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Companies like Oklahoma's GreenShade Trees share how triple-digit growth is well within reach in 2023



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


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Resources needed!

Does your operation have an innovative mowing or maintenance strategy? We want to hear about it! Do you participate in statehouse visits, participate in NALP's Legislative Days or advocate for the green industry in other ways? If so, we want to know! Email Editor Christina Herrick at cherrick@northcoastmedia.net.



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PHOTO: LIGHTCOME/ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS/GETTY IMAGES

A man in a brown jacket and tan pants is driving a yellow riding lawn mower on a lush green lawn. He has his arms raised in a celebratory gesture. In the background, there is a two-story house with a porch. The garden is filled with whimsical topiary animals, including a bear, a dinosaur, and a unicorn. Several garden gnomes are scattered throughout the scene, some holding hoses. In the sky, two flying lawnmowers are visible. The overall scene is bright and cheerful, set against a backdrop of rolling green hills and a clear blue sky.

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Know the Lingo, Amigo

2022 ended on a bitterly-cold note, with a crippling winter storm roaring through much of the country during the holidays. Because I'm known for my great timing, I scheduled a visit with a design/build, landscape and irrigation company in Oklahoma City on the same morning the area was expected to get high winds with wind chills in the minus 20s.

The day before my trip, as the forecast worsened, I reached out to Justin Lingo, president of GreenShade Trees, and gave him an out. I still planned on driving to Oklahoma City as scheduled, but based on the forecast, if he wanted to postpone our meeting to a later date, I understood.

The next morning, I made the walk from my hotel to Myriad Botanical Gardens. I did my best to button up, but the minus-20 wind chill gets pretty cold after 200 yards. I dove into open storefronts to quickly warm up before getting back out in the wind.

My seven-minute walk felt like an eternity, but I finally walked into the botanical garden and was greeted by Lingo

“The day before my trip, as the forecast worsened, I reached out to Justin Lingo, president of GreenShade Trees, and gave him an out.”

and Tyler Entz, project director. As we walked from the reception area into the greenhouse, Entz excitedly announced, “I’ve never felt it this cool in here before!”

The weather outside was so frigid that the greenhouse had cooled to the mid-60s. This was such a strange feeling, Entz told me, because while GreenShade was renovating the building, they instituted a 2 a.m. to 10 a.m. work schedule to beat the Oklahoma City heat.

“We had a guy drop a few pounds working on this project,” he laughed. “We’d see him and say, ‘Man, you’re looking good!’”

LOOKING TO 2023

It was a treat to get a tour of the botanical garden, as well as of Lower Scissortail Park, from the guys at GreenShade. They’re clearly passionate and happy with their work and their success. My story on Lingo and Entz — a former football player and coach duo who are now successful landscapers — and how GreenShade achieved 125-percent growth from 2021 to 2022 begins on page 12.


In this issue, we also profile Lawns of Dallas, which achieved 25 percent growth over the year, and C. Caramanico & Sons in Upland, Pa., which achieved 52 percent growth from 2020 to 2021. I’m

hopeful you’ll find parts of these stories useful for your own business and use their insights to add percentage points to your growth in 2023.

The guys gave me a ride back to my hotel (thank goodness), but before dropping me off, they drove me around their massive Lower Scissortail Park project to show me that handiwork and discuss the various challenges. It was my bright idea to briefly jump out of the truck and get a selfie of the three of us with the OKC skyline as our backdrop. Without hesitation, they jumped out of the truck, and now I had my souvenir from a memorable trip to OKC for LM.

IT’S THE PEOPLE

A few weeks later, I got on a call with David Amigo, president of G&G Landscape Solutions in Charlotte, N.C. That conversation evolved from a get-to-know-you to a 5 Questions interview (page 40.) Amigo has been in the industry for five years now, and coming from a different industry, he’s made some observations about our industry. One comment he made that really stood out was when he told me, “I didn’t buy the business because of the people in the industry, but I love the business because of the people in the industry.”

Whether it’s hanging out with Lingo and Entz in Oklahoma City on a memorably frigid day or getting to know a guy like Amigo after a few emails and a phone call, I have to agree. The projects are cool, but the people are cooler. 



Jones braved the elements for this selfie with GreenShade Trees’ Justin Lingo (center) and Tyler Entz (right).

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EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD



MORE ONLINE

See more great advice and complete answers from our Editorial Advisory Board in the online version of this feature at LandscapeManagement.net.

What's one thing our readers should do now to grow their businesses this year?

“The most important thing to me this winter is getting that phone to ring to make up for the 4,400 clients we lost in 2022 (18 percent cancellation rate) plus adding on another 3,300 for 15 percent new growth.”



Landscape Professionals

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Troy Clogg Landscape Associates
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“Explore early order programs. Often these programs will lock in pricing for the following year and provide extended payment terms to maximize cash flow.”



“Get all your contracts renewed and get out and cold call for new work. Have a clearly identified list of targets and go get them. Nothing happens till someone sells something.”



“Focus growth efforts on higher-margin services.”



“Raise your prices based on your real expense increases as well as the cost-of-living increase.

Be transparent and let your clients know what the increases are and why. As for growth of your client base, meet with your clients. Thank them for their business and ask them who they know that you can likely help and serve.”

“Create client metrics to determine which of your clients are your most profitable. Then, figure out what those clients have in common and find more like them.”



“They should do two things: Become marketing experts and customer service/cross sales/upselling experts.

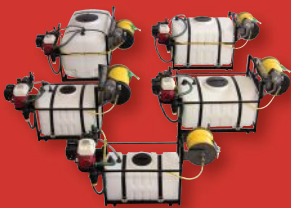
The first will ensure you get the right new clients; the second ensures you keep the right clients. Both will help you achieve stable revenue growth.”



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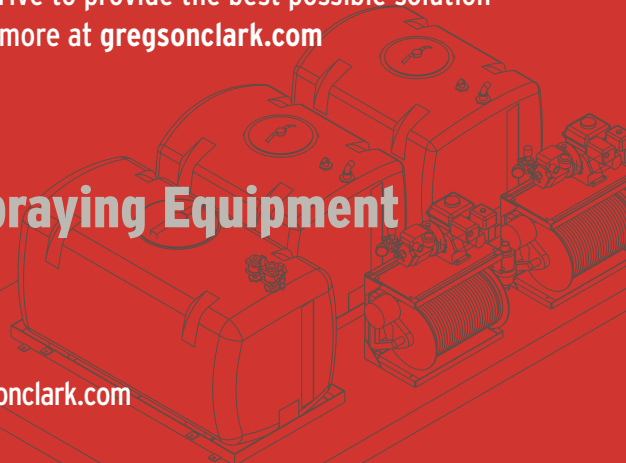


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Where in the U.S. is Cardboard Craig?

Ruppert Landscape's CEO racks up the miles thanks to a creative stunt and a life-size cutout

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR



During the summer, a new hashtag took over social media: #CardboardCraig. This creative stunt, orchestrated by Ruppert Landscape's human resources and public relations team, sent a cardboard cutout of Ruppert Landscape CEO Craig Ruppert to branches and locations across the country and shared Ruppert's travel exploits on its social media accounts.

Cardboard Craig even visited *Landscape Management's* headquarters in Downtown Cleveland with a photo op at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and a Cleveland sign with the city's skyline in the background.

Camilly Vernier, marketing communications manager for Ruppert Landscape, says the inspiration came from Ruppert Nurseries, the sister company to the landscape operations. The nursery uses a life-size cutout of Nick Graves, farm operations manager, as a reference point when showcasing large-caliper trees.

"Members of our human resources and public relations team originally borrowed that concept and created a life-sized cutout of Craig for a photo booth at our company picnic," Vernier says. "Once the event was over, we thought, why not have a little fun with it? That's when we decided to send Craig on the road to visit our various branch locations."

Vernier points out that the real Craig Ruppert visits branches as often as he can.

"But with almost 30 locations and growing, he simply can't be everywhere at once," she says. "We figured we could bring some smiles to our teams with his stand-in and see what kind of adventures he gets up to along the way."

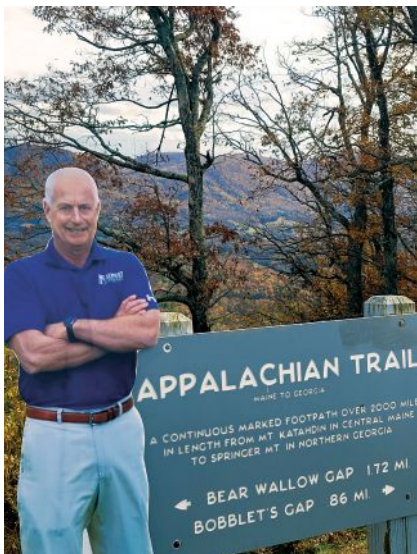
The naturally humble Ruppert was surprised by his cardboard counterpart.

"I think he is amused overall and just glad to know that people are happy to see him, even in cardboard form," Vernier says.

So far, Cardboard Craig has visited 10 of the company's branches — the farthest being Lilburn, Ga. Vernier says she hopes Cardboard Craig can make it to the company's Houston branch soon too. Other notable photo ops include the cockpit of a Southwest flight to Ruppert's Raleigh, N.C., branch;



PHOTOS: RUPPERT LANDSCAPE; LM STAFF (BOTTOM)



A cardboard cutout of Ruppert Landscape CEO Craig Ruppert made stops at Ruppert's Nashville, Tenn., branch (left), the Appalachian Trail (above) and Landscape Management's headquarters in Cleveland (below).

the Blue Ridge Parkway; the Appalachian Trail; and the Atlantic Ocean after a visit to Ruppert's Delmarva, Del., branch.

"Our teams are getting a kick out of it and are all vying for a visit from Cardboard Craig," she says. "I think it brings an element of fun to our busy day-to-day and reminds us that Ruppert Landscape really is one big family, and as our CEO and founder, Craig is sort of like a father figure to us all." 📍



Bland Landscaping adds Mutch Landscaping

Bland Landscaping Co., a commercial landscaping management provider in Apex, N.C., and No. 61 on the 2022 *LM150* list, acquired Mutch Landscaping also of Apex, N.C.

Mutch Landscaping, founded in 1992 by Mike Mutch, provides commercial landscape maintenance, enhancement and irrigation services.

The acquisition continues Bland Landscaping's expansion following the addition of The Byrd's Group, which was acquired in November 2022.

Juniper Landscape expands presence in Southeast Florida with latest move

No. 17 on the 2022 *LM150* list, Juniper Landscaping expands its presence in Southeast Florida with the addition of Yohe's Lawn Care & Landscape in Palm Beach, Fla. This is Juniper's first branch in the Palm Beach market, the company said.

"We are excited to partner with Brent Yohe to serve some of Florida's most prestigious properties, increase our presence in Southeast Florida and serve additional clients in this growing market," said Brandon Duke, CEO of Juniper. "Brent has built an outstanding business and we are excited to bring him and his talented team on to Juniper."

Yohe founded the commercial and residential maintenance, enhancement and design/build operation 19 years ago and has 18 branches throughout Florida.

Landscape Workshop continues growth with acquisition of Southeast Landscapes

Landscape Workshop, a full-service management company in Birmingham, Ala., and No. 39 on the 2022 *LM150* list, acquires Southeast Landscapes (SEL), a commercial and residential landscape design/build operation in Cumming, Ga.

"We are excited to incorporate the SEL team into our existing Atlanta operations," J.T. Price, CEO of Landscape Workshop, said. "With this acquisition, Landscape Workshop has three primary maintenance branches and three satellite facilities in greater Atlanta, increasing our service capabilities and expanding our service area throughout Northwest Georgia."

Adam and Todd Thomas, owners of SEL, will join Landscape Workshop. Thomas will lead Landscape Workshop's new Atlanta install division as general manager. Aaron Gaffney of SEL will oversee its maintenance clients with Landscape Workshop.

Private equity firm invests in Senske Services

GTCR, a private equity firm, invested in Senske Services, No. 60 on the 2022 *LM150* list.

Along with GTCR, Casey Taylor and Nathan Hurst, former CEOs of Waterlogic, a commercial water filtration business,

Continued on page 10

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THE SOURCE MATTERS

NEED TO KNOW >>>

Continued from page 9

are the major investors in Senske. Taylor and Hurst will join Senske Owner Chris Senske as co-CEOs. GTCR said Chris Senske will remain a substantial shareholder and member of the board of directors.

Founded in 1947 and based in Kennewick, Wash., Senske Services is a regional provider of recurring subscription-based residential lawn care, pest control and other home services. The company serves more than 80,000 residential and commercial customers across 16 branches in Washington, Utah, Idaho and Colorado.

In related news, Senske Services acquired DesertGreen of Richland, Wash., a lawn, tree and pest control service provider.

DesertGreen was Senske's eighth acquisition of 2022 including adding Rentokil's landscape maintenance services.

Ruppert Landscape teams up with investment firm

Ruppert Landscape, No. 11 on the 2022 *LM150* list with \$249 million in 2021 revenue, partners with Knox Lane, a growth-oriented investment firm. Ruppert said its management team, led by CEO Craig Ruppert, will continue to lead the operation and remain significant minority owners in the business.

Ruppert said the partnership with Knox Lane supports the operation's long-term vision to grow the company's footprint within current and adjacent markets and expand organically and through strategic acquisitions.

Ruppert Landscape gave more than \$28 million in appreciation bonuses to its employees with the company for more than a year as a thank-you for the role they've played in the company's growth and development. More than 1,200 employees — excluding the top leadership team — received bonuses ranging from \$7,000 to just over \$200,000 from the proceeds from the company's recent partnership with investment firm Knox Lane.

"Everyone receiving this bonus was instrumental in helping create the value that we've been able to realize," said Ruppert. "This bonus is money that is well-deserved and a way for us to acknowledge the value of our teams' contributions and the essential role that they will play in our company's future."

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MADE IN THE SHADE

GreenShade Trees has grown from solely a tree planting operation to a major player changing Oklahoma's landscape

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Justin Lingo has learned a thing or two about running a successful company since he started GreenShade Trees in 2007. He's learned that he can't be in his truck all day and be successful. He's learned to hire the right people and put trust in the team. And perhaps most of all, he's learned that being a tree farmer is a tough gig.

"We thought it'd be a really good idea to start a tree farm," Lingo says, recalling the beginning of GreenShade Trees. "We started growing trees and realized it's really a lot of work. Being in the tree planting service and selling trees, it just wasn't a good way to make a living."

Justin Lingo (right) and Tyler Entz (left) have grown GreenShade Trees from 15 to 125 employees in five years.

Over the last several years, the Oklahoma City, Okla.-based company expanded

its staff and services. In 2021, the company reported \$12.5 million in revenue and a whopping 156-percent increase in business from 2020 and grew 125 percent from 2021 to 2022. The company does 45 percent design/build and installation, 35 percent irrigation and provides some mowing and maintenance and turf and ornamental care.

ALWAYS ON OFFENSE

Early on, Lingo was trying to do everything himself, which he knew was not a sustainable model.

"I was working at jobs during the day, running crews during the day and estimating at night," Lingo says. "I went back to school and got my MBA from Southern Nazarene University. That triggered a new method, and we started scaling from there. We hired one project manager, then another, then another."

One of those project managers is Tyler Entz, now project director. Entz and Lingo go back to when Entz was still in high school. Lingo was the offensive coordinator for the Yukon (Okla.) High School football team. Entz played wide receiver.

Now the two work together and maintain a sports mindset of always being on the offensive.

"Our focus is the big difference," Entz says of the reason GreenShade has been successful. "We were focused on selling trees, getting trees out the door, and now we're focused on bringing as much value as we can to commercial construction projects and landscapes in Oklahoma City and beyond. We make sure architects get what they want, owners get what they want and general contractors have a good partner to work with."

Two recent projects stand out for GreenShade: Myriad Botanical Gardens and Lower Scissortail Park.

The former is a 15-acre green space in the heart of downtown Oklahoma City. The centerpiece is the Crystal Bridge Conservatory. Opened in 1988, the conservatory boasts an exotic plant collection, a reflecting pool and a waterfall. GreenShade won the contract to perform the first-ever remodel of the facility in its 30-plus years. The project was grueling — crews worked from 2 to 10 a.m. to avoid the excessive daytime heat. The confined space was another challenge: GreenShade brought in 400 yards of soil and all but one tree through a set of double doors.



PHOTO: LM STAFF; DISK/ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS/GETTY IMAGES (HEADER)

Lower Scissortail Park is a 34-acre park that stretches southward away from the city, crosses Interstate 40 and includes soccer fields, walking trails and playgrounds. Prior to the company's work on the land, areas of the park were in serious disrepair. Crews unearthed car parts, oil drums and other junk. The grand opening of the project earned GreenShade Trees a shout-out from the Oklahoma City mayor himself.

"The city wanted it done right because phase one didn't go as well as they wanted it to, so they pushed for us to do it right," Lingo says. "We didn't want to have any mistakes. They trusted us, we had enough money, enough time and the right crews to do it. We worked as a team. At the grand opening, the mayor said these three contractors did a great job. ... It was the plumbers, the electrical contractors and us."

GROWING TEAM

Looking at the 2022 holiday card gave Lingo a reason to pause. There were about 125 people in the photo, all employees of GreenShade Trees. They had to use a drone to get everyone in the shot.

The 2017 Christmas card was a much different photo. There were only 15 people in that photo. A different time for a different company.

"That's the fun and scary thing," Lingo says. "We are supporting 130 families. They're relying on our good management. They're relying on us to make sure their family member has a job and has work to do. It's stressful, but having a supportive family and a good team makes all the difference. The good team goes all the way from the delivery drivers to the project directors. It's all of us." 📍

KEYS TO GROWTH

Justin Lingo, president of GreenShade Trees, shares his top keys to growth in 2023:

1 Don't be afraid to invest in good people. If they're expensive, that's fine. Hire good people and make them carry some of that burden with you. You need to be freed up so you can be the best you can be.

2 You don't have to hit a home run every time. We're here to hit singles. We try to do the best we can and we push hard. I'm sure there are (clients) who want us to do more, but at the end of the job, we want everyone to be happy (including our employees).

3 Make sure your spouse understands the demands of the business. My spouse is on board; she's a part of the company. She knows the struggles. She's an integral part of the company.



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HOW C. CARAMANICO & SONS PREPARED FOR 2023

After experiencing 52 percent growth from 2020 to 2021, the team from Upland, Pa., sees employee training and better customer relationships as the key to continued growth

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR



Thanks to a rebound in demand for services with its commercial customers, C. Caramanico & Sons in Upland, Pa., netted a 52-percent increase in revenue from 2020 to 2021. But that increase wasn't without its challenges as the company grew by only 5 percent in 2022.

John Caramanico Jr., president, says many of the company's commercial landscape maintenance, enhancements, construction and snow removal clients delayed projects at the start of the pandemic. He says it's been an interesting past three years.

"It just feels like we're riding a roller-coaster more than talking about a business," he says. "In 2019, the economy was strong. We had a very successful year and then 2020 hit in our commercial market. Customers wanted to be conservative with their spending."

This meant delaying projects. Customers also canceled projects, too.

"From a maintenance perspective, customers spent on necessities," he says. "They wanted to keep curb appeal, but if they didn't need to, they were conservative with their dollars."

He says this all changed in the second year of the pandemic. Commercial clients wanted to start on shelved projects and spent more money on maintenance and enhancements.

"Everybody in the commercial world is trying to set themselves apart," he says.

NEW CHALLENGES

Caramanico says as interest in commercial maintenance increased, his operation faced new challenges in 2022 in the form of inflation, higher fuel costs and supply chain disruptions.

"It's definitely not like it used to be," he says. "We're having to pass along probably some of the biggest increases in company history to our customers to be able to provide for our team members, (and) give them a fair wage."

The conversation about raising prices with clients was difficult at times, he says. The Caramanico team took the full transparency approach, providing documents that show the increase in inputs.

"Telling a story of, 'Hey, you're feeling this at home, we're feeling this in the

business. This is what your renewal for landscape maintenance looks like; this is why that enhancement is costing that much,'" he says.

IT TAKES A TEAM

Caramanico says how his team executed the 2021 season is a big part of the operation's overall growth and success. He says building a strong culture where employees are family starts with "The Caramanico Way," a list of 31 fundamentals for the fourth-generation business.

"This culture has always been a fabric of our business that's been passed down to us through the generations," he says. "My brother (Bill, secretary and treasurer for the company) and I took the time to write them out and focus on delivering them to our team weekly, and it's paid dividends for us."

Each week the operation focuses on one of the 31 fundamentals, Caramanico says. Managers share how "The Caramanico Way" translates to interactions with clients and teammates.

Training on technical and soft skills is a huge focus for C. Caramanico & Sons in 2023.

KEYS TO GROWTH

John Caramanico, president of C. Caramanico & Sons in Upland, Pa., says a lesson he's learned is to focus on the clients that make the most sense for the operation.

"When I first started out, I wanted to be the service provider for everybody," he says, noting he'd see a property and think about how his family's business would do a great job managing it. "I think there's something to be said for focusing on your best clients, your most profitable clients, your most enjoyable clients."

Although the company is fully staffed, Caramanico says he knows he doesn't have 10 or 15 employees lined up for every job, so his team takes a hard look at the types of properties and clients it serves, and works with the ones that are the most profitable and enjoyable.

"If you focus on your clients and focus on profitability, I think that really pays dividends," he says.

LOOKING TO 2023

Caramanico says his executive team prepared a conservative budget for 2023. He expects a dip in the demand for services this year.

"We are thinking that the sugar rush that all our clients have been on is going to slow down," he says. "For the last two years we've been order takers. The customer has known what they wanted."

But Caramanico and his team plan to focus more on sales and customer relationships this year; a nod to No. 2 of "The Caramanico Way" is "deliver legendary service."

"We're preparing with training and discussions and sales meetings about how we're going to deliver legendary service, deliver legendary solutions to our clients that keep revenue coming in the door to keep our team busy," he says.


As of early 2023, the company renewed 75 percent of its maintenance contracts, which is 10 points higher than 2022.

The team at C. Caramanico & Sons also developed 10 to 15 goals around revenue, profitability and relationships this year. Plus, they are ramping up training.

"We are scheduling four full-day rodeos for training for our crew members," he says. "We will train on the technical skills, proper pruning and proper maintenance of the machines and proper operation of the machines. We'll also do developmental training."

The developmental training includes conflict resolution, problem-solving and how to be a good team member, skills Caramanico hopes they'll put to use at work and in their personal lives.

The company put a big focus on employee retention in the last 10 years, and Caramanico sees this training as an opportunity to highlight how the green industry can be a career, not just a job.

"And I think if we focus on our teams, our business revenue and new clients will find us," he says. 

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DEEP (ROOTS) IN THE HEART OF TEXAS

Lawns of Dallas looks to push the envelope and continue its growth trend

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Lawns of Dallas isn't a new company in the Dallas-Fort Worth area — it celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2022 — but following 44 percent revenue growth from 2020 to 2021, it's becoming one of its better known.

"It's been quite a journey," says Madison Gardner, president of Lawns of Dallas. "I feel super fortunate for the team we've built and where we're heading now. We've been really focused on making sure we have all the right people in the right places. Hopefully, growth should be a bit easier now that we've hit our stride in a lot of areas."

Gardner estimates an additional 25 percent growth from 2021 to 2022.

A native Texan with a background in private equity, he purchased Lawns of Dallas in 2017 and, in the five years since, has helped it grow from what he describes as a "typical mom and pop" business into a full-service company with residential and commercial clients.

Gardner says the 150-employee company services 60 percent residential and 40 percent commercial clients.

GROWTH DURING THE PANDEMIC

The key to the company's growth during the pandemic in



Lawns of Dallas President Madison Gardner credits his team's focus on continuous improvement as a key part of his company's growth.



2020 and 2021 started with an open-minded approach, Gardner says.

"We tried to be creative with how we operated," he says. "There was an opportunity during the pandemic, as many people were fearful, and business was impacted all around, to be more proactive and with a long-term view."

The company's proactiveness resulted in a push to hire more employees and invest in more equipment, even as some departments within the company shut down temporarily as work slowed to a crawl.

Gardner says he's always looking to improve the status quo both from a business and landscaping perspective.

"I'm always asking people, 'Is there a better way to do this?'" he says. "Whether it's a procedure we have for installing a new landscape or a new software improvement that will benefit everyone, we're constantly thinking of how we can get better."

While Lawns of Dallas may have taken a creative approach to how it operated during the pandemic, Gardner also attributes the company's growth to the quality of its work. He calls it a positive virtuous cycle that has helped the business grow.

"We've been fortunate to continue to do better and better work that's enabled us to grow more and afford better people and equipment," he says. "Not to say it hasn't been hard, it's definitely been difficult, but we've just continued to grind it out and trust the process."

AN EYE ON THE FUTURE

With the calendar now turned to 2023, Gardner and Lawns of Dallas aren't sure what to expect from the market. He says the company has already begun preparing for a potential

Lawns of Dallas will soon have a new facility to complement its rapid growth since the beginning of 2020.

downturn, having noticed some fear from other landscaping companies about what might come in the new year.

“We’ve noticed recently there’s some fear in the market,” he says. “But I think a lot of it will depend on where your company is located. It’s very market related as far as if we do have a potential downturn.”

Like a number of businesses countrywide, Gardner says, Lawns of Dallas saw difficulty in 2022 from inflation and wage increases.

As a result, the company saw its margins squeeze despite continued growth, he says. This scenario led him to adopt a more conservative budget in 2023 in case a recession officially emerges, causing clients to pull back.

“We’ve really been in a recession for about half a year already, and it’s finally filtering its way to Main Street,” he says. “In general, we’re not too fearful about next year. We’re trying to operate as efficiently as possible in the event we have to slash our budget even more than what we are planning for.”

NEW DIGS COMING SOON

As for what’s ahead in 2023, Gardner says Lawns of Dallas will move to a new, larger facility currently under construction. He says he hopes the new facility, located in the heart of Dallas-Fort Worth, will continue to drive growth.

KEYS TO GROWTH

Madison Gardner, president of Lawns of Dallas, shares his top keys to growth in 2023:



Madison Gardner

1 Don't be afraid to confront issues head-on. If you don't, they won't go away, and things will only be worse down the road if you continue to ignore them.

2 Have a clear organizational chart. Make sure you're happy with everyone on that chart. Make sure everyone is in the right seat and doing the right things. It should be clear.

3 Set quarterly objectives. Whether it's implementing a new operating software upgrade, getting three new trucks or finalizing a sales and marketing plan, break it down into 90-day chunks and focus on getting those things done.

4 Solve the root issue. The root issue might be a broken procedure or not having the right person in the right place. Don't just solve a secondary problem; it's easy to do. Focus on the root issue and make sure to take care of that first.

“We’re at the same location that we were at five years ago,” says Gardner. “So (the size of the facility) honestly has been the biggest hindrance to our growth. We’re really excited about the new facility; I think it’ll really enable us to have continued growth. Part of any company’s ability to grow is making sure that you have the facilities to support the increased volume.” 📍

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How to add aeration to your business

Aeration can be a profitable service with a low barrier to entry

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Aeration isn't a service offered by every lawn care or landscaping company, but for many, it's a reliable source of income, says Gary Sorensen, agronomic sales manager for SiteOne Landscape Supply.

"It's a very good profit center," he says, "Once you get a return on your investment on that aerator, the cost of operation is very low, and you can generate a solid stream of revenue by aerifying lawns."

Aeration improves turf health by relieving compaction and allowing oxygen to get into the turf. Experts say the primary aeration window is in the spring, between April and June.

Sorensen, Brandon King, product manager at Billy Goat Industries and Jeb Fregm, sales and marketing manager for Earth & Turf Products, share what professionals who want to get in on the aerification game need to know about today's aerators.

WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU?

There are two main options for landscape professionals looking to add an aerator to their stable of lawn care services: drum and reciprocating.

The drum aerator is a tried-and-true aeration method, says Sorensen. Drum aerators commonly come in pull-behind and walk-behind options and are simple to use, and have a fixed hole pattern.

"It's a big drum that rotates with aerifying tines spaced out on it," he says. "Depending on how close those tines are in relationship to the drum, that's the pattern of holes you'll get."

Sorensen says drum aerators are a solid choice for pros who primarily manage smaller residential lawns.

"What it really comes down to is the economics of the business model," says Sorensen. "If I'm a relatively new landscaper, and maybe it's just myself and two employees, I may opt to buy a walk-behind drum aerator because the cost of entry is significantly less; we're talking between \$3,000 and \$5,000. Whereas you're at \$10,000 up to \$15,000 to get into a ride-on unit."



Reciprocating aerators — commonly seen on golf courses — offer a more varied approach to aeration. Unlike its drum counterpart, tines aren't in a fixed pattern.

"The first benefit is variable aeration density," he says. "If I go slower, the holes get closer together, so I start to affect a much larger portion of the soil. Denser aeration can help with drought resistance and, really, it amplifies and makes the benefits of aeration more prevalent in the turf."

Companies like Earth & Turf Products offer aerator attachments for other machines. The company will release its aerator attachment for its stand-on 415SP topdresser in spring 2023.


"Our main focus in adding the option to our stand-on unit is to make the most of every moment spent," says Fregm. "Users can aerate, overseed and topdress in the same pass without taking multiple passes, with multiple machines and multiple operators."

HOW ABOUT RENTING?

King says aerators — specifically the drum variety — are a popular rental option for professionals. There are several factors contractors should keep in mind as they ponder buying or renting a machine, he says.

"If I'm a contractor who wants to explore adding aeration, my first course of action might be to rent (an aerator)," he says. "I can pick up a few accounts that want to add on aeration. But after a few years, the availability of renting the machine can come into question."

King says because aerators are such a popular rental, it might make more sense for pros to purchase a machine right off the bat, especially if they are confident that customers will be receptive to aeration services.

"If you go to a rental place in the fall and request an aerator, there's a good chance they're all checked out," he says. "So it becomes kind of a struggle to find a renter who has availability. So, there's definitely a cost of protecting your business; you may want to buy one to do that." 

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Gary Sorensen



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DID YOU KNOW

What to think about before buying tanks, nozzles or hoses

Get the inside scoop on what to know before making that purchase **BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR**

Not only should lawn care operators (LCOs) look at the quality of a product before making a purchase, but they also need to consider what will work best for their specific services and needs — both now and in the future. Donny Pitts, general manager of Graham Spray Equipment, offers this advice on what to look for when buying tanks, nozzles and hoses for spray trucks.

LM: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CHOOSE A DURABLE TANK?

DP: One reason companies need to buy the best tanks is in the last couple of years, we have noticed a lot more accidents where the spray truck is hit while it's parked and the tech is spraying the yard — not to mention normal accidents. You don't want to have a spill out there on top of the other problems.

LM: HOW CAN LCOs SELECT THE BEST NOZZLES?

DP: There are all kinds of guns and nozzles out there these days, and they spray all different patterns. The user needs to know their chemicals and the rates that they need to be applied to really know which one they need. A lot of guns and nozzles are made to handle certain volumes and pressures



GROWTH MINDSET

Know where you plan to grow in order to get the right setup for your operation.


and spray the best patterns at those rates. Most LCOs are spraying 1.5 to 3 gallons per 1,000 square feet and like a broad pattern to cover more area effectively. A tree and shrub technician may want to spray 30 to 40 feet in the air, so they will need a different gun and nozzle for that.

LM: WHAT SHOULD PROS THINK ABOUT WHEN PURCHASING A HOSE FOR THEIR SPRAY TRUCK?

DP: A hose is a personal preference. The first thing to think about again is volume and pressure. The smaller the hose, the lower the volume and vice versa. Most lawn applications are not going to use much pressure — 250 psi or less — and most tree/shrub applications will use 250 psi or more. So, you need to get a hose that is rated for at least 100 psi more than what you need. Another big thing that the techs need to look at is the weight. They don't want to pull a lot of weight in and out 20 times a day. A good quality hose should last four to five years, but it's going to cost more upfront. Some hoses only last a

season or maybe two. It's a pay-me-now or pay-me-later kind of thing.

LM: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO PLAN FOR THE FUTURE WHEN BUYING THESE PARTS?

DP: We have a lot of first-time buyers or people just getting in the business that call us to buy a 200-gallon unit, and six months later, they call back needing a 400-gallon rig. We have a customer now that came in a few years ago and ordered an 800-gallon unit, 600 main tank and 200 auxiliary tank. He came to pick it up a few weeks later, and I was talking to him about his business and when he got started. He said that the next week he was going to take his pesticide test to get his license and was going to ride along with a friend of his that sprayed for another company so he could learn how to do it. He didn't have any customers yet. Eight months later, he was calling to order his second one. I think that's the biggest mistake you can make: underestimating yourself and underestimating what doing a good job for people will get you. 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.




Donny Pitts



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HOW TO

PINPOINT CONTROL
Accuracy counts with pesticides, as inaccurate application could lead to poor control.



Getting the best results from tree and shrub applications

Applicators share how a targeted approach provides best results for disease, insect and environmental stresses **BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR**



To ensure the effective management of trees and shrubs, operators must make the most of their applications — including selecting the right products for the job and proper timing.

ENHANCE PLANT DEFENSES

Understanding the threshold of pest damage is important when selecting products to apply to trees and ornamentals, says Chris Sherrington, technical director at Lawn Doctor. The franchise offers residential lawn care and pest control.

To achieve the best results with trees and shrubs, the Lawn Doctor team inspects, identifies and then only treats if necessary. Lawn Doctor ensures the plants receive balanced nutrition throughout the growing season, along with insect and disease control during high pest pressure times. In general, the company offers six service programs for the cool-season market and eight services for the warm-season market.

“Balanced nutrients enhance the natural plant defense against disease, insect and environmental stresses,” Sherrington says.

Plant misidentification and selecting the incorrect product for treatment is a common mistake with tree/shrub management, he says. Applicators also should avoid impacting beneficial insects like pollinators and non-targeted insects during the application window.

MAKE PROPER DIAGNOSES

To maximize the effect of applications, Cal Leggett, Orlando-based manager of technical services at BrightView

Landscapes, says pros should select products that are effective on the target pest or deficiency and apply them at the correct label rate and time. BrightView provides commercial design/build, maintenance, snow/ice control, water management and tree care services. The company, which ranked No. 1 on the 2021 *LM150* list, reports an annual revenue of \$2.6 billion.

“Understanding the life cycle of pests and when treatments are most effective for different stages of pest development help improve efficacy of tree/shrub programs,” Leggett says.

BrightView follows integrated pest management (IPM) practices for tree/shrub applications, with a combination of preventive and curative applications, Leggett says. Project managers schedule fertilizer applications based on the needs of the plants while also following recommendations from university and regulatory agencies.

“When planning a schedule of applications, I recommend that predictable issues, such as recurring annual insect or disease pests, be treated preventively prior to outbreaks,” Leggett says. “Keeping detailed notes of when outbreaks occur is very important to help determine proper timing of preventive applications in following years. Effective treatment timing can also improve preventive programs and reduce the need for curative applications.”

He says pros should apply contact pesticides to the parts of the plant where the pests are. This often means an application must reach the underside of leaves or deep into the plant canopy.

Systemic and translaminar products, when appropriate, can lead to easier applications because they move through the plant to reach the target pest.

“An inaccurate application can lead to poor control when applied at a rate lower than the label recommends,” Leggett says. “Improper applications at rates higher than label recommendations are both illegal and uneconomical due to excessive product use.”

RESPONSIBLE APPLICATIONS

Scouting on a regular basis allows technicians to identify issues before pests or diseases reach damaging levels and reduce the amount of control products needed.

“This is not only an environmentally responsible approach to tree/shrub care, it is also a more economical approach,” Leggett says.

The biggest mistake he sees with tree/shrub applications is when a technician improperly diagnoses an issue or selects an incorrect product for treatment. “Both of these can lead to ineffective treatments and increased costs,” Leggett says.

He encourages professionals to find resources that will help them make their applications more effective, like university research, communication with product vendors and becoming active in industry associations.

“Creating a network of other industry professionals can help when searching for advice, help with identification of an issue or recommendations for product selection,” Leggett says.

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

PROTECT YOUR TURF

How to choose the right cultivar

Selecting the best turfgrass variety is critical to the success of a lawn installation

BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

From the property's intended use and environmental factors to maintenance and disease concerns, selecting the best turfgrass cultivar is important to a lawn's overall health and success. Pros share what to consider and look for to have the best results.

QUALITY FIRST

Grass species proven and adapted to certain locations and environments will perform better when used in those settings, says Kevin Morris, National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) executive director. To select the best varieties, consider the property type, amount of traffic and what diseases have caused issues in the past—or common diseases found in local turf. Lawn care operators (LCOs) should choose a cultivar with some level of resistance to that disease.

The quality of the cultivar is another important aspect to consider, Morris says. Certified seed undergoes testing to meet standards under strict conditions. Look for a certification tag on each bag that guarantees the authenticity of the cultivar.

"If you're going for some level of quality, you need to think about buying certified (seed)," he says. "With grass



CONSIDER THIS
Property type, amount of traffic and disease history should all factor into the decision to select a turfgrass variety.

seeds, you tend to get what you pay for. When you open a bag of seed, you can't tell what variety it is by looking at it. You need assurance that the cultivar you paid for is what you're getting."

BEST MATCH

The weather, temperature and other environmental factors should play a role in the selection, says Jeremy Bigler, senior brand manager of Lebanon Seaboard. If using turfgrass cultivars to repair an existing lawn, LCOs should look for options that match the leaf texture and color. Grass mismatched for its environment will struggle to become high-quality turf without significant maintenance.

"The environment that the grass will be in is key to selecting the right type of grass," Bigler says. "If a grass that doesn't tolerate shade well is established in a shady area, the turf will struggle to become healthy, thick and lush. This will make the turf more susceptible to weeds, insects and disease."

Local university extension offices and local distributors also can provide information on the best types of grasses for a given area. Not only is it important to choose the right seed, but LCOs also should consider the newest varieties.

"New varieties have the latest genetic developments, and they are more resistant to disease, more drought tolerant and heat tolerant and often require less maintenance than older varieties," Bigler says.


ADVANCED GENETICS

When choosing a turf cultivar, LCOs should look for ones with advanced genetics, such as improved drought tolerance, disease resistance and reduced mowing requirements, says Leah Brilman, Ph.D., director of product management and technical services at DLF.

"Not only will that save LCOs time and money doing maintenance, it will save the customer money and be more environmentally friendly," Brilman says.

To select the right one, professionals should know the type of turf already on the property, soil type, turfgrass cultivars that thrive in their climate, issues the lawn had, the turf's intended use, the cultivar's quality and the customer's expectations, Brilman says. For example, factors like a history of brown patch, customers who value drought-tolerant turf or areas where children will play would all contribute to the ideal cultivar.

The speed of establishment for turfgrass cultivars is also important because both professionals and their customers want to see results quickly. Evaluating data from the NTEP's top-performing blends can be a good starting place. However, LCOs should consider which varieties will thrive in their specific climates.

"The data only shows you so much," Brilman says. "Look at a cultivar's performance or talk with your distributor about which ones perform well in your region." 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

THE BIG ONE

Care for the whole campus

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

LOCATION Washington D.C.

COMPANY Ruppert Landscape

DETAILS Georgetown University Law Center's motto is *cura personalis*, or care for the whole person. Ruppert Landscape takes the same approach to its care of the landscape on the school's seven-acre campus.

"This is a very high-profile campus and is visited regularly by high-level government and military officials who give guest lectures and attend graduation ceremonies," Daniel Derrow, Ruppert Landscape's area manager said. "This necessitates that the campus be in 'company's coming' shape at all times."

The location of the campus also makes access a challenge for crews in trucks and trailers. D.C. Metro also enacted a gas-powered leaf blower ban, so crews only use battery-powered blowers to service the property.

The property suffers from an aging irrigation system. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the property's courtyards served as outdoor testing sites. Several times, tent vendors damaged or broke a main line to the irrigation system.

Irrigation managers monitor the property's plantings and mature trees for fungus and diseases, given the property's location near the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers.

Ruppert Landscape won a Gold Award from the 2022 National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program for this project. 🏆

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



1. To create a formal and inviting site, Ruppert blends turf, sitting areas, gardens and walkways with vivid annuals, perennials and formal hedges. **2.** Ruppert fills the property's planters with summer annuals of mostly tropical, drought-tolerant plants, such as caladium, lantana, begonia, SunPatiens, cordyline, and canna lilies or fall annuals of pansies and cabbage. **3.** This naturalized shaded seating area features self-sustaining plants previously installed by students. Ruppert crews perform rejuvenation pruning, fertilization and weeding. **4.** During the height of the pandemic, Georgetown Law received a special permit to have an outdoor classroom on the quad. This required crews to work around class schedules and repair turf from extra damage.

RECOMMENDER

What is your favorite feature of your **ride-on mower**, and why?

Comfort and availability of parts rank high on the list of landscape professionals' favorite ride-on mower features.



RON GORZ
COO, SEMMER LANDSCAPE
CHICAGO

We use Scag Turf Tiger Zero-Turn riding mowers. We've been using Scag for over 20 years. We have 25 maintenance crews on the road each day, and 33 percent of our business is mowing. I like the Turf Tiger for its dependability, ease of mowing and generally the easily available parts and interchangeable parts. Our field staff likes them for their comfort and ergonomics.



SCOTT LAMON
PRESIDENT, TYNIC
LANDSCAPING
SOUTHWICK, MASS.

We run three different Scag ride-ons — Turf Tiger, Cheetah and Tiger Cat. The seats have come a long way over the last 15 years. I find them almost to be as comfortable as my recliner at the house. And another important feature for us is the low center of gravity on the machines. They feel very safe on hills, and we have a lot here in the Northeast. There's also a deck lift pedal on the right-hand side of the machine that the operator can use very easily and quickly without slowing down. They can raise the deck, travel over that hazard and keep going. So, they really help keep up productivity too.



RON VALE
HEAD OF MAINTENANCE,
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Comfort. Ride-on mowers are great for our crews on larger commercial accounts. They add the comfort of being able to sit instead of standing for long shifts mowing some of the larger lawns we service. The technology for ride-on mowers has come a long way in terms of comfort. They help our crews be more productive because they're less tired or sore after mowing a larger lawn as well.

MAINTAIN YOUR EDGE

Get the most out of your string trimmer

Be more efficient with your string trimmer with these tips from experts

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

String trimmers are an essential part of maintenance operations, but these tools can also be inefficient if started, used and stored incorrectly.

Jack Easterly, product manager for Husqvarna, and Kenneth Glass, product applications specialist for Stihl, share tips for getting the most out of your string trimmers. They also offer a look toward the tool's future.

DON'T MAKE THESE MISTAKES

Glass says removing the tool's debris guard is a major mistake he sees landscape professionals make. Not only does it pose a safety issue, allowing the tool to throw debris around freely, but it also affects the engine.

"If the line is farther out than it's designed for, you lose engine rpm," he says. "You'll build heat in the gearbox, the drive shaft and the clutch; basically, the entire engine suffers from it."

Easterly adds that the manufacturer tuned the string trimmer to a specific rpm, and the machine won't operate correctly with the guard removed. It may increase short-term productivity and visibility, but it's not good for the engine in the long run.

"(The rpm) what the engine and the carburetor were tuned to," he says. "It's what's going to make your trimmer operate correctly and reduce downtime because the engine can operate at optimal rpm. (Removing the guard) can cause carbon buildup in the engine because it cannot reach that higher rpm."

Another common mistake, Easterly says, is not understanding the unit's starting procedures by the book.

"There are hot and cold start procedures for string trimmers," he says. "I think knowing each manufacturer's starting procedures is imperative. Operators know roughly the procedures for how to start the units, but there are some differences in each manufacturer's procedures. Knowing those could reduce a lot of downtime and headache in the field."

SAFETY IS KEY

Easterly says it's important to remember what personal protective equipment (PPE) operators should wear while operating a string trimmer.

"We recommend long pants, a long-sleeve shirt, gloves, close-toed shoes and eye and ear protection," he says. "We see a lot of operators use gaiters to keep from breathing in dust and debris. It's no N95 mask, but it protects against some of those larger particles."

According to Easterly, improper tool storage on trucks and trailers is also a major safety issue. Incorrect storage can lead to damaged units, which can be unsafe for operators and the property.

"You don't need to baby them, but we do see units get dropped and thrown and improperly stored," he says. "If you have a rack for your handheld (equipment), ensure that your operators put that on the rack every time. I've seen countless trailers with trimmers laying around by zero-turns, which are also not strapped in, which will move and bend and damage those tools."

WHAT'S NEXT FOR STRING TRIMMERS?


Easterly says there isn't a lack of power in today's string trimmer market, so the manufacturers' next task is to make them more compact.



"Creating something very lightweight is the next challenge," he says. "Weight and vibrations and making the tool less fatiguing for the operator and keeping them comfortable throughout the day (are important). It increases productivity, and it's better for everyone involved."

Glass adds that battery-powered string trimmers have gained popularity among professionals in densely populated areas, where low-noise operation is a must.

"The FSA 135 (battery-powered string trimmer) shares a lot of the same parts that you'll see in our gasoline units," he says. "It's a move to a unit that has the same balance and power as its gas counterpart, but it's got a battery, and it's a lot quieter."

Much like gas trimmers, removing the debris guard can cause issues in battery-powered trimmers, according to Easterly. He says a long line can cause shorter run times for the unit, as can its thickness. 



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DID YOU KNOW

Pros share their go-to technology to keep their operations running smoothly

From invoicing, texting to answering inbound calls, learn how software helps these operations do more in less time **BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR**

CREW CONTROL

Benjamin J. Christlieb, owner of CTX Mowing in Georgetown, Texas, uses the scheduling software Crew Control for his 75 percent residential, 25 percent commercial maintenance and design/build operation.

Christlieb says he found Crew Control out of the necessity to communicate with the clients of his growing business, which jumped from 60 clients in 2018 to 400 at the end of 2021. He says he would spend an hour a day after work sending invoices and would send reminder texts manually to the customers scheduled for the day.

“We did that through all of 2021 with all our customers. So, it was a lot of text messages,” he says.

In 2022 Christlieb rolled out Crew Control’s automated text messaging function to alert clients to an upcoming service call and deployed the software’s automated invoicing. He says what used to take him an hour now takes him 5 minutes to send out 60 or 70 invoices during the busiest part of the season.

“There’s no way I’d have the time or ability to send that many text messages for invoices and reminders,” he says.

ARBORGOLD SOFTWARE

For Jay Maier, general manager of Sargent’s in Rochester, Minn., adding Arborgold Software, a field management software system, to his operation helped

streamline inventory and project management for the primarily residential design/build, garden maintenance and tree care operation. Sargent’s also operates two garden centers in the Rochester area.

While the company managed nursery inventory through Counterpoint POS software, it used spreadsheets for contract renewals for its maintenance services, Maier says. The company wanted a CRM that could manage Sargent’s design/build and maintenance jobs.

Arborgold’s ability to tie in with the nursery’s Counterpoint POS is invaluable, Maier says. Designers select the plant species for each project, and it ties to the point-of-sale system to inform the nursery that the plants are committed to a project.

Maier recommends that companies evaluating different software programs should consider how well the platforms will accommodate their growth.

“Arborgold can easily handle probably five times the business we’re doing now,” he says.

JOBBER

In the three seasons Brandon Brubacher, owner of Brubacher Property Care in Elmira, Ontario, Canada, has been in business, he’s seen his workload double year over year. Now up to around 55 clients, he says he got to a point where scheduling routes and invoicing clients became a time-consuming task for his primarily residential maintenance business.

So Brubacher sought a smartphone app to help with scheduling routes and invoicing clients. After adding field service management software Jobber last

season, batch invoicing and route optimization helps his team be more efficient. He has one full-time employee and one part-time employee.

“The guys look at their phone and they know exactly what they have to do,” he says of the scheduling function.

Brubacher encourages smaller operations to consider adding CRM software to help take some of the pressure from the day-to-day functions of the business.

SLINGSHOT

George Louvis, marketing director for Go Organic Lawn and Tree Care in Oakland, N.J., added Slingshot’s lead response service because of the operation’s successful marketing initiatives for its primarily residential tree, lawn and shrub care and vegetation and pest control business. The phone wouldn’t stop ringing, and Go Organic’s receptionists struggled to keep up with inquiries.

“Within a week or two of having it set up, we had our first sale through Slingshot,” he says. “We have it set up so that our staff answers the phone first, but if all our lines are busy, then it goes to Slingshot.”

While Slingshot doesn’t provide quotes for clients, it does direct calls to the proper department, and this frees up Go Organic’s team to make sales calls. 📞



Benjamin J. Christlieb



Brandon Brubacher



George Louvis

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REV YOUR ENGINES

CLEAN MOWING MACHINE

Experts say propane burns cleaner than gasoline or diesel. It also helps limit noise.



The 411 on propane power

Get the scoop on the benefits alternative fuel can have for your operation, your bidding process and your bottom line **BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR**

There's no shortage of fueling options for today's mowers. Ken Dykstra, product strategy manager for Kawasaki Engines, and Mike Newland, director of agriculture business development with the Propane Education and Research Council (PERC) walk landscape professionals through the ins and outs of using propane in their operations.

LM: WHAT DO PROS NEED TO THINK ABOUT TO SELECT THE RIGHT ENGINE/POWER FOR THEIR OPERATION?

KD: It's all about productivity. In the case of commercial mowers, the maximum cut speed to get the jobs done quickly — no matter how thick, tall or wet the grass is — is key. This requires power, lots of power.

The next top concern should be reliability, so you have minimum downtime due to repairs. And rounding out the top three, in my mind, is doing regular maintenance on your equipment.

Cutting corners on maintenance might help your short game but definitely not your long game. If you want to make a good, profitable living mowing lawns, think long game.

MN: If you're going into a purchase of equipment that you know is going to be converted to propane, maybe a look at the different engine package options from (your equipment) supplier to make

sure that the (propane conversion) kits are available. 95 percent of the engines available today will have a corresponding kit to convert those to propane.

LM: ARE THERE ANY MISCONCEPTIONS LANDSCAPE PROS HAVE ABOUT PROPANE-POWERED ENGINES?

KD: For many years, I've traveled the country doing engine tear-down classes for Kawasaki and would often hear misplaced concerns/anxiety about the pressurized propane tanks on a commercial ZTR. Those propane tanks are far more robust than any gasoline tank and don't have to vent like a gas/diesel tank have to. It just takes education and familiarity with propane to show it's safe on a commercial mower.

MN: Propane does burn cleaner than gasoline, especially diesel. Not only will you be using clean fuel, but you'll also have less maintenance cost. The fuel burns quietly in our equipment. From a fuel economy standpoint, I think we'll be on par with a gasoline-type fuel system. There is a little bit of upfront cost in making that conversion from a gasoline engine over to a propane engine. You are saving significant dollars on every hour of runtime that you're burning propane versus gasoline today. Even though you may have upfront costs in converting that engine from an ROI standpoint, it's going to save you and your business considerable money. I know a number of commercial landscape professionals citing (propane) in their bids today and highlighting that they are on clean fuel and they continue to be very successful in their bidding process.

LM: FOR PROS CONSIDERING PROPANE, WHAT ARE THE STORAGE AND FUELING CONSIDERATIONS PROS SHOULD THINK ABOUT?

KD: Landscapers must be aware of local ordinances for the storage and transportation of propane tanks. Check with your local propane distributor and they should be able to guide you through it. They usually know the ins and outs to help you avoid tickets on the road when transporting your mowers with propane tanks on them.

There are two kinds of propane tanks: forklifts use liquid propane to run the engine, while a commercial mower engine runs on gaseous (vapor) propane like a barbecue grill. The propane company you work with knows this and should fit you up correctly, but double-check the tank, (and) don't assume.

MN: If you don't have any propane-powered equipment today and you're looking at switching, I think the first call you'd want to make is to a propane supplier. The supplier will determine your usage and then deliver a storage cage, which houses all cylinders, both full and empty. Those folks will just continually trade those empties for full ones.

Once you get into the swing of not having to stop at a fuel station, it becomes very simple — you're just literally throwing an extra cylinder on your trailer or truck for the day. And when you do need fuel, you've got that cylinder ready to go, and you're just making a quick two-minute change out and you're back and up and running. It's a tried-and-true process, and there's a number of folks having great success with that fueling option today.



Ken Dykstra



Mike Newland

BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Do you have the right insurance coverage for your operation?

Here are some things to keep in mind to make sure you and your business are protected

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

Insurance is a critical component for a green industry business. The right policy can protect you and your operation from future risk. Traci Dooley, national agency sales director for Hortica, a subsidiary of Sentry Insurance Group specializing in insurance coverage for green industry businesses, and Drew Garcia, vice president of Rancho Mesa's landscape group, share what you need to know about securing the right coverage for your business.

BEFORE TAKING OUT THAT POLICY

Garcia says an important step in the process is to find a provider with industry experience. The green industry is nuanced, and working with an insurance provider with industry knowledge ensures you'll have the right coverage.

"You can find agents online, through professional associations or ask a peer in the industry who they work with," he says.

Dooley says it's important to understand your risks—and that's something a provider with industry experience can help with.

"Think about the accidents, damages, or legal expenses you could incur over the next year. If you operate a landscaping business, your risks often include potential injuries, damage to your equipment or a customer's property, theft and contract-related errors," she says. "Now consider what each of

those risks could cost if they became a loss."

Dooley says the direct and indirect costs could catch a business owner off guard as they're often higher than expected. Garcia agrees.

"The glaring concern is having an uncovered claim," he says.

"We generally see landscape businesses spend between 2 and 5 percent of revenue on insurance cost. It's important to understand that the lower-cost option might not be the best fit for your business."

Dooley says she encourages new clients to take out property and liability coverage as a good starting place.

"Depending on your team and travel needs, you may also need to consider workers' compensation and commercial auto insurance, which are required in most states," she says.

ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL

Dooley says it may be easy for a business owner to take out a blanket policy for the operation, but she cautions that can be a huge mistake.

"A one-size-fits-all policy rarely fits the needs, or risks, of specialized businesses like those in the horticulture industry," she says. "You typically want to look for an insurer who supports a large number of businesses within your industry. They often have a deeper understanding of the risks and challenges you face, and they're better equipped to tailor a policy to your needs and budget."

Garcia says it's important to communicate to your insurance agent all

the services you provide or if you subcontract out work.


"Incidental service offerings like tree care, lawn care, snow and ice services, pest control and holiday lighting, to name a few, create additional liability," he says. "Making sure your policy offers coverage for the type of work you perform is very important, and make sure your insurance carrier understands the work you perform or subcontract is just as important."



Traci Dooley

REVIEW BEFORE RENEWING

Along with communicating any service updates, Dooley says it's a good idea to revisit your policy yearly with your insurance agent. Update your policy with any additional equipment, services or operations to ensure you're covered.

"You may have found that your business faced more claims or costs than expected in the past year," she says. "Any change to your business could affect your risk and, therefore, your insurance. The most successful businesses I see throughout our industry take safety seriously, manage their risks and review their coverage. If you can do that, you can protect your business and spend more time focusing on your customers." 



Drew Garcia

HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

Raise the roof

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LOCATION Denver

COMPANY Lifescape Colorado

DETAILS This project sits 14 stories above a Denver street that overlooks the home of the Colorado Rockies, Coors Field. The client contacted Lifescape Colorado to build an outdoor living space on their half of the rooftop patio.

Michael Hupf, director of pre-construction services for Lifescape Colorado, says that after a review of the rooftop space, the contractor found potential for a larger project for both residents of the apartment's penthouse level. The addition of a secondary client transformed a 600-square-foot project into a 2,200-square-foot patio.

"We wanted to keep that open feel with the city skyline so the clients could enjoy the views of downtown and Coors Field," he says. "But at the same time, we wanted to give each resident their own bit of privacy."

Hupf says the building's elevator only reached the floor below the roof, so Lifescape coordinated with the construction contractor on the use of a crane to lift heavy materials to the project. The Lifescape crew carried lighter materials up the stairs from the penthouse level.

Lifescape also had to contend with city code issues related to environmental and safety problems, according to Hupf. Notably, he says, those included solar reflections, permeable water and weight restrictions. Hupf says Lifescape irrigated the property with drip irrigation placed underneath pavers.

"We had about 20 inches to work with underneath the pavers," he says. "(The irrigation system) runs underneath the decking and penetrates through the tile pavers, drilled with precise holes, then up through the containers themselves. We had to penetrate the paver and the container and then apply water individually to the plants. So, it's very focused and controlled."

The project earned Lifescape Colorado a Gold Award from the 2022 National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program. 🏆

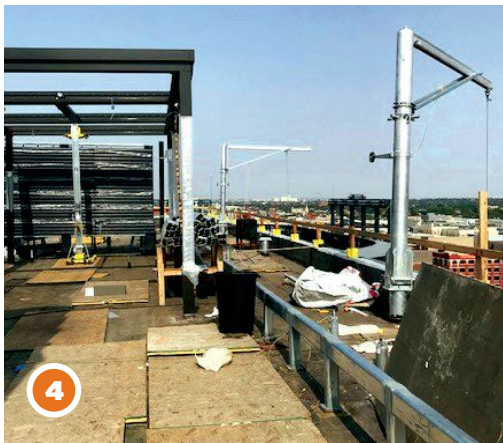
See more photos from this project at LandscapeManagement.net/hardscapesolutions.



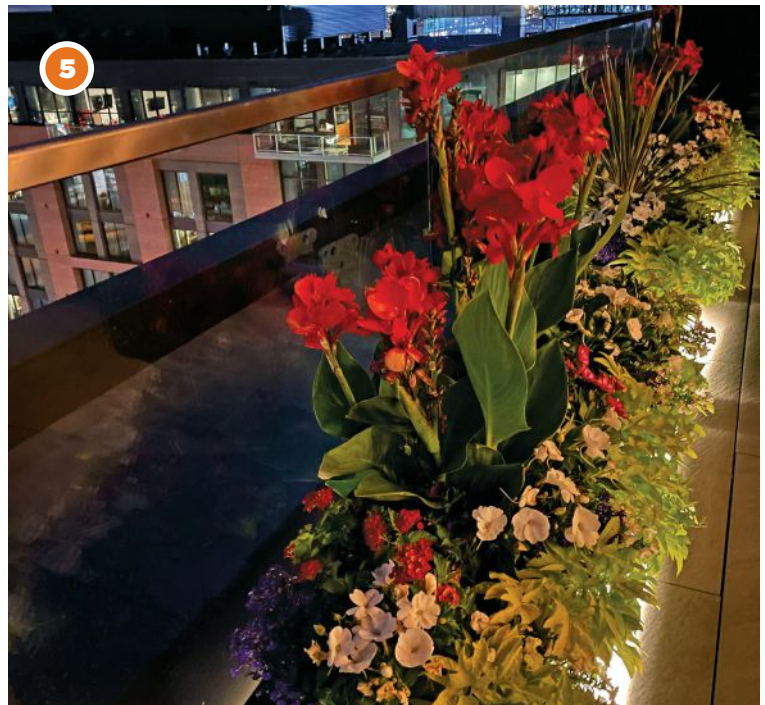
PHOTOS: COURTESY OF LIFESCAPE COLORADO



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Captions | 1. Lifescape Colorado constructed the patio to allow for unobstructed views of the Rocky Mountains. 2. Lifescape installed several Colorado-centric plants in a wildflower garden designed to emulate the state's high-country scenery. 3. Lifescape installed a 4-foot-long wall containing boxwoods to create a natural privacy screen. 4. Lifescape had a blank canvas to work on alongside construction of the building. 5. City code restricts uplighting on rooftop patios, so Lifescape used LED string lights throughout the space. 6. Michael Hupf, director of preconstruction services for Lifescape Colorado, says the two clients had different views of the space, with one wanting a space to entertain and the other wanting a family space. 7. Lifescape worked alongside the building's contractor to use a crane to lift heavy materials to the rooftop.

INSTALLATION IRON

How CUTs can give you a leg up

Compact utility tractors (CUTs) give professionals a multifaceted tool to tackle a number of different jobs

BY ROB DIFRANCO
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Compact utility tractors (CUTs) can be a true jack-of-all-trades for a landscape professional. CUTs offer pros power and utility in a smaller package than a traditional tractor.

“What makes CUTs such valuable tools is their smaller size,” Beau Woodbury, product manager for Kubota’s BX, B, L Series, says. “It allows them to be extremely versatile in areas that larger equipment has difficulty accessing. CUTs allow for material handling and transport, as well as overall property maintenance in a way that traditionally may have included multiple pieces of equipment.”

Woodbury and Mark Davey, go-to-market manager at John Deere, share with *LM* why a CUT might be an excellent addition to your fleet of machines and what’s new with models coming in 2023.

WHAT’S RIGHT FOR YOU?

According to Davey and Woodbury, the most common question contractors ask about CUTs is, “What horsepower do I need for the job I need to get done?” There are several parts to that question, starting with the size of the properties a professional will be working on.

“The main thing is understanding the need of the professional that dictates the overall size/capacity and horsepower needs,” says Woodbury.



UPPER CUT
The versatility of compact utility tractors can help contractors tackle jobs larger equipment can't access easily.

“Our versatile compact utility tractor lineup helps for effectively selecting the right equipment for their needs.”

Generally, the smaller the property, the less horsepower you’ll need. Properties ranging from 0 to 5 acres call for a CUT with 25-35 hp; from 6 to 10 acres, pros should look for 35 hp and up. Depending on what work a contractor is looking to do with a CUT could skew those numbers as well.

Pros looking to move heavy material should aim higher on the horsepower scale; those looking for a CUT to move lighter material in conjunction with mowing might want to look on the lower end.

FASTER AND SMARTER

Part of what makes a CUT such an impactful tool for landscape pros is the ability to change between a variety of different attachments and implements. Changing an attachment allows professionals to dig, move dirt, level dirt and haul materials all with the same machine.

“For design/build jobs, loader and backhoe attachments can be used to carry materials, dig underground or move large amounts of soil,” Davey says. “Additionally, these machines can be equipped with mowers and rotary cutters to tackle land maintenance and

grass cutting, efficiently handling even the largest of properties.”

According to Davey, users can also gather telematics from apps like John Deere’s Tractor Plus app, which help to determine when maintenance might be needed. Kubota also offers telematics through its myKubota app.

Davey expects telematics to become more commonplace in the CUT market as it continues to grow.

A TOOL FOR ALL SEASONS

Compact utility tractor attachments offer additional options for professionals looking to potentially add more services to their business.

Attachments like snow blades, blowers, pushers and brooms can turn a CUT into an effective snow mover. Davey says Deere also offers LED headlights and working lights on its 2023 1025R and 2 Series CUTs, further helping with winter work.

“The true benefit of a compact utility tractor is the ability to tackle a variety of jobs in any season,” says Davey. “This time of year, some parts of the country need to move snow, (John Deere CUTs) are available with a heated cab to allow operators to stay productive in all conditions.”

INSTALLATION SOLUTIONS



Paver installation tips you can't overlook

Learn why there's much more to paver installations than meets the eye

BY JAMES CONLEY | CONTRIBUTOR

Seasoned hardscape professionals know that every paver installation reaches the make-or-break point before the first stone hits the ground.

That means it's important to treat the ground below your next paver project with the same care as the pavers themselves. Compaction, drainage and grading are all keys to a proper installation and will set you up for success when planning the finishing touches that make any new hardscape complete.

GRADING AND UNDERGROUND WATER MANAGEMENT

LeAnn Ostheimer, executive vice president of design/build services at Lifescape Colorado in Denver, says managing a paver installation project means managing water flow above and below the surface. Lifescape Colorado offers primarily residential design/build and maintenance services.

"Drainage is the most important thing to manage," she says. "Any installation that is at least 6 inches thick will bring excavation into the subgrade and affect the flow of underground water."

While surface water is easy to monitor, the hidden flow of underground water can affect pavers, and you should carefully manage it with good early planning.

"Surface drainage management is a must with any paver project, and sub-surface drainage should mirror those efforts," says Ostheimer.

COMPACTION, COMPACTION, COMPACTION

Similarly, Cristhian Ambriz Frias, owner of Urban Grass Landscape in Fenelton, Pa., says all good paver installations depend on proper base preparation. Urban Grass offers maintenance and design/build services for a primarily residential clientele.

"Excavation and compaction are the parts of projects people sometimes overlook," he says. "Not just because these areas can't be seen after the work is done, but usually because of a lack of proper equipment or experience. Preparing the base can take more time than installing the pavers, but that can be normal depending on the application."

Like water, contractors should address excavation and compaction before the first paver hits the ground. If handled incorrectly, these hidden areas can lead to settling, water ponding and trip hazards at the surface.

"We perform mostly new installations," says Ambriz. "Sometimes we're called to fix or replace a bad patio installation. These older projects show their problems right away, with bad compaction or a lack of the right sub-grade aggregates."

UNDERSTANDING PROJECT SCALE

Large installations spanning thousands of square feet may feel out of reach for many clients. Ambriz says medium to large jobs can provide greater value if scaled properly.

"You have to consider the same logistics if it's a small- or medium-sized project," Ambriz says. "Small projects seem easy because they require less in materials, but the same details need to be applied as in large projects. It's easy to overwhelm your margins this way."

Because small hardscapes still require the same time-intensive build practices, final costs to the consumer aren't necessarily as small as the project would suggest, he says.


"Customers might wonder why small projects cost so much," says Ambriz. "It's important to present them as much information as possible and explain solutions to any possible problems that might arise during a build."

DON'T BE AFRAID TO UPSELL

Ostheimer explains that paver installations are usually only a part of the greater plan for a fully-realized landscape.

"Our design teams consider the entire outdoor living space when planning work for our clients," Ostheimer says. "How will the space be used throughout the year? What is the level of investment in each surface? These are all considerations in selecting the right paver products."

Ambriz recommends contractors see the sales conversation as an opportunity to enhance the property. Lights, plantings and other landscape elements can bring a project together, he says.

"Don't be afraid to explain to customers how these additional items can make a project better," he says. "We need to use imagination and be flexible when designing each project, and we ask our customers to use their imaginations when thinking about their projects and how they want to spend time at their homes." 

ALL ABOUT THAT BASE

Proper grading and underwater management are key to a successful installation.

Conley is a green industry professional specializing in design, installation and digital marketing from Pittsburgh, Pa.

EXPERTS' INSIGHTS

New products and best practices for landscape edging installation

Product managers share edging trends and installation insights **BY JAMES CONLEY | CONTRIBUTOR**

Landscape edging is a tried-and-true product in the green industry, and new advancements have made way for more edging applications than ever.

LM spoke with Nick diLorenzo, product manager of landscape products at Horizon Distributors, and Ian Freeman, hardscapes and synthetic turf category manager at SiteOne Landscape Supply, to discuss the latest products and installation best practices in landscape edging.

WHAT DOES EDGING DO?

“Edging essentially creates a physical barrier or separation between grass, pathways, mulch beds and driveways without taking up too much space,” says Freeman.

DiLorenzo says edging also helps distinguish different parts of the landscape.

“We like some sort of organization and differentiation, and edging provides that clean look of transition between different aspects of the landscape,” he says. “Edging also provides contour to break up straight lines and bring a more flowing landscape.”

ALTERNATIVE EDGING PRODUCTS

While these applications represent the traditional use of landscape edging, alternative types of landscape edging are emerging.

With unstable steel prices, manufacturers and installers look to alternatives in aluminum and composite edging.

“Aluminum edging is making its mark as a metal edging,” says diLorenzo. “With the price of steel going up, aluminum is becoming more utilized. Aluminum is (a) much lighter material

and gives you the flexibility of composite without the risk of degradation and rusting.”

Freeman says steel edging is a best-seller for SiteOne.

“Due to the volatility of the steel markets, we’ve seen aluminum edging grow in market share — as well as plastic — because of its cost-effectiveness,” he says.

Freeman says plastic landscape edging remains popular for its ability to provide great flexibility, literally.

“Plastic edging comes in different colors and is usually a more affordable option in the edging space,” says Freeman. “Plastic can be adaptive to most tight curves compared to other materials.”

NEW NEEDS FOR EDGING

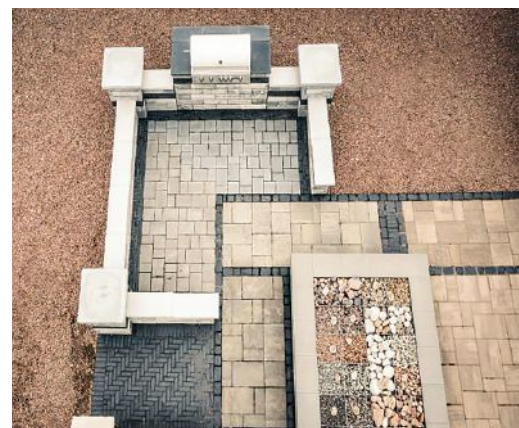
In addition to defining borders between beds and lawns, landscape edging also serves as a way to keep pavers in place.

For contractors, edge restraints are a critical part of the paver installation process. The demand for hardscapes continues to increase as upscale outdoor living grows in popularity. Edge restraints make the work of paver installation quicker and the end product longer-lived.

DiLorenzo says this includes keeping pavers in place.

“Once the outer pavers start moving, the rest of the paver system is compromised, regardless of any chemical stabilizer,” he says. “Contractors don’t want to come back once they have installed the pavers, so edge restraints minimize the lateral movement of the paver system.”

Additionally, the growth of synthetic turf in low-maintenance and low-water applications has seen an increased demand for edge restraints that help to



keep artificial turf products locked into place.

METAL MANIA
Aluminum edging gains in popularity as a lighter alternative to steel.


“We have seen an increase in edging products being used as a border or nailer board on synthetic turf projects to attach the turf to the base underneath,” says Freeman.

MEETING CONTRACTORS' NEEDS

As landscape edging manufacturers integrate new and more efficient installation methods with emerging product lines, that means responding to consumer trends.

“The edging business is constantly changing, says diLorenzo. “Big Box and DIY drive a lot of the new changes that we see, which ultimately makes its way into the commercial and professional channels where we reside.”

No matter the product, good edging installation comes down to preparation.

“Regardless of what material you are using, prepping the site is crucial to make sure the installation goes smoothly and that you get the edging installed properly the first time,” says diLorenzo. 

Conley is a green industry professional specializing in design, installation and digital marketing from Pittsburgh, Pa.

PHOTO: SITEONE LANDSCAPE SUPPLY

RECOMMENDER

What's your favorite irrigation controller and why do you like it?



Max Moreno, vice president of water conservation with Harvest Landscape, says HydroPoint WeatherTRAK Optiflow XR helps his operation manage multiple points of connection.



CHAD SUTTON

**WATER RESOURCE MANAGER
GACHINA LANDSCAPE
MANAGEMENT
MENLO PARK, CALIF.**

My favorite controller to use is the WeatherTRAK OptiFlow XR from HydroPoint. I like it because it is an advanced flow management controller available in two-wire or conventional-wire configurations. It's versatile and makes advanced flow programming easy. It optimizes how, when and where watering takes place by sharing multiple controllers' schedules in the cloud. Hundreds of controllers can share information and receive daily instructions about irrigation. It respects your site's maximum designed flow rates and water windows, so even during drought restrictions, sites can receive the maximum amount of water possible. All this technology amounts to healthier sites during times of water scarcity. The hardware is top-notch and even has a 10-year warranty. I highly recommend this controller.



PAUL SCHULTZ

**IRRIGATION RESOURCE
MANAGER
CAGWIN & DORWARD
PETALUMA, CALIF.**

I prefer the Weathermatic Smart-Line Controller. It's easy to install and program and has many advanced features. The controller is scalable when a customer is cost sensitive. With just the controller, if programmed based on a summer schedule and monthly percent adjustments set, it will adjust the run time minutes each month. The controller has a built-in wire continuity tester and valve-locating feature. With the weather sensor and select station details for plant, soil and irrigation type, the controller creates its own daily watering schedule for healthier plants and saves even more water. With a SmartLink Aircard (with or without flow sensor option) attached, users get email alerts for wiring, controller and even flow issues. Plus, downloadable reports.



MAX MORENO

**VICE PRESIDENT OF WATER
CONSERVATION
HARVEST LANDSCAPE
ORANGE, CALIF.**

The HydroPoint WeatherTRAK Optiflow XR, for me, is hands down my favorite controller. Here in California, we are limited to specific watering cycles and watering days on top of the ever-increasing demand for efficient systems. The Optiflow XR is a game-changer by tackling the complex irrigation scheduling required when irrigating a system with multiple (points of connection), controllers, mainlines and valve zones. The unique scheduling engine helps a water manager properly irrigate a complex system by not exceeding the hydraulics of the irrigation system, all while irrigating efficiently on its own. This controller has saved me time and money, which is why it is my favorite controller.

IRRIGATION TECH

Get to know the rotor

Learn how rotors can be a successful tool for irrigators and water managers alike

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Rotors move water and move it quickly. Jeff Johnson, senior product manager for Rain Bird, gives LM his insights on why a rotor is a useful tool for irrigation pros.

LM: WHAT DO IRRIGATION PROS NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHEN DESIGNING AN IRRIGATION SYSTEM WITH ROTORS?

JJ: What you're looking at is a single-stream water distribution device. A

single stream is preferred for wind penetration and longer throws because the water stays together, and you get better distribution. So, when you're looking at larger green areas — anything over 15 feet — a rotor is your best option.

LM: WHAT ARE SOME COMMON QUESTIONS YOU GET FROM PROS ABOUT ROTORS?

JJ: What's the warranty? How long is it going to last? What's the ease of

installation and maintenance?

There are two types of contractors; one that goes in and installs and one that comes in after the fact and to do maintenance. The first contractor wants the rotor to go into the ground fast and install easily. They want to set the rotor up, set the settings for the throw, link it quickly and move on to the next one. The maintenance contractor wants to know how easy it is to clean debris out of the rotor. If I have to change the nozzle, how easy is that? Or are there any minor setting changes I need to make?

Those are the two things I would say they look for both on the installation and on the maintenance side.

LM: HOW SHOULD PROS MAINTAIN THEIR ROTORS? ARE THERE SPECIFIC PARTS THAT WEAR QUICKLY?

JJ: There are not too many field-replaceable parts in a rotor. So, the first thing you can look at is the inlet filter screen. That cleans out any significant debris that comes in from the water source; it can be removed and cleaned or replaced. Beyond that, I would say the next easiest thing is to replace the guts of the rotor. Spin out the internals and then reinstall new ones. The next step would be to dig up and replace the full rotor. Changing the internals is probably the easiest and most common means of doing maintenance.

LM: WHAT ARE SOME COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ROTORS?

JJ: Rotors tend to get a bad rap. If you go out to a large site, you might see a dozen rotors shooting 30 gallons a minute and people will go, "That's a lot of water. Why don't we tear all of these out and put in a drip system?"

But there's a reason you're putting down 30 gallons a minute, and you're doing it in a sustainable way if you're using the correct rotor. And it's what the turf needs anyway, so even if you're doing it with a subsurface system, the turf is going to need those 30 gallons.



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WATER MOVER

Rotors help efficiently move water to where it needs to be according to Jeff Johnson, product manager for Rain Bird.

LM: PRESSURE-REGULATED SPRAY BODIES ARE A BIG TALKING POINT IN THE INDUSTRY AT THE MOMENT. HAS THAT STARTED TO WORK ITS WAY INTO THE ROTOR SPACE?

JJ: It hasn't yet, but our Rain Bird 5000 series rotors have pre-installed pressure regulation. We have a pressure-regulating swing joint for the larger rotors; pressure regulation can give 50 percent water savings.

It can depend on the pressure and flow, but you're saving a ton of water if you have a check valve — an internal valve that prevents external leaking — or a SAM (Seal-a-Matic) system. Without that, there's a waste of water. That water is going somewhere that you don't want it to go. 🌱

PHOTO: RAIN BIRD

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FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

David Amigo

PRESIDENT
G&G LANDSCAPE SOLUTIONS
CHARLOTTE, N.C.

1 What's the origins of G&G Landscape Solutions?

In 1989, Hurricane Hugo came through the area and did a lot of damage. Two guys named Gary got chainsaws and started cleaning up. That's how G&G got started. A few years in, they had a falling out. One of the Garys left, and the remaining Gary started telling folks that G&G stood for "green and growing." A guy named Richard became the second owner and is responsible for growing the company. He had some health issues and decided to sell the company to me.

2 How do you like the industry now that you've been in it for a few years?

I love the fact that we build stuff. We have an incredible product. One of the things I love, but I had no idea about until I got into it — are the people. These are salt-of-the-earth people, really hard-working, down-to-earth people. I've come across people of every race, religion, skin color and all of that. None of that matters except whether you are a good person or not. We don't care where you come from; we care that you work hard and are fun to be around. I think this industry is a shining example of the American dream. How many stories have you heard about people who started out mowing yards as high schoolers? My wife agrees. We are in the ACE Peer Group, and she loves the people — they're all caring and willing to share their successes and failures. I didn't buy the business because of the people in the industry, but I love the business because of the people in the industry.

3 What is your expectation for the upcoming season?

No. 1, the overall economy is not great. I live in a market that is somewhat resistant to that. People move here (to Charlotte) every day. We're somewhat insulated. But I'm not looking for incredible tailwinds anymore. I think they're gone. I'm not sure how strong the headwinds are or if they're there. Maybe it's neutral. Certainly, in Charlotte, we won't see what Detroit or Albany, N.Y., will see. Our market is so strong. It won't take a lot for us to grow.

4 What do you and your family do for fun?

Back in 2015, I sold my modular home business. One of the trips we took as a family afterward was to Maine. Subsequently, we purchased a piece of property in Maine. We've built phase one of a house ... it's a garage with an apartment above it. My wife spends the summers up in Maine. I travel back and forth. We have three kids; two are still in college and one works for me, which is fantastic. We try to plan our vacations together. We like to spend the week of the Fourth of July in Maine, and then we also just show up there once in a while.

5 Do you have a most memorable day at work?

My favorite workday of the year is our Christmas party, which we hold in mid-January. Everybody is happy. I used to do it in December, like everyone else. One year we had it in January because my father had to have triple bypass surgery, and I had to cancel the December party. I made some observations that year. In December, it's an obligation. People have so much going on. People can't relax and enjoy it. In January, nothing is going on. The buying presents, wrapping, going to your aunt's house — all that is over. By having it in January, it goes from an obligation to a celebration. It also allows you to look back at the last year and then look forward to what is coming up. I can thank everybody, but then, by the way ... look at all the things that are coming in the upcoming year. 🎁

BEST ADVICE

"This is an adaptation of the University of North Carolina basketball team's slogan ... Work hard ... work smart ... work together ... get better every day ... and have fun."



PHOTO: LISA AMIGO



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When the price isn't right

Our Equip Expo panelists advise that though raising prices isn't easy, there are good reasons to take the risk BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Rising prices are hitting consumers across all sectors. Owners in the lawn care and landscape industry are also getting hit in their wallets.

But what is the best way to pass along these rising prices to their customers?

At the 2022 Equip Expo in Louisville, Ky., a panel of industry veterans discussed their methods and philosophies for increasing prices. Nada Duna, COO of Gothic Landscape; Sam Gembel, owner of Atlas Outdoor; Steve Steele, financial and business practices leader at Bruce Wilson and Co.; and Barb Stropko, owner and vice president of New Desert Gallery, were the four panelists.

Steele advised the room that there is no industry-wide perfect percentage price increase to abide by.

"There are basic economic factors that will impact each of you, but a lot of what you look at in terms of pricing has to be based on one word. And that word is data," Steele told the room. "Understand your data, and if you don't have access to data, or you don't know

how to get it, or you don't have systems that allow you to get it, that's where you need to put your time and your effort."

Don't wait

Gembel said his regret over the last few years is that he was scared to ruffle his clients' feathers with price increases until it became absolutely necessary.

"Landscapers will just ride the wave. And I think it's so sad that we used to live like that," Gembel said. "We explain to clients this is seven years of us not messing with your price and it's just getting us to where we need to be. If we would've just done a 3- to 4-percent increase (annually), most people won't bat an eye at that. But what they will get ticked about is when you hit them with something that in their eyes doesn't make sense."

Duna added that it's not easy to take the risk of rising prices. She encouraged the room to be emboldened that everyone is in a similar situation.

"I advise everybody, to take a risk. If you don't take a risk, nothing is going to happen because fear is not

going to be what drives the industry forward," she said. "Know your customer's business. We deal with a lot of commercial property management, high-tech

HELP US CREATE MORE CLASSES FOR EQUIP 2023!

Landscape Management returns this year as the official magazine partner of Equip Expo. With that, we will again be offering a full slate of classes for attendees. Do you have a great idea for a class you wish you could attend if only someone would offer it? Now is your chance — send your ideas for consideration for future Equip Expo educational seminars to LM Editor Christina Herrick at cherrick@northcoastmedia.net.

campuses. Different segments are going through different economic hardships themselves. We tried to find out what is happening on their end. And you know what? They're raising their tenants' prices by 12 percent. So, I say take that risk."

Communication is key

Gembel added he shares with his customers how Atlas Outdoor is improving efficiency to offset the price increase.

"I tell them 'Hey, we're at Equip Expo looking at more efficient mowers,'" he said. "Because there was this window where people were okay with you raising the price, but then they also want to know that you're doing your part to try to get more efficient. I feel like that window (for raising prices) is closing now."

Stropko encouraged the audience that if they were confident that their services were exceptional, customers wouldn't leave them over a price increase. In fact, their customers might be more fearful of being dropped by their lawn care company, based on the demands of the industry.

"I just think that people and us as an industry should have more confidence and be proud of what we do," she said. "Because if you produce and give them something they cannot get anywhere else, they're not going to leave."



LM Editor-in-Chief Seth Jones (foreground) with the Price Isn't Right panel at Equip Expo and attendees. Jones was joined on stage by (left to right) Nada Duna, Gothic Landscape; Barb Stropko, New Desert Gallery; Steve Steele, Bruce Wilson and Co.; and Sam Gembel, Atlas Outdoor.

How Green Lawn Fertilizing focuses on quality

After experiencing 27 percent growth in revenue last year, Green Lawn Fertilizing shares how heightened attention to detail is paying dividends **BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR**

Green Lawn Fertilizing in West Chester, Pa., No. 118 on the 2022 LM150 list, experienced a 27 percent growth in revenue from 2020 to 2021. The operation grew by 25.4 percent from 2021 to 2022.

The company attributed some of that revenue growth to the addition of two quality assurance (QA) managers.

Ryan Petitti, director of technical operations and quality assurance at Green Lawn Fertilizing, says the company emphasizes offering an exceptional customer experience, so quality assurance was a natural extension of that mission.

“The addition of a quality assurance team was not about merely finding problems, it was about adding team members that could build relationships, identify the areas of opportunity, and constructively develop our technician teams by building on trust,” he says.

Petitti looked for adaptable candidates with strong self-awareness and relationship management skills. The quality assurance managers work directly with technicians and interface with customers in specific territories.

What do they do?

Green Lawn Fertilizing’s two quality assurance managers evaluate the performance of services provided by technicians. The managers coach and develop the technicians.

Topics include vehicle and driver safety, communication with customers, scouting and treating pests, best practices, equipment maintenance and calibration, regulatory and environmental compliance and more.

Green Lawn sees the QA team as another step in fostering client trust. The managers also work with the customer service and operations team to address customer concerns.

“Depending on the customers’ needs, the quality assurance managers will evaluate the property, diagnose concerns, share actions that can be taken to maximize service results, reset expectations if necessary and communicate next steps,” he says.

Positive experience

Petitti says there haven’t been any issues with technicians having their work double-checked by the QA team. In fact, technicians often seek extra training or information from the quality assurance managers. Customers have noticed, Petitti says.

“(They’re) often amazed that the company has a dedicated position focused on the quality of the service



being delivered to their properties,” he says.

Green Lawn Fertilizing’s QA team evaluates the performance of services provided.


Keep in mind

Petitti stresses that operations considering adding a quality assurance manager or team should not tie the position to production. Don’t apply the performance metrics of technicians to the QA team.

Field visits with technicians are an entire day for Green Lawn’s quality assurance manager. Petitti says this is intentional to encourage relationship building and quality coaching.

“If the position is tied to revenue, the daily demands of the business will dictate where time is spent because of immediate needs,” he says. “This will impact the long-term influence of the position.”

Don’t expect an immediate return on investment either. Green Lawn sees the quality assurance team as a long-term investment.

“Such impacts will be seen in technician retention, customer retention, a reduction in service calls, improved product management (savings on wasted product and labor time) and a competitive advantage that sets the business apart from others,” he says. 

Don’t miss our call for the 2023 LM150 list. Sign up at LandscapeManagement.net/Subscribe to get our e-newsletter with our call for entries or email Special Projects Editor Marisa Palmieri MPalmieri@NorthCoastMedia.net for more information.



BY GREG HERRING

The author is the CEO of The Herring Group, financial leaders serving landscape companies. He can be reached at greg.herring@herring-group.com.

The opportunity presented by 10 percent operating profit margin

I'm a self-proclaimed numbers nerd, so it's not surprising that one of the most gratifying projects I do each year is The Herring Group Landscape Industry Benchmark Report.

What story does this year's report tell? Most companies can be a lot more profitable than they are.

Before we get into just how much more profitable landscape companies could be, here's some background on our Benchmark Report, sponsored by Aspire, John Deere and Inova. This year, 151 companies participated, with revenue between \$1 million and \$120 million. To produce the report, we get income statements from all participants and format them to make them comparable. Then we analyze the data to generate useful insights for the participants.

KEY RESULTS

At The Herring Group, we use operating profit margin to measure profitability. Operating profit equals revenue minus direct job expenses, indirect job expenses and overhead expenses (including straight-line depreciation expense). Operating profit margin is operating profit divided by revenue.

This indicator measures customer satisfaction, the effectiveness of management and employees and efficiency. I encourage companies to plan for an operating profit margin of 12 percent and settle for anything above 10 percent as an initial goal.

Our 2022 report shows a weighted average operating profit margin of 5 percent. Companies with an operating profit margin above 10 percent averaged 12.8 percent, and companies with an operating profit margin below 10 percent averaged just under 3 percent.

That's a big gap. One out of every four companies had an operating profit margin greater than 10 percent.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE FINDINGS

When analyzing the participants who hit 10 percent, I noticed the following:

- Companies of every size and in every region hit the goal;
- Companies with and without snow hit the goal; and
- Companies that grew fast and those that grew slow hit the goal.

Notably, 1/4 of the participants improved their operating profit margin by more than 5 points.

Reaching a 10 percent operating profit margin requires the right plan and the right mindset.

A solid plan means the right people have the right data at the right time. Your team members must know if they are winning or losing.

The right mindset avoids "what-aboutism," or the tendency to make excuses or seek explanations for poor performance. It says, "We can do better. We can win. We are going to think and work differently, and we are going to hold each other accountable for

results. Sure, we will make mistakes, but we will learn from them."

UNDERSTANDING YOUR OPPORTUNITY

So how much more profitable could your company be? See the chart below to understand your opportunity.

First, find your current operating profit margin on the left side of the chart. Next, find your revenue at the top of the chart. That figure is your opportunity. This number is the additional pre-tax cash flow available when you reach the goal of a 10 percent operating profit margin.

Consider what the opportunity would mean for your company, your employees and you. A larger investment in technology? Higher 401(k) contributions? A bigger cushion in the event of an economic jolt?

As you contemplate the start of a new season, now is the time to develop your plan, adjust your mindset and seek commitment from your team to reach the goal in 2023.

To be notified when registration opens for next year's Industry Benchmark Report, visit [Herring-Group.com/Benchmark](https://www.herring-group.com/Benchmark).

		Annual revenue					
		\$2,000,000	\$4,000,000	\$6,000,000	\$8,000,000	\$10,000,000	\$12,000,000
Current profitability	3%	\$140,000	\$280,000	\$420,000	\$560,000	\$700,000	\$840,000
	4%	\$120,000	\$240,000	\$360,000	\$480,000	\$600,000	\$720,000
	5%	\$100,000	\$200,000	\$300,000	\$400,000	\$500,000	\$600,000
	6%	\$80,000	\$160,000	\$240,000	\$320,000	\$400,000	\$480,000
	7%	\$60,000	\$120,000	\$180,000	\$240,000	\$300,000	\$360,000
	8%	\$40,000	\$80,000	\$120,000	\$160,000	\$200,000	\$240,000
	9%	\$20,000	\$40,000	\$60,000	\$80,000	\$100,000	\$120,000



BY JEFF KORHAN

Jeff Korhan is the author of *Built-In Social*, founder of Landscape Digital Institute and a Duct Tape Marketing Certified consultant. Reach him at jeff@landscapedigitalinstitute.com.

Use strategy to gain a competitive edge for your business

Few business owners are comfortable articulating the difference between strategy and planning. As the phrase strategic planning suggests, the two are closely related. Yet, understanding the distinction is vitally important for achieving your company goals and objectives.

Strategy is a set of specific choices that define how you plan to win as a company. The future is uncertain, but every company gets to choose how it will gain its competitive advantage. Typical advantages leverage quality, service and pricing. Variables to consider for choosing yours should include:

- Your strengths;
- Ideal customers;
- The competition;
- Industry trends; and
- Economic factors.

Strategy is an inquiry process that asks targeted questions, including:

- Where are our competitors weak?
- Would buyers pay for a better way?
- Can our solution grow revenue and margin?

Think of strategy as a puzzle whose solution enhances the value proposition for customers. That solution's focus separates it from planning initiatives, such as getting close to customers. Once your team approves the strategy, the planning cycle can begin allocating resources to support its execution.

STRATEGY UNITES AND FOCUSES TEAMS

To have the greatest chance of creating a winning strategy, you must assess all the market conditions

“Think of strategy as a puzzle whose solution enhances the value proposition for customers. That solution's focus separates it from planning initiatives.”

and ask if your strategy can support them. You can only estimate the size of the segment of new customers you expect to capture. The critical success factor often turns out to be execution. Managers often say, “I'll take first-rate execution of a second-rate strategy over poor execution of a brilliant strategy every time.”

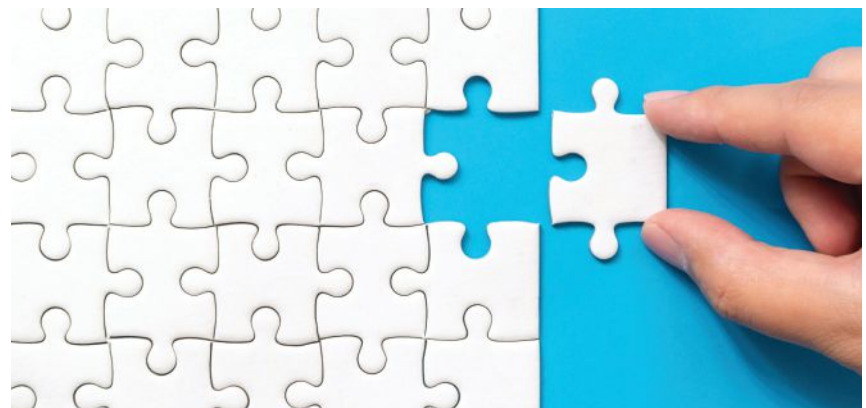
My residential design/build company faced this challenge when we rolled out our innovative design strategy. It turned out our strategy's winning distinction was more than innovative designs. Its greatest strength proved to be carefully planned execution. It put homeowners at ease by bringing

transparency to the choices necessary for buying high-end residential landscaping, such as determining realistic budgets.

Your strategy is a focusing tool that guides the actions of the people who execute it. It should empower them to confidently take action, regardless of the day-to-day circumstances they may encounter. We accomplished this by training designers and project managers on how their execution of our system promised exceptional value for clients.

Over time we became known for our unique process, how it worked and why it differentiated us from our competitors. This approach attracted buyers interested in a greater attention to detail and a uniquely personalized experience.

The greatest strategy challenges for owners and managers are the inherent uncertainties and risks of abandoning the status quo. The trade-off is this: A strategy's singular focus is invaluable for empowering team members in ways that planning and financial targets cannot. 📌





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.

10 ways to build a stronger, better company

Chick-fil-A founder S. Truett Cathy has a simple growth strategy: “Get better, and your clients will demand that you get bigger.”

I tell my clients something similar: “Bigger doesn’t make you better, but getting better will surely make you bigger.”

A top-line growth strategy can make you weaker unless you grow and strengthen from within. To avoid weak growth, consider the following steps.

STEPS TO STRONG GROWTH

1 Survey your team members repeatedly. Have them score their satisfaction working at your firm. Make sure to identify what can be improved. You can use the Net Promoter Score (NPS) to underpin your research and track results. Plug the holes and then fill the bucket!

2 Survey your clients. Some companies use NPS, but many use other approaches, like calling clients, focus groups and walk-throughs after project completion. Develop a rhythm for checking in.

3 Wow your new employees and clients. Use a comprehensive two-day onboarding for employees. Give new maintenance and



installation clients a “hug.” This can be intentional communication during the first 30 days or leading up to the start of a job.

4 Share a compelling mission and vision. These should be inspiring and detailed. Share with your team and let them put their thumbprints on the implementation plans. When everyone owns your mission and vision, you maximize their passion and dedication. This step is so important for your team; most owners underestimate it until they do it.

“A top-line growth strategy can make you weaker unless you grow and strengthen from within.”

5 Help employees earn a living wage, be it with full-time employment, or earning enough money to start and grow a family. Develop a professional approach to each role, and ensure your people are constantly improving and growing their earnings potential.

6 Take time off as an owner. I am coaching one gentleman who is planning to take off the month of July. While there are other leaders (branch managers) in the business, he has the critical role of general manager. We will set up the systems needed for the company to work without him, including virtual assistants. He is making the business more valuable and more salable through these efforts!

7 Grow the performance of each division. I am a big believer in

exploiting one’s strengths. Focus first on your strong divisions and make them even stronger. Many entrepreneurs skip this step! Then fix or sideline the weakest divisions. Use billable hours accountability and lean management techniques to improve margins across the board. All this will drive both bottom-line and top-line growth.

8 Improve throughput. Teach your sales team to use throughput as a guide to their estimating, and you will see your resulting jobs become more profitable. Production managers can use throughput to guide and motivate crews. Use numbers to make everyone smarter.

9 Align your incentives. For those using profit sharing, keep educating your team and connecting the dots. For those using incentives and commissions, keep them fair, believable and winnable or make the step up to profit sharing. The key is to align any win-sharing plan with your mission, vision and values to gain synergy and minimize friction.

10 Promote a habit of learning. Keep your team members growing via active use of a career ladder, the books they read and the management and communication tools they acquire. Success is not an end result. Rather, it is a light on the horizon that you constantly drive toward. Growing companies maintain momentum by growing team members.

Business success is a journey you should enjoy. Follow these 10 inspiring steps to become stronger and better, and your business will grow bigger as a result.

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GROW WITH GRUNDER

BY MARTY GRUNDER

The author is president and CEO of Grunder Landscaping Co. and The Grow Group, based in Dayton, Ohio. Reach him at marty@growgroupinc.com.



Nearly 40 years in, we focus on these 4 areas

When I first started my business, I couldn't even drive. I was using a tractor and pulling a trailer behind me to go house to house, mowing lawns.

It's hard to believe that 2024 marks our 40th year in business at Grunder Landscaping Co., and it's unbelievable to me how far we've come since the early days. As we approach our 40th year, I'm sharing the most important lessons I've learned. They fall into four categories: platform, people, process and profits.

PLATFORM

Nothing is more powerful than a clear vision, mission and core values. These are tools for identifying a common goal for your team, and they help you rally your team around that goal. Your core values are the beliefs and behaviors that must be present for your team to reach that goal.

An effective platform needs to be enacted and not just espoused. You need to hire people who demonstrate core values and fire people who don't.

This was a hard lesson for me to learn. Especially in the years we struggled to stay fully staffed; it was easy to get complacent and retain team members who were "close enough."

By keeping someone who excelled in our core value of quality but fell flat on teamwork, we told our team that this behavior was OK. Our core values are important, so today we hire and fire based on all of them.

PEOPLE

It's people who get things done, and a great team is the No. 1 ingredient the fastest-growing landscaping companies have in common. With people, I've learned that attitude is way more important than aptitude.

I want team members who are curious, humble and who care. We can teach them all the landscaping skills they need if they're willing to learn. The best team members understand that it's all about the team, and they make everyone they work with better.

PROCESS

Processes enable ordinary people to do extraordinary things. My business has grown tremendously in the past two years, and that growth has been possible because we found balance in processes.

We used to have so many processes that it became paralyzing. We put some decision making back into the hands of our team, we have gotten rid of processes and removed steps from others. We still train our team on how we want work done and best practices for efficiency and quality standards, but we've greatly decentralized decision making.

PROFITS


Profitability is NOT a dirty word, yet too many of us don't talk about profits with our teams. Early in my career, I was protective of this information. I didn't want my team to somehow use our profitability against me.

“Nothing is more powerful than a clear vision, mission and core values.”

But I learned if I don't share the information, they assume if we do \$2 million in work, \$1.5 million of it is profit. When in reality, we may have \$200,000 in profits. We now share profitability metrics with our team at GLC, but we also always frame it so they understand why the company's profitability is important to them.

Our teams work because they have their own financial goals. They want to take care of their families, buy a car, buy a house and better their lives. Profitability allows us to reinvest in the company and the team with new equipment, additional team members, raises and profit sharing or bonuses. Our team members will make more money and have more opportunities if we're profitable.

Grunder Landscaping Co. is still a work in progress, and we're still learning and figuring things out, just like I know many of you are. I'm looking forward to the many years ahead and all my team and I will be able to accomplish in that time. My career has been quite the journey, and we've still got a lot of road ahead.

At GROW! 2023 in San Antonio, Texas, on Feb. 28-March 2, I'll share more about our mistakes and what I've learned in my keynote. We have a fantastic event planned. If you haven't registered yet, what's stopping you? Visit [GrowGroupInc.com/Grow-2023](https://www.growgroupinc.com/grow-2023). 

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