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[FUN IN THE BLUEGRASS STATE]

Calling all Equip Exposition fans



Has your operation attended a few Equip Expositions or GIE+Expos in the past? Do you have a fun story to share about

your time in Louisville during the show (keep it clean, though, this is a family magazine)? Email Editor Christina Herrick at cherrick@northcoastmedia.net.

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The doers and the dreamers

We create every issue of *Landscape Management* with our readers in mind. But who, exactly, are our readers?

It's a fun question, and one I often consider. It's a diverse group of people, that's for sure. They could work for a small landscaping outfit just coming up in their local market, or they could be a multibusiness owner across multiple states with thousands of customers.

To further complicate this question, we consider that our readers offer a wide variety of services. We try to cover all these bases — and be a little bit to everyone — by including content in four categories in every issue: turf and ornamental; mowing and maintenance; design/build and installation; irrigation and water management (and this month, a bonus snow and ice).

There are commonalities among our readers. People depend on them, not just their customers but also their families and the families of those they employ. They are dreamers. They are doers. When they see a problem, they want to fix it.

The topic of this month's cover story, written by Editor Christina Herrick, covers adding a service to an existing business. Herrick spoke with representatives from six companies about how they went about adding services — pool installations and pest control as a few examples — and their best practices when going through the addition. That story, *Taking the plunge*, begins on page 12.

It could be hard for a doer to know when to leap and when to wait. It's not an easy decision. This story offers plenty of advice on things to consider if you find yourself in a similar situation.

WHY WE ADDED A SERVICE

I could relate to this story, as we recently added a service here at *LM*. Last year, we stepped outside our comfort zone to partner with Equip Exposition and host educational seminars.

“There are commonalities among our readers. People depend on them, not just their customers but also their families, and the families of those they employ. They are dreamers. They are doers.”

Making a monthly magazine, a weekly e-newsletter, a website, social media and YouTube content is our normal gig. But we took a chance and expanded into in-person education. I'm glad we did, as year one was a success. Now we're preparing for year two with hopes of growing the program.

And there are expansions we have decided against, for now. Does the world really need another podcast? Maybe someday I'll make the leap. As of now, I've decided to stay on the sidelines of that one. Unless you all tell me otherwise, that is.

Beyond that cover story, we have plenty of content in this issue to appeal to our wide variety of readers.

We have articles on controlling dove-weed (page 24); extending the life of a string trimmer (page 32) and tips from three experts on irrigation system maintenance (page 39). For those who do snow and ice removal, we check in with you two times in this issue — page 41 and page 42. And lastly,

I'll mention that my 5 Questions this month is a fun Q&A with Seth Pflum, recently promoted to president and COO of Grunder Landscaping Co., a company all *LM* readers are familiar with as it's the company started by our regular back-page columnist, Marty Grunder.

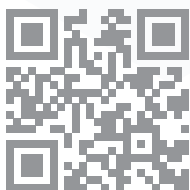
We're in the throes of summer, but I hope this issue finds all you doers and dreamers in complete charge and moving full steam ahead. Whatever business you're in, and whether you take that plunge and add a service or don't, I'll remind you of my favorite quote from the 1971 classic film *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*: “We are the music makers, and we are the dreamers of dreams.”


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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 should landscape business owners consider when adding a new service line?

“Adding a successful new service line is very difficult. The best way to do it is to buy out an existing company in the field and grow it. I would make sure management has skin in the game.”



Landscape Professionals

Richard Bare
Arbor-Nomics Turf
Norcross, Ga.

Troy Clogg
Troy Clogg Landscape Associates
Wixom, Mich.

Pam Dooley
Plants Creative Landscapes
Decatur, Ga.

Paul Fraynd
Sun Valley Landscaping
Omaha, Neb.

Mike Haynes
The Loving Companies
Charlotte, N.C.

Luke Henry
ProScape Lawn &
Landscaping Services
Marion, Ohio

Chris Joyce
Joyce Landscaping
Cape Cod, Mass.

Aaron Katerberg
Grapids Irrigation
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jerry McKay
McKay Landscape Lighting
Omaha, Neb.

Bryan Stolz
Winterberry Landscape
& Garden Center
Southington, Conn.

Greg Winchel
Winchel Irrigation
Grandville, Mich.

Industry Consultants

Neal Glatt
Grow the Bench
Boston, Mass.

Marty Grunder
The Grow Group
Dayton, Ohio

Phil Harwood
Tamarisk Business Advisors
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jeffrey Scott
Jeffrey Scott Consulting
New Orleans, La.



“Is this new service line good for the future? Will clients need this 10 years from now? Or is this just a new shiny object that many of us entrepreneurs like to chase? If it’s sustainable, build a plan to follow and measure against.”



“Consider if the new service leverages your ideal client relationships and internal execution capacity. Can you cross-sell the service? Can you gain efficiency by adding this service in-house? Does it give your clients a better experience?”

“Look at its impact on your core business. Can the new service be easily cross-sold to and from your existing lines? How much attention and talent will it pull from the rest of your business? And keep in mind the negative synergies will be realized before the positive.”



“Consider what you can add to the market that is completely unique. What is no one else offering that adds maximum value to customers at maximum efficiency for the business? When new demand is created with unleveraged resources, new service lines can become the best service lines.”



OUR MISSION: *Landscape Management* shares a comprehensive mix of content designed to stimulate growth and take our readers to their next level.

LM GALLERY

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

1 Welcome to Cleveland, Jeff! *LM* Columnist Jeff Korhan recently spoke at the 2023 Associated Builders and Contractors One Conference in Cleveland. He joined Editor Christina Herrick and Publisher Bill Roddy for a photo op at the Fountain of Eternal Life.

2 Gather 'round Herrick joined a group with Kimberly Straw and Pam Dooley of Plants Creative and Mariela Richardson and Kristina Thayer of MSNW Group to tour Russell Landscape Group's headquarters in Sugar Hill, Ga., as part of the National Association of Landscape Professionals Field Trip.

3 Team purple (From left) Russell Landscape's Teddy Russell, CEO; Brandon Thomas, vice president of customer experience; Josh Camp, regional manager; Hugh Cooper, COO; and Will Dutton, general manager, took the stage with Marty Grunder, CEO of The Grow Group and Grunder Landscaping Co. (center), to discuss their company in greater detail following a tour of Russell Landscape Group's facility.

4 Warm reception Grunder, Bill Russell and Teddy Russell welcomed guests to a special reception on the first night of NALP's Field Trip.

5 Growing list of accolades Herrick took the time to congratulate Grunder on his recent Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association award wins (see page 9 for more on that) and Vince Torchia's, vice president of The Grow Group, recent graduation from law school while at the NALP Field Trip.

6 Selfie time Mike Bogan, CEO of LandCare and president of NALP and Bob Grover, president of Pacific Landscape Management and NALP past-president, join Herrick for a selfie at the field trip.



Behind-the-scenes tour shows off the growth of Russell Landscape

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

Teddy Russell, CEO of Russell Landscape Group, No. 46 on the 2023 LM150 list, kicked off the National Association of Landscape Professionals' field trip in Atlanta, Ga., like the Russell Landscape team does every morning before rollout — with stretches and jumping jacks.

Teddy Russell said these stretches serve two purposes. First, it helps the team physically prepare for the day. Second, it helps managers scout for any team members hiding an injury.

Marty Grunder, CEO of The Grow Group and Grunder Landscaping Co., led a two-day deep dive into Russell Landscape's operations, successes and lessons learned.

REFERRAL ONLY

Russell Landscape, headquartered outside of Atlanta in Sugar Hill, Ga., specializes in full-service commercial maintenance. The company's 2022 revenue was \$62 million. The operation anticipates \$70 million in revenue this year. What makes those numbers interesting is Russell Landscape's success is built entirely on referrals.

"We've been trying to swallow the fire hose from the organic referrals we experience," Teddy Russell said.

Hugh Cooper, chief operating officer of Russell Landscape, said the company budgets for about 10 percent growth each year in business development.

"We put that number down and double it each year," he said.

Russell Landscape Group hosted the National Association of Landscape Professionals' field trip at its Sugar Hill, Ga., facilities. CEO Teddy Russell shared some of the company's keys to its rapid expansion and growth.

But it wasn't always like that for the business.

Russell Landscape grew from \$3 million to \$18 million from 2002 to 2008, but the Great Recession changed how the operation ran. In 2013, Teddy Russell said there was a falling out where family members left the operation. Bill Russell promoted his son Teddy to company president. But he said the company quickly ran out of money. Russell Landscape had about \$100,000 left in the bank, and Teddy told his father to take what was left and get out. But his father did the opposite.

"He told me, 'Take the money, believe in what you're doing. You're almost there,'" Teddy Russell said of his father's advice.

Since then, the operation expanded into Nashville, Tenn., Savannah, Ga., Tampa and Destin, Fla., and Charleston, S.C.

WHAT MAKES RUSSELL LANDSCAPE RUSSELL LANDSCAPE

Teddy Russell said the leadership team noticed the need for additional training about string trimmer operation. So, he took a lead role in the training video. It's something Grunder said shouldn't be overlooked.

"That says something," Grunder said of Russell demonstrating weed eating for Russell Landscape employees. "What is one of the minute details an entry-level employee does? It is so important that the CEO is in the training video."

The leadership team also created Russell Landscape University in 2020 to help team members of all levels learn new skills. William Dutton, general manager of Russell Landscape, estimates Russell Landscape University hosts more than 1,500 videos. 📺



PHOTO: PHILIPPE NOBILE PHOTOGRAPHY/NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONALS

Landscape Management wins 16 industry awards

Landscape Management took home 16 awards as part of the 2023 Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA) Communications Awards contest. TOCA annually recognizes members for outstanding writing, design, photography, videography and interactive efforts in the green industry. *LM* earned two Gardner (Best-In-Show) awards for cover page design and blogs. The complete list of *LM*'s winnings includes:



Gardner (Best-in-Show) awards

- **Cover Page Design (Printed Magazines)** — Supercharged!, Tracie Martinez, Peter Krause and Chris Sotomayor
- **Blogs** — How building a band is like building a rockin' leadership team, Jeffrey Scott

First place

- **Cover Page Design (Printed Magazines)** — Supercharged!, Tracie Martinez, Peter Krause and Chris Sotomayor
- **Overall Media Kit Design** — *Landscape Management* media kit, *Landscape Management* staff
- **Blogs** — How building a band is like building a rockin' leadership team, Jeffrey Scott
- **Best Short Video (2 Minutes or Less)** — Exmark debuts electric Lazer zero-turn mower, set for 2023 release, Joey Ciccolini
- **Column (Commercial Publications)** — Thanks for the memories, Kevin Kehoe
- **Series of Columns by Regular Department Columnist** — Grow with Grunder, Marty Grunder
- **Ornamental Feature Article (Commercial Publications)** — Get to know these emerging pests, Christina Herrick
- **Product Information Article (Commercial Publications)** — Supercharged!, Christina Herrick
- **Best Use of Editorial or Opinion in Video** — Grow with Grunder: Why making mistakes is an important part of growth, Marty Grunder
- **Writing for Special Projects** — 2022 *LM150*, Seth Jones, Christina Herrick and Rob DiFranco

Merit

- **Product Information Article (Commercial Publications)** — Why infrastructure is the latest buzzword in battery-powered equipment, Christina Herrick
- **Environmental Stewardship Article (Commercial Publications)** — Making \$ense, Christina Herrick
- **Best Long Video (More than 2 Minutes)** — Case Minotaur DL550 offers users dozing and grading capabilities in one package, Joey Ciccolini

- **Writing for Special Project** — *Landscape Management's* 2022 State of the Industry Report, Seth Jones, Christina Herrick and Rob DiFranco

More mergers and acquisition news

Senske Services, No. 59 on the 2023 *LM150* list, acquired Emerald Lawns of Austin, Texas. Emerald Lawns offers lawn care, tree care and pest control services. With this addition, Senske Services enters the Southwest region. Mary and Luke Hawthorne founded Emerald Lawns in 2006. The company services Austin, San Antonio, Temple and surrounding areas in Texas. Luke Hawthorne will continue to lead Emerald Lawns.

Sperber Landscape Co., No. 8 on the 2023 *LM150* list, enters the Arizona market by partnering with ProQual Landscaping, No. 117 on the 2023 *LM150* list, with \$23 million in 2022 revenue. Headquartered in Phoenix, Ariz., ProQual marks the 17th brand in Sperber's growing national portfolio. ProQual provides commercial landscape services within the Phoenix-Mesa-Chandler market in Arizona.

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The importance of knowing the value of your business

Phil Harwood shares why valuation is an important element of your business and what to expect from his education session

BY PHIL HARWOOD | LM COLUMNIST

A business owner's greatest asset is usually the business itself. While they may own other assets, such as real estate, their business is almost always their most valuable asset. There are exceptions, of course, but this is the general rule. Let's call this the greatest asset rule.

Closely related is another general rule: Owners usually don't know the value of their businesses. Most often, business owners have overinflated expectations of what their business is worth and are disappointed to discover the reality of the situation. If this discovery occurs well before the owner's exit, there is still time to recover. Both in terms of adjusting expectations and increasing the valuations. But, it may be devastating if this occurs simultaneously with the owner's exit.

A third general rule is the topic of their exit and business valuation interests business owners, even if it is in the distant future. They watch *Shark Tank*. They listen to conversations about what others are doing. All of this piecemeal information comes together to formulate the business owner's perception of what their business might be worth. But this is not a reliable, systematic methodology.

Art of valuation

Valuation is an art, not a science. There are many valuation methods. And there is a plethora of certifications for valuation experts. However, some basic elements go into valuation models.

Business owners can do well by learning these elements. Even better, a business owner would do well to become educated about these elements BEFORE their exit. This is while there is still time to improve the valuation.

If you read or listen to books, I highly recommend *Built to Sell: Creating a Business That Can Thrive Without You* by John Warrillow. Building your company to sell it is pure genius. Every business owner would do well to read this book. Over the years, I have met a few people who actually have done this. These owners are extremely well-informed and visionary people. Not all business


owners share these attributes, but all should learn about their inevitable exit.

Learn from me

This October, you will have an opportunity to learn about the elements of valuation and perform an initial valuation for your company. I'm presenting a session at Equip Exposition on this topic, hosted by *Landscape Management*.

You will leave this session with a solid understanding of valuation methods, valuation elements, an actual preliminary valuation of your company and action steps to take to move forward toward your exit.

If you haven't attended before, Equip Expo is the largest trade show in our industry. It attracts more than 25,000 attendees to interact with suppliers and educators in landscaping, outdoor living and equipment. Equip Exposition takes place from Oct. 17-20 at the Kentucky Expo Center in Louisville, Ky. Registration opened in April, and area hotel rooms will sell out. So now is the time to plan your trip and book your hotel rooms.

Now go forth. 



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BUSINESS IS
WORTH AND ARE
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A full-page photograph of a worker in a green shirt, yellow safety vest, blue jeans, orange ear protection, and a clear face shield. He is using a STIHL trimmer on a green lawn. In the background, a large cable-stayed bridge with two tall concrete pylons is visible under a clear blue sky. A garden bed with mulch and plants is in the foreground on the right.

STIHL

TAKING THE PLUNGE

Experts advise how an added service — like pool installations — can grow a company

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

Local Roots Landscaping capitalized on the popularity of plunge pools in Pittsburgh by offering installations.



PHOTO: LOCAL ROOTS LANDSCAPING

Have you ever struggled with a subcontractor and wondered, “Could we do this in-house instead?” Or had a client request that you perform a service you’re not currently offering? Or wondered how you could differentiate yourself from the competition?

If so, it just may be time to add a new service line. There’s a lot to consider before adding a new offering, so we turned to a handful of landscape professionals who’ve gone down this path to share the pros and cons.

“When you offer a very respectable service and people love what you’re doing for them, they want you to do more,” says Joshua Malik, CEO of Joshua Tree Experts in Stockertown, Pa. “We did have a lot of clients calling us out of the blue, ‘Hey, do you guys also do this?’ ‘Hey, why aren’t you doing this?’”

Diving in

Local Roots Landscaping in Pittsburgh saw an increased demand for pool installations as the perfect opportunity to dive right in, says managing partner Kenneth Deemer.

The operation, which also offers residential and commercial landscape design/build and maintenance and residential autonomous mowing, previously subcontracted pool installations.

“We realized that integrating pool installations into our in-house capabilities would streamline operations, improve quality control and offer a more seamless experience to our clients,” he says.

Deemer says Local Roots considered a few pool suppliers before landing on Soake Pools, a plunge-pool supplier. Deemer says the process took about a year from when he and his business partner, Patrick Murray, decided to add pool installations to when Local Roots installed its first Soake Pool. Since Local Roots serves clients in the Pittsburgh metro area, a pool with a smaller footprint was a natural fit for clients with small backyards.

Continued on page 14

THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE ADDING A SERVICE

“More is not always better. You have to make sure these services align with where you’re going. A mentor of ours told us that you make your first million dollars by saying yes and then you make every other million dollars after that by saying no. It’s easy to be attracted to the flashy things or the cool things, but that’s a surefire way to have really low margins, to have a really confused and disappointed team and offer lackluster quality to your clients.”

— **Kenneth Deemer, managing partner of Local Roots Landscaping**



STAND OUT →
Cherrylake added sustainable landscape installations and management to help distinguish itself from its competitors in a tough commercial market in Florida.



THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE ADDING A SERVICE

“Does it solve a need for your customer? Is it something you can get passionate about? Is this something that can help you differentiate yourself from the competition and create value for your company financially?”

— **Timothee Sallin, co-CEO of Cherrylake**

Continued from page 13

“I knew there was a big niche for (plunge pools),” he says. “They were blowing up. No one in Pittsburgh was doing them. I was like, ‘This is a great window of opportunity for us.’”

Deemer says he and Murray researched the permits, equipment, training and certifications necessary to bring pool installation in-house. He adds that a critical part of adding pool installation is the relationships the Local Roots team built with crane, plumbing, electrical and shipping suppliers.

“These projects require a relatively high degree of collaboration and competency from your industry partners, and that also allows you to move into those things more quickly where you’re just filling a project management role rather than having to train your team to do all these complex tasks,” he says.

Deemer says pool installations boost Local Roots’ presence in Pittsburgh.

“Incorporating pool installations has opened up new revenue streams and expanded our client base, attracting customers who specifically seek professional landscaping services with integrated pool installations,” he says. “By diversifying our service offerings, we have strengthened our competitive advantage in the market and positioned ourselves for long-term growth and success.”

Resource management

The operations at Cherrylake, No. 144 on the 2023 LM150 list, include a 1,800-acre tree farm, a landscape and irrigation construction division and a landscape maintenance division in Groveland, Fla. To better compete within a tough landscape maintenance market in the Sunshine State, Cherrylake recently added sustainable landscape management.

“We were looking for a way to be a little bit different and to find a way to create more value for our properties and our customers,” says Timothee Sallin, co-CEO of Cherrylake. “Just to get out of that hyper-competitive environment and to find some niche services where we could stand out.”

Sallin says Cherrylake’s leadership team believes in better resource management, something sustainable landscape management aligns directly with.

Crews no longer manage all clients’ properties the same and utilize native plants for landscaping projects. Gone is gas-powered equipment. Sallin says crews focus on pruning, weeding and general gardening. He says crew leaders develop crews’ horticultural skills to help them understand native plants’ growth cycles.

“We have to train our people to be very attentive to what’s going on with water,” he says. “That means understanding what’s

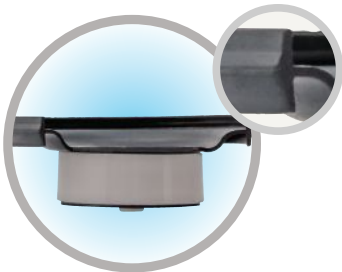
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PHOTO: CHERRYLAKE



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ASK AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE →
Joshua Tree Experts added indoor and outdoor pest control and lawn care services as a response to an increased demand from its customers.



THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE ADDING A SERVICE

“Take it step-by-step. We didn’t jump all the way in. The first year we just wanted to understand the program. It was a two-year progression to get here. Do your due diligence and research. We partnered with an expert to really look at it and vet it, and then make sure you have the capital available to invest in it and do it correctly the right way from day one.”
— Seth Pflum, president and COO of Grunder Landscaping Co.

Continued from page 14
going on with the soils and how the soils are retaining water and paying close attention to the conditions that affect water use.”

He says Cherrylake invested in research and trial gardens to learn how to manage and maintain these native plants.

“We’re finally getting some momentum with some big customers now,” he says. “It’s going to be a lot easier to get everybody’s buy-in because they can see not just the research and investment that we’re making, but now they can see there are some really big customers that are signing up for this.”

Green light

Grunder Landscaping Co. (GLC) in Miamisburg, Ohio, decided to bring its lawn care and pest control services in-house in 2022 after subcontracting the service for many years. Seth Pflum, president and COO of GLC, says a big driver of this move was to ensure its lawn care services were on par with the quality GLC provides through its landscaping, hardscaping and maintenance services for its 60 percent residential and 40 percent commercial clientele.

“Any time you sub it out, you lose a little bit of control, you’ll lose a little bit of what makes your organization unique,” Pflum says.

Pflum says it helped that GLC had a champion of the cause in Brian Davis, director of lawn care for Grunder Green, who wanted to bring the service under the Grunder roof. Pflum says Davis made applications in the first year to understand how the operation needed to estimate and price its services. Additionally, the company spent time integrating the new offering.

“The first year we brought in 15 to 20 properties in-house,” Pflum says. “The second season, we brought in all the properties we were subbing out — around 150 properties. We ran with one truck and tweaked it. We analyzed the numbers on



the production side, to understand where we need to be on markups, on the materials and what our proposals are going to look like.”

GLC decided to establish the lawn care and pest control services as Grunder Green as a nod to GLC’s founder and CEO, Marty Grunder, but also to distinguish the two services, Pflum says.

“We can do it all out of one simple truck, one-stop,” Pflum says of pest control. “(Technicians) can fertilize the yard and handle the pest control around the perimeter of the home and any other services that we can add on.”

Pflum says the Grunder Green team is still perfecting marketing strategies for these new services.

“We’re learning the different cycles of sales for that business,” he says. “It’s a lot different than selling landscape and landscape maintenance. It’s very heavy in the last part of the first quarter. In our eyes we’re learning — it’s so marketing driven — how to acquire new Grunder Green clients because of the volume that you need. We’re hitting our goals that we want to hit for this year.”

PHOTO: JOSHUA TREE EXPERTS

Meeting customer demand

Joshua Tree Experts, a residential tree maintenance, plant health care, pest control and lawn care company expanded its offerings in 2017 to include lawn care to meet customer interest and demand. The company also added interior and exterior pest control in 2020.

Malik says adding lawn care didn't happen overnight.

"It took us probably about close to two years, where we really put some plans together and really pushed the launch," he says.

Joshua Tree's leadership team talked about its target market and lawn size, the budget for adding new equipment, uniforms, goals and training. Malik says the company also realized the similarities between lawn care and plant health care.

"We already had a really good idea of what it was going to take to add lawn care," he says. "In that time of talking about it, planning it, you're making decisions (like), what style of trucks do you

want to do? Are we going to do granular? Are we going to do liquid applications, or are we going to do organic?"

Malik says Joshua Tree sets budgets for each profit center separately to accurately keep track of expenses. Malik says one thing he learned the hard way was that his existing software program didn't support indoor pest control. Malik says adding both pest control and lawn care helped his operation streamline its processes.

"It's helped us become better business-minded," he says. "It's helped us prepare and plan better year over year. It helped us be able to structure pricing much better. It's given us the tools and the ability to perform more efficiently internally."

Synergy in services

Tony Nasrallah founded Ground Works Land Design in 2009 in Westlake, Ohio. As his residential design/build and maintenance company took on more projects, his team ran into product availability

Continued on page 18



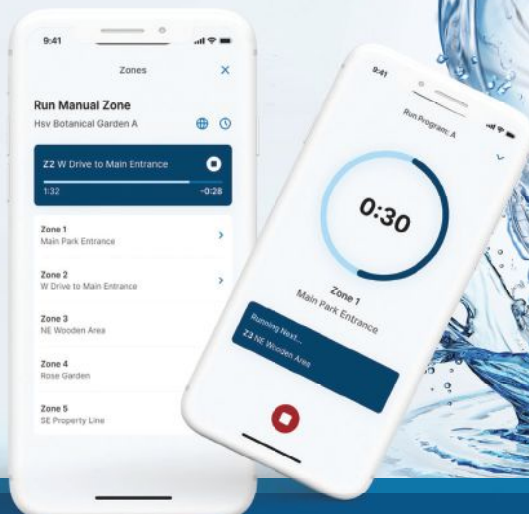
THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE ADDING A SERVICE

“You've got to build a plan. You need to have some type of vision you can share with your people. The more that they buy in, the more that they value the business and the more that they value the opportunity that you as an employer are going to give them to advance professionally.”

— Joshua Malik, CEO of Joshua Tree Experts

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Continued from page 17
and subcontractor quality issues. He says Ground Works Land Design crews would nearly complete an outdoor kitchen, only to face delays in getting countertops.

“By the time the kitchen’s done and the patio’s done, we’re just waiting for countertops to wrap the job,” he says.

The delays in getting products and increased demand for his company’s services pushed Nasrallah to make a move. In 2021, Nasrallah purchased U.S. Marble & Granite and rebranded it to Granite Works Stone Design. Nasrallah also launched GW Capital, a parent company to manage multiple ventures, including Ground Works Land Design, Granite Works Stone Design and the subsequent additions of Purchase Green Cleveland in 2022 and Irrigation Works + Outdoor Lighting in 2023.

He says GW Capital creates synergy between Granite Works Stone Design, Ground Works Land Design, Purchase Green and Irrigation Works + Outdoor Lighting.

“We will continue to focus on vertical integration,” he says. “We are able to feed each other work. Customers are coming into Granite Works to pick out kitchen countertops for inside their homes and that leads

to the opportunity to work on their outdoor kitchen and their landscaping and so on.”

Nasrallah says setting up GW Capital also allows the different companies to access a controller, human resources, a marketing director and more. GW Capital added each additional business to address the pain points Ground Works Land Design suffered.

Before GW Capital added irrigation services, Nasrallah says Ground Works Land Design subcontracted until the leadership team felt it had enough irrigation clients to bring the service into the GW Capital family of brands.

“We didn’t want to jump into a new line of work until we knew we had a good handle on it,” he says.

He says these additions paid off for GW Capital, Granite Works Stone Design, Ground Works Land Design, Purchase Green Cleveland and Irrigation Works + Outdoor Lighting.

“It’s leading to more work,” he says. “We’re creating that integration between all the companies. It’s feeding work all the way across the board. I do see Irrigation Works and Purchase Green Cleveland growing outside of (the Cleveland area).”



THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE ADDING A SERVICE

“Really master what you’re currently doing and be really good at it before you add on services. Make sure you have the right people and systems for those services before you add anything else. And then really understand your numbers.”

— **Tony Nasrallah,**
president and founder
of Ground Works Land
Design and GW Capital

SUB IT TILL YOU MAKE IT →

Ground Works Land Design subbed out irrigation installations until it had a strong enough client base to justify adding Irrigation Works + Outdoor Lighting to the GW Capital portfolio.



PHOTO: GW CAPITAL

Back in-house

Sunset Lawn & Landscape, a commercial landscape maintenance and snow removal operation that serves New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware, recently brought pest control in-house this year.

Steve Dadura, vice president of Sunset Lawn & Landscape, Somerdale, N.J., says a goal of this move was to increase the number of property visits by Sunset Lawn & Landscape team members.

“When we’ve got properties in Pennsylvania or Delaware, the only time we get to see them is when we physically go to visit the properties,” he says. “But if we were doing the turf applications (and) pesticide applications in-house, then that would be almost like a guaranteed monthly site visit that we can do the service plus do our quality checks of the overall property.”

Another big driver is the risk with pesticide applications, Dadura says.

“When you’re dealing with pesticides and people and compliance, even though the subs are fully licensed and insured — and we’re insured and now we’re licensed — I’d just like to bring the responsibility back to us,” he says.

He says pest control applications are also a good opportunity to look for proactive upsells.

“We approach it as more of a proactive offering,” he says. “And the more you’re on the site, the more you have face-to-face contact with the property managers, too.”

Dadura says this process took three to five years to ensure the company had the proper state licenses, insurance and training. Currently, the company holds a license for pest control applications in Pennsylvania and Delaware.

“It’s expensive to add a service and do it correctly,” he says. “That’s a lot of upfront money and ongoing expenses. So you (have) to let your clients know that you’re doing that for them.” 📱



THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE ADDING A SERVICE

“I would start with getting compliant first, then subbing everything out for a few years. Get your feet wet and understand the process, the problems, the good, the bad. Then start pulling it in-house once you’ve fully been involved in it and around it, and properly insured and licensed.”

— Steve Dadura, vice president of Sunset Lawn & Landscape

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PROTECT YOUR TURF

LCOs share their best tips to prevent and manage heat-stressed turf

Monitoring irrigation use, soil health and communicating with customers are key to mitigating the effects of drought **BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR**

The summer months can cause turf to turn brown or go dormant from the long periods of hot, dry weather. To minimize the effects of heat and drought conditions, experts say lawn care operators (LCOs) should educate customers about irrigation and soil health.

PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION

Communicating with customers well in advance of heat stress and drought conditions is key, says Steve Murray, government contracting and agronomic manager at McCall Service in Jacksonville, Fla.

“We know the stress is going to happen, so proactively prepare them to take action instead of reacting,” he says.

That includes giving customers plant care recommendations, local regulations, aeration schedules and suggesting quarterly lawn audits. Having success isn’t as much about what products McCall Service uses as it is about preparation, Murray says.

His company provides pest control, lawn care, bed bug, mosquito and wildlife services to 60 percent residential, 15 percent commercial, 15 percent government and 10 percent other customers.

“Stress management in a lawn is a year-round job, especially in our market,” Murray says. “We focus on stress-reduction processes in every single service to get the plants as strong as we can to survive the stressors that will happen.”

McCall Service’s regiment includes applying surfactants and moisture-management products to prepare the soil for stress and maintain plant health. They also use Hydretain and topdressing, along with maintaining potassium levels.

“If there is stress, minimize herbicides and fertilizers so you don’t further encourage stress on the lawns,” Murray says.

MOISTURIZE SOIL

Water restrictions also need consideration when managing heat-stressed turf, says Paul Laberge, vice president of operations at Emerald Lawns in Round Rock, Texas. Emerald Lawns provides turf/soil, tree and shrub, pest control, mulch/rock and holiday lighting services to 95 percent residential and 5 percent commercial customers.

First, the company adds a topdressing of compost in the spring before the drought sets in. Then, technicians apply the granular version of Hydretain beginning in May and apply again about 60 days later.

“We chose this because it allows us to be more flexible when applying due to stringent water-rationing regulations we undergo in several of our service areas,” Laberge says. “We also advise our customers to mow at the highest recommended settings for individual turf types throughout the summer to help conserve water.”

NO OFFSEASON IN THE SOUTH

Keeping turf safe from heat and drought stress is a year-round job for certain parts of the country says Steve Murray, government contracting and agronomic manager at McCall Service in Jacksonville, Fla.



ADD NUTRIENTS

LCOs should ensure the turf and soil are healthy before drought conditions set in, says Shawn Cadmus, lawn care manager and commercial applicator at Pro Green Irrigation and Lawn Care in Plainfield, N.J. Pro Green Irrigation provides lawn care, tree and shrub care, irrigation and lawn maintenance services to customers that are 70 percent residential and 30 percent commercial.

At the beginning of the year, the Pro Green Irrigation team focuses on preventive treatments like grub control and other prep work. This is so the turf responds better during the season. This summer, Cadmus will apply a custom blend with a high amount of potassium to strengthen the turf for the next year. Technicians also add micronutrients and humates to improve soil health.

Incorporating stronger grass blends and more organic matter improves the overall turf health and stress tolerance. As the cool-season turf becomes dormant, Pro Green Irrigation backs off from applying fertilizers.

“When it’s hot, let it be,” Cadmus says. “If the temperature is 90 degrees or more, don’t do weed control or fertilizer.”

Pro Green Irrigation also leaves notes for customers to remind them not to water every day or at night to prevent fungus — as well as to have the lawn aerated.

“It’s all about educating your customer in the end,” Cadmus says. “It takes time to build the environment to survive better and thrive.” 🌱

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham Ala.



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How to keep *Pythium* blight out of your turf

Tips on how to identify and prevent the most common and destructive turfgrass disease

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

With a name like *Pythium* blight, it's no surprise this turf disease is one that strikes fear into lawn care operators.

"It's a name that certainly catches your attention," says Lane Tredway, Ph.D., technical services manager for Syngenta. "*Pythium* blight can destroy a significant portion of a landscape within a few days. So, it's crucial to catch it very early and treat it immediately when observed on those susceptible turf species."

Tredway and Brian Aynardi, Ph.D., Northeast research scientist for PBI-Gordon, share tips for identifying and treating *Pythium* blight.

IDENTIFICATION

Lawn care operators (LCOs) who manage cool-season grasses, like ryegrass and bluegrass, are most likely to see *Pythium* blight.

A specific set of conditions must be present for *Pythium* blight to gain a

foothold on a customer's lawn, Tredway says. Those conditions include nighttime temperatures consistently above 65 degrees F and high humidity, leading to prolonged periods of wet turf.

"If you get that for one night, it doesn't mean you're going to have a massive outbreak," says Aynardi. "Typically, when you see those conditions continue for several days you've got to keep an eye out for (*Pythium* blight)."

Pythium blight, Tredway says, is most active in the evening on days when the right environmental conditions of high temperatures, high humidity and turf wetness are present.

"Say there's an afternoon thunderstorm on a hot and humid day," he says. "If those leaves stay wet for at least 14 hours and the temperature stays warm at night, that's a perfect recipe for a *Pythium* blight outbreak."

CONFIRMATION

LCOs can occasionally confuse *Pythium* blight with other common turf diseases, like brown patch, gray leaf spot or dollar spot. The potential wide-scale turf destruction that comes with *Pythium* blight makes quick and correct identification critical.

"With *Pythium* blight, you won't see any distinct leaf spots or lesions on the leaves," Tredway says. "It causes very rapid dieback of entire leaves. Those blighted leaves will initially turn a dark gray

to a black color and have a greasy or oily appearance."

As the disease progresses, Tredway says the turf will show an orange or brown coloration as it collapses.

Aynardi adds that the presence of mycelium is another potential trip up for LCOs when misdiagnosing *Pythium* blight as dollar spot.

"Sometimes, people will see that cottony growth (mycelium) and think, 'Oh, that's just dollar spot,'" he says. "But you'll also see that with *Pythium* blight. It will start small, around the size of your fist, in areas of higher-cut turf."


He reinforces that the best way to know if the disease is blight or dollar spot is to feel the turf. An oily, greasy texture means you're dealing with *Pythium* blight.

PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Pythium management often requires separate chemical applications because the disease is different from other fungi LCOs deal with.

According to Tredway, the other way to imagine the difference between fungi and *Pythium* is to imagine *Pythium* as more of a primitive form of fungus. Even though both produce mycelium, he adds, some of the fungicides LCOs often use do not affect *Pythium*.

Cyazofamid and azoxystrobin are a pair of active ingredients Aynardi and Tredway recommend to control the disease. Applications of those two fungicides should be preventive, Aynardi adds.

"Make those applications a day or two before those environmental conditions are set to happen," he says. "If you need to make further applications, it should be at a shorter interval, like 14 days. (I recommend) staying at the lower label rate, and applying more frequently, rather than applying at the higher rate and hoping it holds until those conditions are present." 




DISEASE-TRIANGLE

For *Pythium* blight to take hold in a lawn, it needs three key factors: a susceptible host, the right environmental conditions and the disease to be present.

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Unlocking the secrets of successful doveweed control

Learn how to scout and control this stubborn summer annual **BY GEORGE KEGODE, PH.D. | CONTRIBUTOR**

Every year, lawn care operators face the challenge of staying ahead of various stubborn weeds, such as doveweed, to stop them from taking root and spreading.

Doveweed, an aggressive summer annual, has increasingly become a nuisance on residential lawns in recent years. Effective control of doveweed depends on accurately identifying it, understanding the areas where it is prone to causing problems, knowing its distribution across the U.S., and implementing control measures at the appropriate time.

THE PROBLEM WITH DOVEWEED

Doveweed resembles grass but is a broadleaf species, according to Eric Reasor, Ph.D., a Southeast research scientist at PBI-Gordon. It features succulent leaves and stems, leaf sheaths with hairs, purple flowers on short stalks, and the ability to form roots at stem nodes.

Doveweed germinates when soil temperatures range between 70 and 75 degrees F, rendering early preemergence herbicide applications ineffective. These applications, typically made when the soil temperature is between 60 and 65 degrees F to control summer annuals like crabgrass and goosegrass, do not impact doveweed. Once it emerges from the soil, doveweed can be mistaken for St. Augustinegrass, contributing to its spread in warm regions.

"It is a challenging weed to manage because it germinates much later in the season and typically is not controlled by preemergence herbicides," says Ken Hutto, Ph.D., product development manager for herbicides and fungicides for FMC. "St. Augustinegrass and doveweed

look similar, which makes this weed difficult to identify before flowering."

That's why application timing is a critical element of doveweed management, Reasor says.

"Proper timing of (preemergent) herbicide applications is crucial for doveweed control," he says. "If two (pre-emergent) herbicides are applied early to target crabgrass and goosegrass, a third (preemergent) application may be necessary to control doveweed."

PROBLEMATIC AREAS

Doveweed poses a challenge in warm regions of the South, Southeast and as far north as Virginia. Lawns dominated by St. Augustinegrass are particularly susceptible to doveweed, says Lane Tredway, Ph.D., technical services manager for Syngenta.

"Due to limited options for herbicides safe to use on St. Augustinegrass, we have seen a rise in doveweed occurrences in lawns dominated by this turfgrass species," Tredway says.

Overirrigated lawns or those with poor drainage create favorable conditions for doveweed growth. Lawn care operators must educate customers about proper soil moisture management to prevent doveweed.

"The best approach to managing doveweed and preventing its establishment and spread is to combine good lawn care practices with herbicides safe for the specific turfgrass species," says Tredway.

CONTROLLING DOVEWEED IN LAWNS

Doveweed begins germinating late in spring when commonly used pre-emergent herbicides, designed for early emerging weeds, are less effective.

"While most commonly used (pre-emergent) herbicides for grassy weeds like crabgrass and goosegrass can also control doveweed, understanding the timing of preemergent herbicide applications is crucial to effectively target this late-emerging weed," notes Reasor.


There are a few postemergent herbicides available for doveweed control. However, these treatments may harm turfgrass. Experts say it is important to carefully read the label of any postemergent herbicide to determine its safety for the specific turfgrass.

"When applying (postemergent) herbicides for doveweed control, ensure that the temperature is not too hot, as it may cause turfgrass injury regardless of species," cautions Tredway. "(Postemergent) treatments should complement (preemergent) treatments rather than replace them, as they are generally less effective."

KEY STRATEGIES FOR MANAGEMENT

Doveweed is an aggressive invader that thrives in areas where the turfgrass species struggle to compete. The best defense against doveweed is maintaining a healthy lawn with proper irrigation, fertilization and regular maintenance, Reasor says.

Lawn care operators should have a comprehensive plan to manage doveweed in areas where it is prevalent.

"Maintaining a healthy, well-fertilized and properly-irrigated lawn is the first line of defense," Reasor stresses. "Additionally, applying up to three splits of a (preemergent) herbicide followed by multiple (postemergent) herbicide applications will effectively control doveweed." 

George Kegode, Ph.D., is a consultant and writer specializing in pest and weed management, based in Missouri.

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FROM THE SOURCE

Keep your spray rig in optimal condition

Learn how daily, summer and winter maintenance can help keep your fleet running its best

BY DONNY PITTS | CONTRIBUTOR

Performing maintenance on a spray rig may not be what drives your lawn care company's revenue — and can feel like a chore — but there is every reason to be diligent about it.

Daily and seasonal maintenance keeps spray equipment functioning at peak performance and extends the life of the spray rig and its components. It also reduces the likelihood of expensive repairs and lost revenue due to downtime.

DAILY MAINTENANCE CHECKS

Performing key tasks and checks each morning is the best way to catch problems early and ensure the daily route goes smoothly and efficiently. Here are my top five tips for daily maintenance.

1 Clean the pump screen.

A dirty or clogged screen affects the flow rate. It also stresses the pump, which could damage it and shorten its lifespan. Clean the screen daily by removing it from its housing and spraying it with water to remove accumulated debris.

2 Do a bucket test to ensure a proper flow rate.

Ideally, when treating a lawn, a good reference point is to distribute 3 gallons of product per 1,000 square feet. A good approximation is a flow rate of 3 gallons per minute. A quick bucket test enables you to check the flow. After cleaning the screen, spray some product into a 1-gallon bucket and time how long it takes to fill. For a flow rate of 3 gallons per minute, it should take 20 seconds. If the time you get is off, adjust the flow.

3 Test the hose reel.

While you have the hose out (for the bucket test), it makes sense to test the reel. Pull a decent length of hose out and press the button on the reel to verify it works properly and this winds up the hose.

4 Check for loose belts.

The tension on the idlers is correct when 1/2 inch of spring is in the belts. Simply hand tighten any belts with more than 1/2 inch of spring. When you check the tension, look over the belts for cracks, dry rot and excessive wear and tear.

5 Hose off the rig.

Fertilizers and other chemicals are highly corrosive and will eventually eat through even aluminum. At the end of each day, spray down the rig to remove any chemical residue. Giving your rig a quick rinse is one of the best things you can do to ensure it lasts and looks good for a very long time.

SUMMERTIME MAINTENANCE

It's tempting to cut corners during the busy summer season, but this is the time when rig maintenance is extra important to prevent downtime. Here are my top three tips for rig maintenance in the summer.

1 Check the oil, spark plugs and air filter regularly.

This may seem obvious, but it's worth emphasizing. A quick check of these three things can spare you some potentially major problems.

2 Take inventory of replacement parts.

Many routine rig repairs — such as replacing a worn belt — are easy enough to do yourself. Make sure you have common replacement parts and repair kits on hand.

3 Wash your rig weekly.

Along with a daily hosing-off, a weekly wash goes a long way to extending the useful life of your rig.



Donny Pitts

WINTERIZE YOUR RIG

If you're in a climate where winter is an off-season, it's important to winterize your rig to prevent damage due to freezing and corrosion. The process is just a few simple steps.

These include:

- Remove strainer caps and screens;
- Open ball valves on suction lines;
- Remove nozzles from spray guns and fix the trigger in the open position;
- Remove the plug or open the drain valve on the regulator;
- Open valves on reels and tanks, including the drop valve; and
- Turn the pump over to completely drain it.

To get your rig ready in the spring, reverse the process.

By incorporating these maintenance recommendations into your daily and seasonal routines, both your spray rig and your business will run much smoother. 🛠️

Donny Pitts is the general manager of Graham Spray Equipment in Douglasville, Ga.

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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Why you need to sell grub control as insurance for lawns

A preventive strategy is the best approach when selling a green, healthy and grub-free lawn

BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR

The most effective way to control grubs is to address them in the spring or early summer before they hatch and destroy a lawn. This is the best argument lawn care professionals can make when selling grub control as part of a comprehensive residential or commercial turf program.

“Grub control is life insurance for your lawn,” says Samuel Rankin, president of ETCH Outdoor Living in Ankeny,

Iowa. The company’s service portfolio includes 30 percent maintenance (including irrigation and lawn care), 55 percent design/build and 15 percent snow and ice management. “We hope you never need it, but you’re certainly glad you have it when you do.”

The key to keeping grubs under control in his clients’ lawns is to focus on the big picture, particularly what a lawn care program attempts to achieve. “Don’t sell the tree. Sell the shade,”

Rankin says about encouraging a preventive grub control program with residential and commercial clients. “You’re not selling (grub) control. You’re selling a healthy lawn. We care for the lawn, and (grub control) is a normal standard of maintaining turf.”

When customers hesitate, Rankin forewarns the consequences of ignoring preventive grub treatments. He’s witnessed several turf repair jobs that cost a client 10 to 15 times the amount of a standard preventive grub-control program.

“Many times, clients claim they’ve never had a grub problem in the past,” Rankin adds. “That’s great, but white grubs can come anytime and devastate a lawn because they chew the roots off (the plants). Then, they turn into Japanese beetles and infest the surrounding landscape.”

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PHOTO: ETCH OUTDOOR LIVING

STAY AHEAD, NOT BEHIND

From a chemical standpoint, Gerry White, owner of pH Lawn Care in Ipswich, Mass., agrees that a preventive treatment strategy is the most effective way to address grub prevention.

“If you’re trying to kill them curatively, then you’re just chasing them,” he says. “And at that point, the damage is done.” White’s client portfolio is 90 percent residential and 10 percent

commercial clients. The company primarily offers lawn care.

Grub damage manifests itself as growing and expanding irregular patches in the turf that peak in August, often being mistaken for drought damage. However, unlike drought damage, grub-damaged turf easily peels back from the soil due to a lack of roots.

Curative treatments can be tricky. At that stage, White uses trichlorfon, a fast-acting and effective chemical tool for controlling white grubs as well as mole crickets, sod webworms, cutworms and armyworms. However, the insecticide has a short lifespan and needs watering into the soil within three days of application to be effective.

Chlorantraniliprole is White’s weapon of choice for preventive grub control. Applied between late spring and mid-July, when environmental conditions encourage grubs to hatch and start their life

cycles, chlorantraniliprole controls the pests at a foliar and systemic level and remains effective for a considerable time following a single application—as long as two seasons. White prefers to apply the product at a reduced rate.

“I talked with entomologists and asked if I could use (chlorantraniliprole) at a lower rate—a half rate—to give me one year of coverage, which is a better fit in my overall (lawn care) program,” White says. “They all said yes. And I’ve never had any breakthroughs to speak of ... even at a lower rate.”

While White does not charge separately for grub control, it’s part of his overall lawn care program, he says using chlorantraniliprole at a lower rate reduces his costs by around 2.5 percent compared to the standard application rate. ¹⁴

Zawacki is a Cleveland-based writer covering the landscape and turf industries for nearly two decades.

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THE BIG ONE

4-season landscaping

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LOCATION Madison, Wis.

COMPANY David J. Frank Landscape Contracting

DETAILS Kurt Bartel, senior horticulturist for David J. Frank, says this project, located in a major outdoor shopping center, is a major investment for the client.

“It’s not chump change,” he says, noting seasonal color changeouts cost tens of thousands of dollars. “It’s unusual to see a client willing to put that kind of money out and invest in their site to make it look good.”

Bartel estimates the spring and summer displays require more than 3,400 annuals, 760 bulbs and 512 mixed pansies. Fall and winter installs include pumpkins, gourds, cornstalks, garlands, fully-decorated balsam firs and more.

With that kind of volume, seasonal installation is a multi-day job. The day before installation, crews remove the previous season’s plantings and prep the beds for their new residents.

On installation day, David J. Frank arrives on-site at 5 a.m. Crews must finish work by 11 a.m.

“We usually have three crews, and they each have a designated area that they need to plant,” Bartel says. “We have at least one or two people following behind them, cleaning up the tags and pots and trays, and behind them is a watering crew.”

Bartel says maintenance is crucial to making sure installation days run smoothly. Crews are on the property regularly hand-weeding and more. This is to ensure the beds and planters meet the client’s expectations.

“We are there three days a week, watering, grooming, pinching and fertilizing,” he says. “That’s the key with annuals. If there isn’t a regular maintenance agreement in place, they won’t work out very well.”

He adds that crews typically fertilize every two weeks and selectively apply insecticides.

For this project, David J. Frank Landscape Contracting won a Gold Award from the 2022 National Association of Landscape Professionals’ Awards of Excellence program. 

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



Captions | 1. Kurt Bartel, senior horticulturist, says this property, a popular outdoor mall, is suited to high-end shoppers. 2. Bartel is proud of the care his crews take to keep the sterilized soil on-site in top condition. 3. The day before crews transition planters and beds from one season to another, they remove all the previous plantings and allow the soil to sit vacant for 24 hours.

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MAINTENANCE SHOP

Extending the life of a string trimmer

Experts share maintenance advice to optimize string trimmer performance

BY BRIAN LOVE | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

String trimmers are essential tools for any landscaping company. John Powers, director of product management for Echo; Ryan Fredrickson, senior product manager of outdoor power equipment for Milwaukee Tool; Cindy Harley, senior product manager for Oregon Tool; and Ahmed Hamdy, Ph.D., product segment manager at Stihl, share maintenance tips contractors can use to get the most out of their equipment.



Ahmed Hamdy

PERFORMING MAINTENANCE

According to Powers, routine maintenance for gas-powered trimmers depends on the time of year and the part. Some parts need checking more often.

“With harder usage, there will be more frequent checks,” Powers says.

Hamdy says performing basic maintenance, such as checking for loose, broken or missing parts, and cleaning the equipment before and after every use is critical.

INSPECTION TIME

Operators will notice negative performance consequences if crews don't perform routine maintenance.



“Before starting a job, do a thorough visual check of critical components, including the control handle, fuel system and cutting attachment,” Hamdy says.

Fredrickson says battery-powered tools will not require extensive maintenance. Instead, monitor the batteries and cord instead of the fuel filter or spark plugs. Check and top off the grease in the trimmer head gear case every 50 hours of operation and clean the vents on the back of the trimmer.

“Keeping those vents clean will help cool the motor and electronics,” he says.

PHOTO: STIHL



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CONSISTENCY IS KEY

Some of Harley's top maintenance items include checking the trimmer head to ensure the eyelets are in place and that there are no excessive signs of wear. In addition, inspect the spark arrestor on the exhaust and the recoil starter rope.

"Maintenance is important for any outdoor power product," Harley says. "Basic use of a string trimmer requires maintenance once a season, but it varies based on usage."

Still, contractors can easily overlook maintenance aspects during a busy season.

Powers says regularly checking trimmer heads and air filters is critical. He recommends replacing filters every few months.

"Trimmer heads, especially plastic ones, wear out," Powers says. "Keeping the air filter clean will help the unit run properly. Dirty air filters inhibit engine performance."

Hamdy adds that operators will notice negative consequences in the field if crews don't perform routine maintenance before use.

"With a clogged air filter, fuel filter, fuel line or carburetor, there can be a noticeable loss of engine power during use," Hamdy adds. "Or the trimmer will simply not start."

Harley says that hydrating the trimmer line is an overlooked maintenance practice. She recommends keeping the trimmer line hydrated with room-temperature water, especially when the heat rises.

"Soaking the trimmer line in water for at least two hours before use will maximize its life span," Harley says. "This is because the line is hygroscopic, so it can become dry and brittle before breaking."



Ryan Fredrickson




John Powers



Cindy Harley

EXTENDING THE LIFESPAN

Hamdy says if crews inspect and take care of equipment after use, the product will run efficiently season after season. String trimmer maintenance is essential for landscape professionals, from cleaning debris to changing parts.

"Proper string trimmer maintenance extends tool life and reduces downtime," Hamdy says. "Although built to handle demanding jobs, failing to clean or provide general maintenance can prevent trimmers from achieving peak performance." 



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FROM THE SOURCE

3 ways to increase landscape contract renewals

Learn how maintaining and retaining contracts can help fuel your firm's long-term growth

BY GAGE ROBERTS | CONTRIBUTOR

The landscaping industry is ripe with unique challenges — and for many companies, you cannot measure success by sales or purchases alone. Instead, succeeding in the landscaping business and securing long-term growth depends on retaining contracts.

Turning one-time customers into long-term clients is essential for growth. It's important to remember that the contracting process isn't as straightforward as making a sale. Above all, landscaping professionals should prioritize customer relationships from the start. From there, the right strategy can help to secure recurring contracts.

CUSTOMER-FIRST APPROACH

Renewing landscaping service contracts is easier when businesses act quickly and start the process early. Treating the first day of a job as a trial run and setting up the initial contract for success is crucial to the process. Doing so can turn new clients into long-term customers.

Landscaping businesses also need to issue competitive prices to support securing long-term contracts. Offers



must be competitive and meet customers' long-term needs at a price that works for your company's bottom line.

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

When it comes to proper landscaping, your crew always knows best. Opportunities to sell enhancements exist well beyond initial client requests. Clients' properties can tell you a lot about return business opportunities.

Give the site visit your full attention, ask the customer about areas they haven't mentioned yet, and share any specialty services you provide that you may not cover during initial contract negotiations, such as:

- Tree trimming and care;
- Pest control;
- Irrigation system maintenance;
- Power washing;
- Gutter cleaning;
- Fertilization.

Landscapers also should use contract renewals to their advantage, showing customers how it makes things easier. Contracts allow:

- Routine work;
- No need for ongoing communication;
- Automated renewals;
- Healthy lawns and landscapes;
- Reduced pricing due to regular lawn care.

Explore other benefits that may be unique to your business. Routine services and automated renewals also can be a gateway to other services clients may be interested in further down the road, fueling long-term growth.

KEEP CONTRACTS TOP OF MIND

The importance of the customer relationship extends far beyond the

contract renewal process. That's why it's critical your entire team — from crew to estimators and even office workers — treat every client interaction as an opportunity to secure a new contract.

Standardized processes, company-wide visibility and connecting departments all strengthen this approach. You will also benefit from mobile access to your system so your team can show clients how your operations function from the field.



Gage Roberts

Don't forget to review customer satisfaction policies and discuss what steps are in place to continually meet evolving customer needs. Even while working with a satisfied customer, businesses can strengthen existing trust by allowing customers to share their thoughts and feedback immediately or even a few weeks after the service. Some of the best ways to do this include:

- Empower crew leaders to ask customers if they are happy;
- Email or text surveys for customers to complete on their own time;
- Respond to postings on review sites such as Google, Yelp and Angi.

Landscape professionals can forge lasting relationships built on responsive, dedicated and adaptable service by providing customers with a point of contact for issues or questions and offering exclusive services to contracted clients. By keeping these tips top-of-mind during the renewal season, businesses can secure long-term, repeat contracts. 📞

Roberts is a sales director for Aspire Software. He joined the company in 2017 and is based in Nashville, Tenn.

HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

Making a connection

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

LOCATION Winnetka, Ill.

COMPANY Chalet

DETAILS Chalet worked with an existing client to transform the backyard and connect it to the client's guest home directly behind this property. The client wanted an oasis with a terrace to entertain guests and friends.

The property suffered from poor drainage because it pitches from north to south, so water collected along the southern border. During construction, Chalet crews discovered large chunks of plywood, asphalt, bricks and stones.

To remedy the drainage issues, Chalet created a large bioswale in the southern portion of the property to collect and filter stormwater. Crews also had to renovate the back lawn to remove 8 inches of clay soil and debris and add more than 200 cubic yards of topsoil to help the turf properly establish.


"One of the big tests was transplanting the existing large arborvitae hedges from one side to the other side of the property," says Luis Mata, maintenance operations manager for Chalet.

The Chalet team installed a 12-foot-deep concrete foundation to support the property's elevated brick and limestone terrace with an outdoor kitchen. The terrace features a drinking fountain for the client's dogs. The client's outdoor space also features a dog bath with warm water.

"Their dogs are very important to them," Mata says. "Everything we do, we just to have to consider how this may affect the dogs."

Access was an additional challenge. The client's driveway provided the only way to enter the backyard. Crews put down the protective fabric, plywood and 2 inches of sand to avoid damaging the driveway with equipment, including Takeuchi mini excavators.

Other details include a custom-built wrought-iron fence that surrounds the property. A bluestone walkway connects the main home to the guest house.

Chalet 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/hardscapesolutions](https://www.landscapemanagement.net/hardscapesolutions).



Captions | **1.** Crews removed between 6 to 8 inches of compacted soil and debris and replaced it with fresh topsoil to help establish the new back lawn. **2.** A bluestone walkway meanders through the backyard and connects the main property to the client's guest property. **3.** Crews backfilled the terrace with pea gravel and drain tile to relieve pressure on the concrete walls. **4.** Chalet created large, mortar brick walls to accommodate grade changes in the backyard.

MAINTENANCE SHOP

Top maintenance tips for compact track loaders

Experts share how staying on top of your CTL's maintenance schedule can help extend its life **BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR**



To maximize the life of a machine, limit downtime, save on repairs, improve efficiency and prevent injuries, operators must prioritize compact track loader (CTL) maintenance and remember these tips.

FOLLOW MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

Operators should adhere to the manufacturer's recommended maintenance schedule in the owner's manual for daily, weekly, monthly and service-hour intervals, says Kyle Newendorp, product specialist for Vermeer.

He recommends checking the following items daily: engine oil, hydraulic fluid, coolant levels, air cleaner and track condition. Operators should also fill the fuel tank and grease the machine — specifically the boom pivot and park brake, he adds. Weekly items include checking fuel lines, clamp bands and track tension.

It's also important to keep the loader clean, especially the tracks.

"Once you get abrasive debris inside them, internal components may experience premature wear, especially when it gets between the roller and the track itself," Newendorp says.

CHECK TRACKS FOR UNEVEN WEAR

If certain components wear down more quickly on the tracks, it will affect the entire machine's productivity, says Lee Padgett, product manager for Takeuchi. Operators should look for and repair tears, cuts or punctures — as well as leakages from the travel motors, hoses or rollers.

Machines with high-flow hydraulic systems require the same checks as standard CTLs. However, they tend to run high-flow hydraulic attachments, which can increase the hydraulic temperature and decrease the oil lifespan, he says.

To avoid costly mistakes, operators should regularly clean the belly pan and replace dirty filters, instead of only cleaning them.

"Using compressed air to blow the filters out will damage them and allow dirt ingestion, resulting in engine damage," Padgett says.

GREASE MACHINE

Regular maintenance should include routine greasing. A lack of grease will cause premature wear, says Luke Gribble, solutions marketing manager for John Deere.

"When greasing, it is important to see the grease come out slightly from the pins to ensure they have been sufficiently greased," Gribble says. "Greasing the machine at the end of the day can be beneficial while all the joints are free to ensure proper lubrication."

UNDERCARRIAGE MAINTENANCE

Much of the CTL's owning and operating costs tie to undercarriage maintenance, says Jeff Jacobsmeyer, product manager for Case Construction Equipment.

"An undercarriage is made up of countless moving components that work together and rub up against each other, which creates an opportunity for friction and wear," he says.

Operators should inspect the tracks and the undercarriage structure for

signs of new wear or damage.

"Pre- and post-operation, you want to clean the tracks and remove as much material as possible," Jacobsmeyer says. "This is also critical in cold-weather climates where material may freeze overnight."

ADJUST TENSION AND SAG


Operators also should maintain the proper track sagging specifications shown in the manual, Gribble says.

"Tracks that are too tight can lead to excessive wear, and tracks that are too loose can leave the machine unstable and the track can come loose from the sprocket," he says.

The most important undercarriage interval item to monitor is track tension, says Mike Fitzgerald, marketing manager for Bobcat. Operators should check the owner's manual for the proper track tension ranges and instructions.

"While other undercarriage components may not need a daily inspection, regular monitoring of idlers, rollers and sprockets can help identify potential problems," Fitzgerald says.

The sprocket should also be checked periodically by examining the teeth, he adds.

"A good sprocket tooth has a rounded end, while a worn tooth is more pointed," Fitzgerald says. "This is especially important to check when installing a new set of tracks." 

STAY REGULAR

Experts say consistent maintenance checks lead to a clean and smooth-running machine.

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

RECOMMENDER

What's the **No. 1 question** design/build contractors should ask a distributor?



Product availability tops the list of what contractors should talk about with their distributors.



LARRY GIROUX

EWING OUTDOOR SUPPLY,
RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL
SEGMENT MANAGER
ST. CLAIR SHORES, MICH.

You have a lot to coordinate, including scheduling crews, moving equipment, sales and the administrative tasks of running a business. Ask the supplier about the products stocked and how quickly and accurately they can fill an order for pick up or delivery. Find out if the distributor has multiple locations with a variety of delivery vehicles that can deliver the materials needed for any job. When you rely on a vendor, you can spend less time processing purchase orders and invoices. You can also identify any issues before they become major problems. Partnering with a trusted supplier with the inventory, the ability to offer extended dating on terms and experienced staff with technical knowledge helps ensure every project runs smoothly.



PAT JOHNSTON

HORIZON DISTRIBUTORS,
IRRIGATION PRODUCT MANAGER,
PHOENIX, ARIZ.

What products and brands do you stock and support in project quantity? Before you select a partner for your next project, be sure they can support you from planning through completion. Distributors that stock project quantities have the items a contractor needs when they need them. This is important because back orders cost contractors money. When a distributor carries many brands, you know they can deliver the best fit for a contractor's project. And when working with multiple manufacturers, distributors can incorporate vendor reward programs, product promotions and manufacturer purchase incentives into final quotations. This, along with project-documented invoicing, pricing locks running the project term and constant communication with your sales rep, assures the contractor a project will be completed on time and within budget.



MATT HENDERSON

SITEONE LANDSCAPE SUPPLY,
NATURAL STONE
CATEGORY MANAGER
ROSWELL, GA.

The most important question we receive is from contractors wanting to know what product is available so they can start their client's dream outdoor living space. It helps ensure job completion is quick and contractors can keep profits flowing. Contractors should ask their distributors what products they keep in stock and how long it takes to order-in specialty products to determine if a partnership is a good fit for their business's needs.

FROM THE SOURCE

5 lessons I learned in pricing my design/build projects

Here are some mistakes I've made along the way with my business to help you avoid them

BY SAM GEMBEL | CONTRIBUTOR

Unless you've been living under some of the rocks you installed over the last few years, it should be no shock to you to say that costs have changed a lot.

Some of the darkest years of business for me were 2016 and 2017. Our company grew by millions in revenue, but we were bleeding financially. Clients told us we were over their budget for the work we bid on.



Sam Gembel

My way of fixing the problem was to sell another job, collect a deposit check, and let that carry us through for another week. Many mornings I'd sit in my truck in our office parking lot and ask myself if being a business owner was really my calling.

We took a deep dive into the close-out of our projects. We started using software to help us build budgets around our expenses — instead of just delivering a bid on a Word document with pricing I thought was accurate.

What did we learn?

Expenses were deeper than what we priced on paper. We knew our labor costs but didn't know our production rates. We could get material costs from our suppliers, but marking it up 25 percent from what the dealer charged wasn't enough to cover unseen expenses, warranty callbacks and more.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Focus on projects in your skill level and expertise and design for efficiency.

Know that growth comes at a cost. The more efficient and predictable you can make your builds, the better you'll know how to properly price them.

2 Know your production rates.

Not only will this help you price properly, but it will also help you hold yourself and your team accountable when things take longer than you bid the work for.

3 Know your expenses.

Work with your suppliers to obtain the firmest pricing possible for the materials you install the most frequently. Our material costs and fuel surcharges on deliveries were all over the place. For example, a \$54,000 project we priced in March 2022 had a material increase of 22 percent when we installed it 120 days later. Have great working relationships with your vendors because they



can communicate with you as prices change based on product availability and supply and demand.


4 Use materials you are most familiar with and know you can get.

Consistency is key to building production rates, firming your pricing and becoming more efficient.

5 Don't forget to factor overhead expenses into your cost.

Nowhere in my pricing did I account for fuel, design fees, insurance, shop rent, truck repairs, equipment purchases, overhead payroll, overtime and more. Every company's overhead expenses are different.

From what I've learned from my company and working with dozens of landscape contractors, most overhead percentages range from 23 to 33 percent of the company's revenue. For the sake of easy math, let's say your company earns \$1 million in gross revenue. Aside from your direct material and labor costs, you'll have \$200,000 to \$330,000 in unseen expenses. This money comes from somewhere. The sad truth is most contractors (including myself at one point) just eat it right from their profit — if there is profit to eat it from.

Running a landscape business is much deeper than the talents of being a landscape artist. Do some forensics on your numbers before sending out your next proposal. I've been in your shoes. I know how you feel. There is a better way to conduct your landscape business and ensure you're making the profits you deserve from providing the quality services you deliver to your clients. 

Gembel is the owner and founder of Atlas Outdoor based in Flint, Mich. This is his debut column for *LM*.

RECOMMENDER

What's your No. 1 tip for effective irrigation system maintenance?

Logging all relevant client data, goals of the system and maintenance calls helps your technicians easily get up to speed when arriving at a client's property.



PAUL SCHULTZ
IRRIGATION RESOURCE
MANAGER, CAGWIN & DORWARD
PETALUMA, CALIF.

Work with your customers to agree upon a preapproved dollar amount for incidental repairs so that right after checking their irrigation system you can make at least the immediate basic repairs, such as broken heads and nozzles, and maybe even a broken pipe — if it's within their preapproved amount versus waiting. It reduces water waste, keeps plants healthy and saves the customer the added cost of your time to return to their site. It is not something everyone will do. The key is to earn their trust. They must believe in you. You must never abuse that trust. And lastly, be sure to document what you see before repairing it if they have concerns afterward.



RUSS JUNDT
FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT
OF CONSERVA IRRIGATION
GLEN ALLEN, VA.

My No. 1 tip for effective irrigation system maintenance is to establish a scalable, repeatable and reliable method of assessing irrigation systems. Then, consistently record that data in your CRM enterprise system. When a technician arrives at a property, they should have instant access to every detail of that system — just like a doctor. The “patient chart” should include the original assessment along with incremental repairs and improvements along the way. Additionally, it should have the system goal, as established by the customer and maintenance company, so that the technician is aware and can help achieve that goal. For example, is the goal to maintain the status quo by only fixing critical issues, or is it to upgrade inefficient components proactively and incrementally along the way?



DJ SEEGER
PRESIDENT,
SEEGER WATER
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

The best tool for effective irrigation system maintenance is a flow sensor. You cannot manage what you cannot monitor. A flow sensor calibrated to your system's consumption will save you time and water.

WATER WORLD

An irrigation transformation

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

LOCATION Huntington Beach, Calif.

COMPANY Harvest Landscape Enterprises

DETAILS At a homeowners association built in the 1950s, Harvest Landscape Enterprises worked with property owners to retrofit the outdated irrigation system with new equipment. The total project spans about 141 acres and about 1,120 valves.

As part of the project, Harvest also replaced the existing landscaping and turf with drought-tolerant plantings suitable for Southern California.

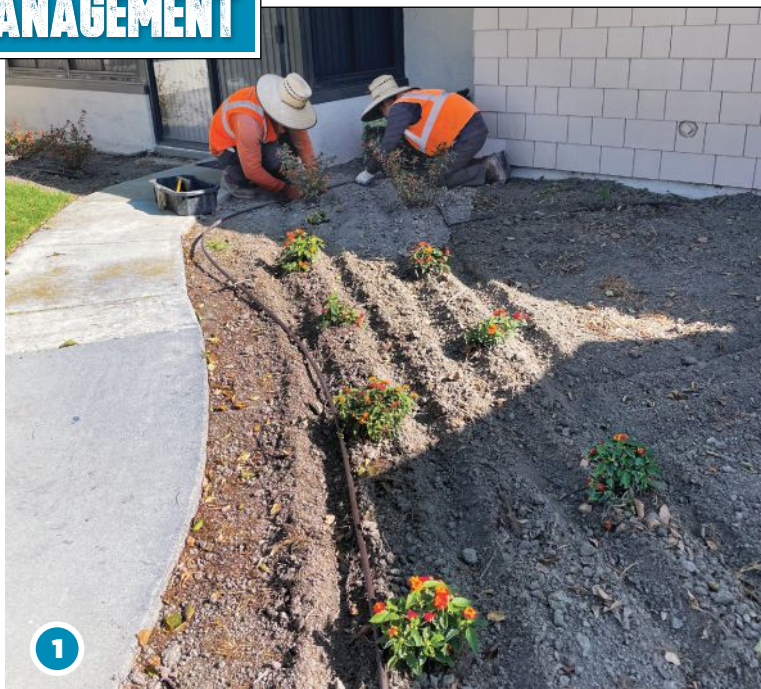
“From this project, we have saved so much water and implemented new technology into the association where now it’s coming up to state-level standards,” says Max Moreno, vice president of water conservation for Harvest Landscape Enterprises.

As Harvest upgraded the system, Moreno says the company kept foundational pieces of the system, including the main lines and laterals. Moreno says the system’s original design watered turf and planters at the same time, so crews rerouted some pipes and designated one valve for turf and one valve for planters in each section.

Harvest Landscape Enterprises uses Rain Bird drip tubing in landscape beds to ensure water gets directly to the landscaping when needed. Harvest also upgraded the system controllers to HydroPoint’s WeatherTRAK OptiFlow XR controllers. Moreno says the new system allows the Harvest team to separate the water needs of each segment: turf, planters, etc. Currently, Harvest has installed nine controllers with a plan for 48 total on the property. 🌱

GET YOUR PROJECT FEATURED

Did your company recently complete a noteworthy irrigation project? Do you have photos? We want to hear about it! Email Editor Christina Herrick at cherrick@northcoastmedia.net to have your company’s irrigation project featured in our Water World section.



Captions | 1. Drip irrigation is a key component of system upgrades to ensure plants have the right amount of water. **2.** Harvest Landscape Enterprises worked with property owners to update an aging irrigation system and add more drought-tolerant plantings. **3.** Updates to the system included designating valves for turf and planters in each section to maximize water applied and cut down on overall water use.

EXPERTS' TIPS

Don't let summer cool off your snow and ice season preparation

How to use the summer months to better prepare for this winter

BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR

While the days are longer and the weather favors warmer temperatures, snow and ice management contractors must not lose sight of winter. There are some key steps snow professionals must do to prepare their operations to be more effective in the field and to provide improved customer service to clients when the snow flies.

THE DEBRIEF

Like an after-action report following a snow and ice event, snow contractors must debrief employees at the close of the winter season.



Lee Durdahl

“With your team, you want to learn what they thought went well during the season and what the big wins were,” says Lee Durdahl, vice president of operations at Crystal Greens Landscape, Clackamas, Ore. “You

also want to ask them what didn't go well, what caused the most stress, and what needs improvement upon heading into next winter.”

Crystal Greens is a full-service company with a service profile of landscape maintenance, enhancement services and snow and ice management. Durdahl advises conducting a similar debrief with customers to gather feedback and review the previous winter's pain points.

“You want to gauge (customers') overall satisfaction with your performance,



as well as look for improvements for the next season,” he says.

Once you understand these fine improvement points, Durdahl suggests compiling them into a list and periodically review it throughout the offseason.

“You're always revisiting that list and working on those issues that will better prepare you for winter,” he adds. “The goal is to improve and provide better services.”

EQUIPMENT

Once you've debriefed, do not overlook postseason equipment maintenance. Most importantly, properly wash all snow and ice management items to remove salt residue. Failing to do so may lead to rust and corrosion over the summer months, potentially causing costly repairs.

“We wash everything, including every plow, truck, salter, heavy equipment — we even wash the shovels,” says Doug O'Bryan, president of O'Bryan Grounds Maintenance, Stow, Ohio. The company offers snow and ice management and landscape work. The majority of its clients are commercial

property owners and managers.

“Our process involves hot water and soap,” he says. “Then we treat everything with a salt neutralizer and wash them all over again with water and soap. Finally, we use a power washer to get into the nooks and crannies, but only on the lightest setting.”

CONTRACTS

A common misconception among snow professionals is that clients are reluctant to discuss contract renewals after the winter season. However, many pros say this is the best time to seek new contracts, especially if customers are happy with their service.

“We turn around and renew our contracts right now, and we try to get as many of them out of the way immediately at the end of the season,” O'Bryan says. “It gives me a better idea of what capacity I could expect when fall comes.”

LOOK AHEAD
Summer is the perfect time to prep for snow season according to experts.

Zawacki is a Cleveland-based writer covering the landscape and turf industries for nearly two decades.

ALL SYSTEMS GO
Experts recommend testing equipment such as salt spreaders to ensure proper application rates.



Get your salt spreaders ready for snow season

Winter 2023 is just a few months away. Here are some pro tips to get your salt spreader ready for action **BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR**



Most professional snow and ice management contractors agree it is a 365-day business. Operations ramp up in late summer to prepare for the coming winter. Part of this process is ensuring equipment is in top form. Here are some tips to make sure your salt spreaders are ready when meteorologists forecast winter's first flakes.

IT STARTS AT THE END

"If you don't take care of the previous winter, you won't be able to address the next winter," says Charles Glossop, founder and CEO of Hantho Outdoor Services in Saint Louis Park, Minn. "You'll have rust on the key components, you'll still have rock salt in the unit and wiring connections that are, at best, in poor condition."

An essential facet of putting spreaders into summer storage is to remove salt and wash each unit thoroughly, says Chris Pagnia, chief visionary officer at Busy Beaver Lawn & Garden in Hamburg, N.Y.

"We spray all of the units down with a biodegradable product designed to remove all of the salt residues, and we assess each unit and fix anything that's broken or worn before it's put away for the summer," says Pagnia. His service portfolio is around 65 percent commercial snow and ice management, 25 percent landscape maintenance and 10 percent landscape construction.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Brandon Barker, general manager at J. Barker Landscaping Co. in Bedford,

Ohio, says the fleet mechanic meticulously inspects each salt spreader — both tailgate and hopper spreaders — before returning them to winter service.

The mechanic replaces hoses and couplers as needed and regreases everything for the coming winter season. He inspects augers for damage and checks connections on the spinner motors to ensure they're clean with no leaks.

"All of our couplers are in a Ziplock bag with grease inside during the off-season to ensure they are staying lubricated," Barker says, adding J. Barker Landscaping Co.'s overall service portfolio is about 35 percent commercial snow and ice management, 25 percent lawn care/lawn maintenance and 40 percent design/build.

As part of Busy Beaver Lawn & Garden's preventive maintenance process, Pagnia replaces all the units' ball bearings and electrical connectors with marine-grade connectors.

"You can source these parts off Amazon, and it's inexpensive when you consider what it will cost you if you don't replace them and your salter breaks down mid-event," he says.

CALIBRATION

Proper salter application rates are essential for material cost savings, slip-and-fall mitigation and more. Pagnia recalibrates each spreader at the start of each season and then monthly once the season begins.

"We'll load the spreader with a yard of salt, which we know the weight of," he says. "And we know the truck's weight when it's empty. We'll run the rock salt


through and time it out. We then run the numbers to ensure it's running out of a yard (of rock salt) at a calibrated weight. It's a bit of an old-school way of doing it, but it's effective."

TRAINING IS KEY

Glossop, a veteran snow fighter whose company does about 55 percent commercial snow and ice management, 20 percent landscaping, 20 percent maintenance and around 5 percent residential lawn care, recommends devoting at least a full day to equipment training, which includes going over every facet of a salt spreader or liquid brine unit's operational components.

"These units are becoming more and more (technologically) sophisticated, so we need to make sure that (operators) understand how to use them correctly, how to calibrate them so the correct amount of salt releases and how to troubleshoot minor maintenance issues so you don't have to travel back 20 miles to the shop for a minor repair," he says.

Glossop also stresses safety during preseason training.

There are different types of salt spreaders — gas drive, hydraulic and electric — and all of these units have some form of back pressure, even when they're not in operation," he says, "Those augers will take your hand off if you don't have the unit totally shut down. And if you put your hand into the auger to clear some blockage, that auger will jump when that back pressure is released." 

Zawacki is a Cleveland-based writer covering the landscape and turf industries for nearly two decades.

FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Seth Pflum

PRESIDENT AND COO
GRUNDER LANDSCAPING CO.
MIAMISBURG, OHIO

1 Congratulations on the promotion to president and COO of Grunder Landscaping Co. What does this mean for you and for Marty Grunder?

I've always been a big believer that you're learning the job ahead of the job you're at, plus doing the job that you're currently doing and training your replacement. For me, what I'm trying to do is continue the vision and path that Marty's laid out for the organization, being supportive and progressive. I'm taking over the strategic planning and the vision of the organization, to push it along and move it along. And ultimately, it's giving Marty the ability to really focus on what he's really good at, teaching business development.

2 What is a book you'd recommend to others in a similar position to you?

One of my favorite books is *The Dichotomy of Leadership* by Jocko Willink and Leif Babin. I took a lot of nuggets away from it. It's in the top three of my favorite books. It gives good a perspective on life in general, and the balance in business and leadership. Everything has a balance. It helps you find a path.

3 Tell us about your family.

I have a wonderful wife named Kara. We have an 11-year-old daughter, Cambrie, and an 8-year-old son, Carter. Carter wants to come work at Grunder Landscaping. He's fascinated with landscaping. When we do a spring cleanup at my house, he's out there with the guys working, he has his own wheelbarrow and he pushes it around. On career day last year, he wore a Grunder Landscaping polo to school and said, "I'm going to go work with Gaston (Diaz Ramirez)." He's one of our operations managers — that's what he wants to do right now when he grows up.

4 Do you have a most memorable day at work?

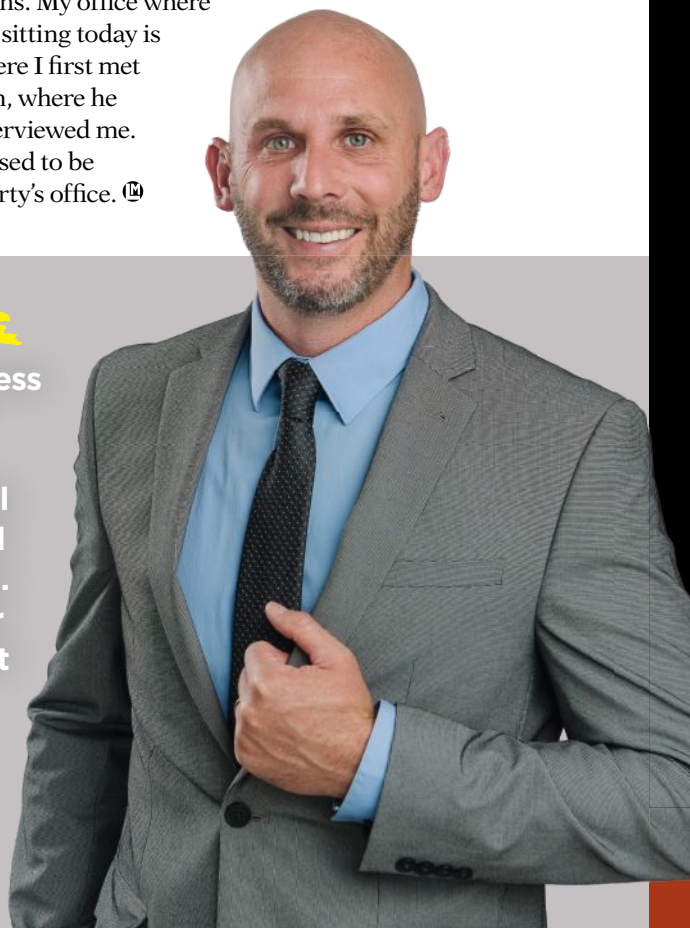
I have two. The first would be when I first sat down to interview with Marty. I followed Marty's columns for years before I moved to Dayton. I would cut them out and hang them up behind me at my office. So, to sit down and interview with him was pretty surreal because he was a mentor to me before I even joined the organization. The second was when the promotion became official and was announced. I was just humbled by it and I greatly appreciate and respect the trust Marty's instilled in me.

5 What was it like interviewing with Marty that first time? Is he the guy we know, or different in that situation?

One thing about Marty, is you know what to expect with him. He's a straight shooter. He asked some very tough questions. He's the same guy if he's sitting here chatting with me, or standing in front of a group of 1,500 people. I was pretty nervous that day, to finally meet him. I didn't share with him that I was constantly reading his columns. My office where I'm sitting today is where I first met him, where he interviewed me. It used to be Marty's office. 📍

BEST ADVICE

"Trust the process and trust your fellow team members are all working toward a common goal. Growth is never linear; it doesn't go in order."





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.

Mid-year financial review: Are you really making money?

Even if you review your numbers monthly and everything looks on track, you could still be off-budget. How is that possible, you ask? It's because you use skewed numbers.

At Jeffrey Scott Consulting, we benchmark many landscape companies in our annual Financial Master Class. We have seen every financial pitfall there is. Here are five common ways numbers can be misleading, with suggested fixes.

1 Hybrid accounting numbers

Our No. 1 rule: Use accrual-based accounting to manage finances and make decisions. Accrual accounting follows the matching principle, where you record expenses associated with revenue (and vice versa) in the same period.

For example, you should record deposits and prepayments as revenue only after you start the work, recognizing revenue when you perform the work. The same with materials you ordered and prepaid for — you should record them as the cost of goods. Many companies think the team uses the accrual method, but when we dig in, we often find it is a hybrid approach of accrual, cash and as-invoiced.

2 Lack of inventory control

Picture this: All of your numbers look great. But the end of the year comes and margins suddenly drop. What happened?

You waited until you slowed down to count and reconcile inventory. Then you realize the value of your physical inventory is less than the value on the books. That adjustment hits

the cost of goods sold and the gross margin nosedives. Jobs you thought performed well only looked like they did because the foreman or project manager forgot to allocate materials from the inventory. It is avoidable.

3 Underpaid and overperked

Many owners underpay themselves when cash is tight, and this skews their profits. What's worse, many owners underpay themselves as standard practice, and they think their company makes more money than it is.

Conversely, owners may work for Aunt Suzie for free, thus underestimating their profit. It's the owner's prerogative to help Aunt Suzie. However, let's remove these jobs from our management books, so the leadership team can have a clean set of numbers from which to steer the business.

4 Aggregate numbers, lost potential


Some businesses use only aggregate budgets and reports. This makes it difficult to identify opportunities and necessary improvements. Break down your numbers as much as possible and look at them from all angles. Break down revenue and operating costs by branch, division, service, route and sometimes, by job type, crew, etc.

You should budget and report overhead by branch and division. When you break out the numbers this way, you can see what needs attention. After I recently went through this exercise with a new coaching client, he discovered a division at his second branch was losing money. Now he can have conversations and make the necessary pivots to improve his year-end performance.

5 Not tracking billable hours

Your revenue and job costs can both be on track and still lose money. This scenario can happen when you are not selling/producing enough billable hours to cover overhead and achieve net profit goals.

Unplanned variances in subs and materials can affect gross margins. Therefore, it is helpful to budget and track billable and non-billable hours to avoid disappointment at year-end.

Your implementation of these techniques don't need to be perfect, but it needs to be close, accurate and consistent. Reviewing a clean set of accrual-based numbers monthly and billable hours weekly with your team will help you be more successful. 





BY JEFF KORHAN

The author is the owner of True Nature Marketing, a Naples, Fla.-based company helping entrepreneurs grow. Reach him at jeff@truenature.com.

How unlocking the power of process will drive sales success

One of the hidden secrets of selling is how you show up, interact and move prospective buyers forward to become not just customers but fans of your brand. The more effective that process is, the more likely it will produce results, providing the salesperson focuses on the primary driver of that process.

FOCUSING ON OUTCOME DIMINISHES SUCCESS

In his memoir, *A Life in Parts*, *Breaking Bad* actor Bryan Cranston describes how he lost one role after another because he focused on what seemed the logical part of the process, getting the part. The paradox is that focusing on outcomes diminishes the chance of achieving them. Salespeople and athletes can make this mistake, too. It's counting your money and adding up your score before you've done the work.

As Cranston later realized, "You have to set aside what you will get to instead focus on what you will give." He sought to make his performance compelling, one that only he could deliver from the lessons of his life experiences. As sellers, we must do the same by giving our prospective customers all of ourselves to earn their trust. That won't happen if we play it safe and hope we get the sale.

Unlike an auditioning actor, you have a big advantage: the customers. They honor you with the opportunity to serve. Take that to heart by showing up prepared to plant the seeds of a new relationship. The best-sellers are skilled listeners and storytellers. Don't worry if that doesn't describe you because you can learn these

“The key is being honest and truthful to invite buyers into a narrative that validates your intentions and capabilities.”

skills. As my early mentor said, "Go out there and have a good time and you'll do fine." He knew what I didn't — that enjoying the process tends to give better results.

The key is being honest and truthful to invite buyers into a narrative that validates your intentions and capabilities. When you feel like you are giving so much that there is nothing else you can give, relax and allow them space. If they don't choose you today, there's always tomorrow to give a little more.

SELLING IS A PERFORMANCE WITH PURPOSE

Every organization exists to make people's lives better. That "why" is the driving force behind your organization, its mission and culture, but it's not enough to close sales. The magic is how you take it further with a narrative of stories that open buyers' minds, showing how you give them what they want.

We'll talk about that at my presentation in the Equip Exposition, "17-Trust Based Secrets of Closing the Sale." You'll discover how to build a trust-based sales process that becomes your secret for adding value to the customer experience. Most importantly, you'll learn how to make that process a collaboration that buyers love so much, they'll tell their friends. It's more than how, it's a wow! 🙌



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GROW WITH GRUNDER

BY MARTY GRUNDER

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



4 ways we improved Grunder Landscaping Co.'s profitability

As part of our strategic planning in recent years, Grunder Landscaping Co. has focused on growing our recurring revenue services, like landscaping maintenance, snow removal and lawn care. When we implemented Aspire Software, it highlighted some opportunities to improve our profitability and offer more consistent year-round work to our team. We've followed what the data has told us to do.

I think it's important to share how we improved our profitability. There's a lesson in it for all landscape professionals about staying true to your brand while being open to change.

Here are the priorities we focused on:

1 STAYING TRUE TO OUR BRAND PROMISE

Our clients must have a consistent experience so our brand stays strong in our market. While we've traditionally focused on residential clients, we've also always had commercial maintenance clients.

Commercial and residential clients often have different expectations of quality landscape maintenance. Residential clients tend to be a little pickier. Regardless of their different expectations, all clients must receive the same level of service and quality of work.

2 TRACKING OUR NUMBERS WELL

Before implementing Aspire, we included our equipment expenses in our overhead. After implementing

Aspire, we allocated equipment costs to jobs where we used it.

For example, we don't use our Vermeer mini skid-steers for maintenance work, so we only count the cost of that equipment in the overhead for design/build jobs. This accounting change helped us see that maintenance services like mowing and watering were more profitable than we thought. It gave us a clearer picture of maintenance costs.

3 ROUTING

Our slogan is "Where service is ALWAYS in season." We took this a little too literally. We had clients who asked us to do their maintenance visit on a certain day of the week. We were accommodating because we wanted to make them happy. As a result, our maintenance routes were an inefficient mess, with crews zigzagging all over town.

We used Aspire to reroute our crews efficiently to cut down drive time, and that change alone reduced our indirect time by 35 percent.

4 TRAINING, INCENTIVES AND OVERTIME POLICY

We focused on efficiency in our training, such as how to do tasks efficiently without losing sight of quality. We launched a bonus program that rewards our crews for coming in under budgeted hours, with checks and balances in place to monitor and maintain quality.

We also don't worry about overtime, which may seem counter-intuitive. A crew working overtime

may cost more per hour, but overtime rates are less expensive than finding, training and equipping a new crew.

For maintenance routes, this strategy means we'll add new properties to our existing crews' schedules until we have enough properties to justify an additional crew.

CLEARER PICTURE

These four policies combined got our entire team on the same page.

We're making decisions and creating programs that benefit team members financially, allowing them to earn more money as the company does well. We're also aligning their self-interests with our growth goals.

As a result of these changes, we're able to be more competitive with our pricing and also make sure the maintenance contracts we get are sustainable for our business. These things have been a key driver in doubling our company size over the last two years.

As you look at the coming months, find ways to get a clear picture of your costs and improve your efficiency. That's never a waste of time and is especially smart as we prepare for maintenance renewal season.

And if you'd like to see my team and me in action, join us this fall for one of our Grunder Landscaping Co. Field Trips. You'll have the chance to tour our operation, watch a morning roll-out and learn directly from the leadership team that drives our rapid growth. Learn more:

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