHOENBERGER | LM SENIOR EDITOR**

After installing a pond, Lloyd Lightsey sits down and has a long talk with the water feature's new owner. Water on a property is great, but without proper maintenance, you'll quickly be dealing with a smelly nuisance.

"Aeration is absolutely critical, and you need to keep that aerator clean and well maintained," says Lightsey, owner of The Pond Monster in Winter Haven Fla., a company that builds and maintains ponds for 70 percent residential and 30 percent commercial customers, with most of that commercial work going to homeowner associations.

Without aeration, Lightsey says pond water gets stagnant. Most water features are near professionally maintained lawns or agriculture, so nitrogen-based fertilizers often wash in, feeding algae growth, which can lead to nasty odors and green water and choke off other plant life or fish in a pond.

Sean Simonpietri, owner of Exact Stormwater Management in Midlothian, Va., agrees. His company services several rural ponds, making maintenance a bigger challenge.

"A bubbler creates a current, equalizes the water temperature between the surface of the pond and the bottom, reduces algae growth and keeps the water clearer," Simonpietri says.

Keeping aerators operating properly depends on the system type. Lightsey says he only works with aerators attached to a power supply. At installation, he puts in system power connections, water connections and exhaust fans in elevated metal boxes where they'll be safe from mowing crews or low-level flooding.

Maintaining those boxes means monthly visits to check water connections, clean aerator filters, examine electrical connections and clean components.

"Typically, I'll charge for one hour of service, once a month," Lightsey says. "It's not a huge amount of revenue, but if you can get contracts for a bunch of ponds, it adds up."

His service customers tend to be residential clients. Commercial users and homeowner associations tend to do their own pond maintenance, so Lightsey says he spends time training them on maintenance instead of offering contract service.

OFF THE GRID

Simonpietri also offers service contracts to maintain pond systems, but he takes a different approach at the installation stage. With his primarily rural clientele, many of his ponds are nowhere near a power supply.

"You can spend as much money running power to the pond as the rest of

the system," he says. So, Exact Stormwater offers self-contained systems that power aerators with solar panels.


The systems include a floating aerator that stays below the water's surface but above the silt of pond beds, a solar panel and weighted air lines that attach to the aerator and fall to the bottom of the pond.

"The systems are stand-alone, but they still need maintenance," Simonpietri says. Crews visit ponds about once a month to clean solar panels, make sure they're oriented properly, inspect aerator filters and make sure all connections are still good.

Lightsey says he's seen the solar systems and calls them "interesting" but isn't convinced they're a good fit for central Florida. Between torrential rains, hurricanes and hail storms, he worries that solar panels may require frequent visits.

"I'm old school. Just give me a power plug," Lightsey says.

Todd Brown, irrigation project manager for Tuckahoe Landscaping in Rockville, Va., says his company has had good luck with solar-powered systems. Tuckahoe is 100 percent commercial, typically acting as a pond specialist for general contractors, so it doesn't use maintenance for a revenue stream.

"We chose the Pond Hawk (solar systems) because you don't have to maintain much," Brown says. "We talk to the general contractor about what people will need to do, and we offer a one-year warranty, but outside of that, we don't end up doing a lot of service." 

PRISTINE AND CLEAN
To have a pond that maintains its aesthetically pleasing look, aeration is key.



FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Joe Majerus

OWNER, LANDMARK LANDSCAPES
SHEBOYGAN FALLS, WIS.

1 What would you like us to know about Landmark Landscapes?

We are building the best team in the industry. My brother and I bought it six years ago with a clear vision to grow the business, be leaders in our market and exceed the expectations of our clients and community. We've grown the business revenue by 600 percent by building a team focused on that same vision. Today we are focusing on revolutionizing the client experience of contracting and we are consistently producing nationally award-winning work through this process. We are so proud of the incredible group of individuals that come to work with us every day.

2 What were some of the changes implemented when you and your brother took over?

We realized we wanted to grow the business so we could offer more opportunities for our team and clients better service. We also knew that if we were going to grow, we had to get everyone on the same page.

We developed a mission, vision, values statement and we relate every single thing we do in the business day-to-day back to those values.

We also focused on implementing a business operating system, which helps us to standardize roles and responsibilities.

BEST ADVICE

"Take the time to build a great team around you, treat them well and give them repeatable systems so they can be successful. You have to get the employee experience right before you can get the client experience right."

3 The people I've met from your team have diverse work experience. How have you gotten them to come together successfully?

It comes down to our culture. We work hard every single day to make sure that we have a place where people can take pride in their working environment. I think our team genuinely enjoys coming to work. In fact, 'have fun' is one of our core values, and we take it very seriously. Our fast growth means we are always recruiting so we can keep up with the demand. The magic of Landmark seems to be that every time we need somebody to fill a role, the perfect candidate happens to come along. We focus on only hiring people with the right attitude who be a good fit for our team. Then we train them for the role and make sure they understand how they fit into the team and the company goals.

4 How do you show your appreciation for your employees?

It's an attitude of gratitude that we try to show each person each day. Every month we get together for a company-wide meeting where we share how we are doing against the budget and goals. If we beat our goals, we bring a food truck in for breakfast. Each summer, the first day it's forecast to be over 90 degrees, we have a beach party where we grill out and host our annual cornhole tournament. We do great Christmas parties and even Santa comes with presents for our team's children. We do an employee enrichment day where we focus on building camaraderie, teamwork and passion for the industry. We'll tour a botanical garden or garden space in the morning, do a workshop over lunch and then a team-building activity in the afternoon. We also have the basics, a comprehensive benefits program with matched 401K, health insurance with 70 percent paid by the company, paid vacation, paid sick days, holidays, uniforms and tuition reimbursement.

5 Do you have any days at work that are especially memorable?

I had just gotten done with a potential sales call with the general contractor and the client and we were talking about a big project and its associated budget. The contractor said to me, 'why would they spend that much money on the landscape?' I walked out of the meeting and felt like no one cared about landscaping and our mission was failing. I sat in my truck, opened my email and saw that we won a national award from the NALP. That gave me a spark. By the way, we ended up getting that job, which turned into another award of excellence at this year's NALP awards! 🏆

PHOTO: CHARLES FETT, WORLD'S BEST OPERATOR



PART 2

How a second-in-command can transform your business



BY JEFFREY SCOTT

The author is owner of Jeffrey Scott Consulting, which helps landscape companies grow and maximize profits. Reach him at jeff@jeffreyscott.biz.

Last month, I explored how successful landscape entrepreneurs employ a secret weapon: a powerful second-in-command (SIC) to help run the business. This month, I will take a closer look at the job of a SIC within operations.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SIC

The role and responsibilities of a successful SIC vary greatly depending on the personality and needs of the owner and business.

Having said that, here are seven key responsibilities that the SIC can support or do:

1 Keep the trains running profitably and on time.

This is often the main reason an owner decides to hire a SIC: keeping the day to day operating with good systems and all positions filled, with a steady eye on hitting the budget.

2 Identify issues and set priorities.

The SIC acts as an internal consultant, identifying the operational priorities that need addressing and acting as a filter for the new ideas the owner brings. This task requires a strong amount of trust from the owner and skill from the SIC.

3 Align the people and operations around the company's vision, values and mission.

This is more than a theoretical exercise; it's about building a culture and protecting it from variances, culture killers and distractions. The SIC strengthens the legacy and builds out the aspirational values needed to grow the business.

4 Coach and train the talent.

To grow the company, one must grow the bench. A great SIC always has one eye on the future while keeping things moving in the current year.

5 Find and drive continuous improvement, both personally and companywide.

The SIC helps drive improvement both through others and with what he or she personally gets involved in. This is about creating an innovative culture, setting up company initiatives and taking on personal improvement projects.

6 Temporarily fill leadership gaps personally as needed.

This is a double-edged sword: A SIC often comes from outside the industry and cannot do this in every position, but he or she can still jump in and support a division where needed. If the SIC comes from inside the industry, the danger is he or she will fill gaps too often. A successful SIC prevents fires instead of putting out fires.

7 Lead or support budgeting and strategic planning.

This last responsibility is shared with the owner and depends on the owner's inclinations. Some owners want to lead one or both of these, and some

want their SIC to lead both of these.

Whether your SIC should handle these tasks initially depends on the situation, so view this list as an end point. If your SIC is more of an operations manager, the list of responsibilities will look different.

A SIC CASE STUDY

I received a call from a young, serial entrepreneur from Alabama who owns a landscape and a real-estate company. He was looking for financial tools to improve operations and help to identify a SIC to completely run his company day-to-day. His desire was to focus his time on new outside business opportunities.

When we met with his team for a consulting retreat in New Orleans, I immediately identified a gem in the midst: his young, new marketing manager. She had the underlying competence to fill this role. What she lacked in life experiences and green industry knowledge, she made up with balance, ambition, innate skills and smarts. We started her in the role of chief of staff, with a clear growth path into chief operations officer. She will eventually lead most and probably all of the responsibility areas listed above.

BE ON THE SAME PAGE

Critical to success is mutual respect and an honest relationship. They must have each other's back 100 percent for this relationship to work. The two must also have clear deliverables and a consistent meeting rhythm where issues and needs are discussed. You can't set it and forget it; you must continually work at the relationship for the arrangement and the company to grow and prosper.



PHOTO: CECILIE_ARCURS/E+/GETTY IMAGES



BY GREG HERRING

The author is the CEO of The Herring Group and has significant experience in the landscape industry. He can be reached at gherring@herring-group.com.

Are you selling a commodity or a service?

Are you selling a commodity? Before you answer with a no, let me tell you a story. I was speaking with a client who said, “You know, Greg, when it gets down to it, the landscape business is just about selling hours.” I remember that conversation like it was yesterday.

This opinion reflects the reality that many landscape companies get beat down on price. However, is the design and horticultural experience of a landscape company’s employees worth nothing?

The view of “selling hours” is one of the causes of companies getting beat down on price. It is also a reason the average landscape company’s operating profit margin is only 5 percent. There are many companies above and below that average.

SELLING A SERVICE, NOT HOURS

In our annual benchmark report of landscape companies, the top 15 percent of companies have an operating profit margin above 10 percent and do so consistently. I know the owners of many of those companies. They are not selling hours. Those companies have found a type of customer who pays for what they do best, or they have found services that are much less price competitive in their markets, or both. In other words, they are doing something that others are not doing.

The book “Simplified Strategic Planning” by Robert W. Bradford and Peter Duncan contains three powerful questions:

- What do you sell?
- To whom do you sell it?
- How can you beat or avoid the competition?

“The view of ‘selling hours’ is one of the causes of companies getting beat down on price.”

The first two questions appear simple to answer. However, a company’s management team will be rewarded by brainstorming many possible answers to these questions. Let the creativity flow.

WHAT DO YOU SELL?

If you are a below-average profit landscape company, you sell hours. If you are an average profit landscape company, you sell landscape construction or landscape maintenance services — or both.

If you are an above-average profit landscape company and construct residential landscapes, you might sell the design experience, the construction experience and testimonials (nightmare stories abound) and the memories that will be made living in the landscape once completed.

If you are an above-average profit landscape company and maintain the landscape of commercial properties, you might sell comprehensive landscape management that creates certainty in results while minimizing the time required of the property manager. What property manager would not like less work to do?

TO WHOM DO YOU SELL IT?

Will every homeowner pay more for experiences and memories? No. Will every property manager pay more for fewer landscape hassles? No. But some will.

Finding those who will is the purpose of answering the second question. Good job-cost software will help you answer that question by showing which customers were most profitable and which customers were least profitable.

HOW CAN YOU BEAT OR AVOID THE COMPETITION?

Answering this question is difficult in an industry where the barriers to entry are low.

As I observe high-performing companies, I see highly capable people in management teams. Highly capable people require compensation well above industry averages. Creative incentive plans help retain people and ensure that above-average performance is rewarded with above-average total compensation. This type of incentive plan could be part of how your company beats the competition.

I continue to be amazed by one statistic in the industry: Only a small minority of landscape companies use powerful software to manage their businesses and accumulate incredibly valuable data to help them answer these strategic questions. I suspect that many owners focus on the cost of the software rather than the value.

Even fewer companies have strategic financial leadership. The thinking in this column is an example of strategic financial leadership. Like technology leadership, this service can be outsourced. Technology leadership and strategic financial leadership can help a landscape company beat the competition.

Answering these three strategic questions should be an annual process as management teams start thinking about next year.



BY KEN THOMAS

The author is COO of The Greenery and principal of Envisor Consulting. Reach him at kenthomas@envisorsco.com.

How offseason planning leads to success

Let's face it, for most commercial landscape maintenance businesses around the country, performance during the growing season can make or break your financial year. Even in heavy snow markets, it's important to hit your green season margins to mitigate down snow years.

A lot of green season success comes from smart offseason planning and execution.

As the green season winds down, savvy leaders begin planning for next year. Through budgeting and strategic planning, business leaders zero in on a few key metrics to ensure that next year's growing season will be successful. Below are a few areas to focus on.

CONTRACT REVIEW/SCRUB/RENEW

Customer contracts can be made up of a combination of service lines. Each contract should be assessed annually, utilizing filters such as profitability, size and strategic value. Then rank contracts in terms of best to worst and in terms of largest to smallest. Based on ranking, determine whether you'd like to renew the contract, increase the price or take another action.

Some nonconforming contracts may need to be scrubbed or dropped. There are few reasons to retain losing or nonconforming accounts in today's labor market. It's important to understand your client's budgeting cycle so that you can discuss increases. Most property management firms start the budgeting process by August and are complete by October. Don't miss the timeline to adjust pricing as necessary.

SERVICE LINE REVIEW

Landscape companies offer their

clients a variety of in-season options or service lines. It's important to understand the gross profitability (GP) of each service line. Review GP in terms of budget versus actual. Service line profitability is simply the combined profitability of all jobs within a service line.

REVENUE SERVICE LINES

- Contract maintenance
- Mulching
- Seasonal color
- Irrigation
- Fertilizer and pest control
- Enhancements
- Construction
- Subcontracting

In too many cases, companies are leaving profit on the table by not seeing the performance of the individual service lines. While you may know the profitability of all service lines combined, it's important to be able to analyze profitability for each separately. Often, there are profit laggards.

When you identify GP laggards, determine the root cause. Drill into each job to identify profit robbers. Services like seasonal color and fertilizer and pest control tend to get buried in the base contract price. Develop GP through your company's annual budgeting process. Generate actual GP results through your work ticket management or job cost system.

LABOR REVIEW AND FORECASTING

Through the contract review exercise, give special attention to evaluating your labor efficiency (LE) and total labor expense. Labor efficiency is a metric derived by dividing your budgeted hours by your actual hours over the year for your base maintenance services.

LE of 100 percent or better means you performed the work within the hours bid. Performance under 100 percent begins to erode margins. Reset the hours based on where you need to be to hit 100 percent LE or better. If you find that you're working off fat labor budgets, reduce the future hours to reflect the actual performance. In addition to LE, review the labor dollars budgeted to actual.

This exercise may yield two outcomes. First, you may need to develop a more efficient workflow plan. Second, you may need to increase the contract amount or a combination of both.

After completing an effective labor hour assessment and associated reset, you are ready to forecast head count and payroll for the upcoming year. These forecasts form the basis for all staffing and overtime decisions in the future.

ESTIMATING COSTS AND PRODUCTION RATES

As you analyze your job cost performance and identify any negative variances or anomalies, you may discover estimating issues.

In 2021, we've seen substantial increases in many operational expenses, including labor, materials, fuel and more. Those increases need to be factored into your estimating system so you're on track with new opportunities. If you find that your LE percentage is falling significantly under target, take some time to challenge your labor production rates.

Planning for next year's success starts right now. Pull the data, build a plan and execute over the offseason to ensure a more profitable 2022! 🎯

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GROW WITH GRUNDER

BY MARTY GRUNDER

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To improve your sales, focus on these 3 areas

“Nothing happens till somebody sells something!”
—Author unknown
That’s a great quote, one of my favorites. I

use it all the time with my team at Grunder Landscaping Co. (GLC) and with our clients at The Grow Group. Nothing *does* happen until somebody sells something. In 2021, we had lots of sales closing and, as a result, a lot of activity happening at GLC. We were firing on all cylinders this summer and fall to perform the work we sold, and we have been finding efficiencies left and right to allow us to get more done in less time. We’re closing out a great year in a couple of months, but we’re also looking ahead to 2022 and thinking through how we’ll replicate this success.

Right now, we’re using three specific strategies to ensure we’re setting our sales team up well for the coming year.

SET ATTAINABLE SALES GOALS

First off, you need to *have* a well-thought-out sales goal. Too many owners and leaders just throw a number out there or wait to see what happens. For goals to be attainable, they need to be rooted in logic. Look at what the data tells you:

- How much in sales did each salesperson close last year?
- Were you able to complete the jobs you sold within their promised timelines?

- What were your most profitable types of jobs? Can you do more of them?

At The Grow Group, we like to see annual growth goals around 10-20 percent, especially in companies under \$5 million in revenue. At that level, the growth is manageable — and 20 percent growth annually will more than double the size of your business in five years. Just remember, if you want to sell 20 percent more work, you also need to increase labor hours and equipment to do the work.

Set sales goals that are attainable for your sales and production teams, and be specific about the type of work, location and timing of the work you want to sell more of.

TARGET THE RIGHT PROSPECTS

You absolutely must target the right types of clients to grow. Spell out as a team who your ideal clients are, where they are located, what type of account they are and what size jobs you’re looking for. At GLC, we have our target prospect well defined: We’re looking for more residential properties in specific neighborhoods we already work in.

We have gone so far as to put the names, addresses and other information into the prospect record we maintain within Aspire. We know exactly who our targets are, and we know that we’ll be spending our time on clients and prospects who are a fit.

“Set sales goals that are attainable for your sales and production teams, and be specific about the type of work, location and timing.”

SLOT EVERYONE INTO THE RIGHT ROLE

In my role at GLC, I oversee business development. It’s my job to network, volunteer, be active in the community and get to know people who can refer us to clients or become clients. This is what I do best, and it’s the best way I can support the company.

We’ve put the rest of our team into roles that allow them to use their strengths, too. We’ve promoted someone from our production team who was fantastic at noticing enhancement projects into a sales position, and he’s excelling. Our design-build consultants are both crushing their goals for 2021 and within reach of their stretch goals. Find your team’s strengths and put them in roles that maximize them.

While operations are no doubt key for success in 2022, smart companies will seize the opportunity ahead with the strong demand we’re seeing from clients. 📞

If you need a little more help defining your ideal client, setting attainable sales goals, addressing objections and building relationships that turn into sales for your company, join us Dec. 15-16 for our Virtual Sales Bootcamp: growgroupinc.com/virtual-sales-bootcamp.

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