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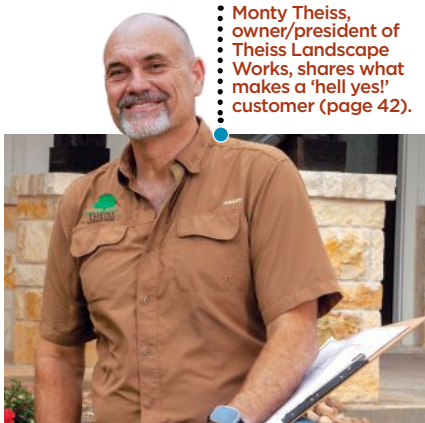
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2023 LM150 list

It's that time of year again! Are you curious what companies made our list this year? Stay tuned for our June issue to see which operations topped our 2023 LM150 list!



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High-tech, low stress

A few years ago, I was in Denver on an assignment. My host was gracious enough to pick me up from the airport. From there, we grabbed lunch, followed by a tour of a few of Denver's breweries (Yes, it was a good assignment.) Turns out, Denver has a nice brewery scene.

It was sometime after the second brewery when I asked my host how he thought robotic mowers would impact his job in 10 years.

He laughed a big laugh and told me that by then, he was pretty sure he'd arrive at work in the morning, open the shop door and watch little robotic mowers crawl out like crabs. He might not even need to leave the shop anymore, he said. He even mimicked the sound these crab mower bots might make.

He was joking. The IPAs had taken hold, and he was incapable of holding back his sarcasm. While I wasn't necessarily suggesting that robotic mowers would take his job away, I could tell by his answer that he was cynical that anything could change his job too much in the next 10 years.

I was in a similar situation — only the roles were reversed from Denver — at a recent industry event. In a crowded ballroom during a cocktail hour, a reader asked me how I foresaw ChatGPT changing the way I do my job. The big difference in my answer was, rather than laugh and respond with sarcasm, I had to ask, "What?"

ChatGPT — the artificial intelligence chatbot built to mimic human conversations — was just starting to make headlines at the time. Personally, I hadn't heard of it yet. And with that strange name ... you can imagine hearing the name *chat-gee-pee-tee* for the first time in conversation in a crowded room ... I had no inkling as to what my new friend was talking about.

“ In a crowded hotel ballroom during cocktail hour, a reader asked me how I foresaw ChatGPT changing the way I do my job. The big difference in my answer was, rather than laugh and respond with sarcasm, I had to ask, 'What?' ”

Since then, I've been hearing about it more and more and all the work it might be able to take off our desks in our day-to-day lives.

Who knows, maybe it could write a magazine article for me? Maybe it could write this column?

I don't think it can. ChatGPT can't go to that Denver brewery and learn from a source. What we do here requires talking to you, the experts, earning your trust and learning about how you do your jobs. We learn about where you see the industry heading. About how you're utilizing — or foresee utilizing — the latest technology. We take those insights and then deliver this publication to you every month.

For example, this month's cover story, written by Associate Editor Rob DiFranco, required him to speak with six industry experts. The topic?

How much has changed over the last 10 years in the compact equipment market, and what might come next. DiFranco took all those sources and boiled down those conversations to create a quality cover story that begins on page 12.

(Rob also wrote it shortly before getting married — congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. DiFranco!)

New technologies will keep coming our way, and I welcome them. But the key to any of this technology is that it is surrounded and supported by talented, passionate people. Look at any of the columnists in this issue, and all of them are in some way writing about the same topic: people.

People make the industry charge onward and upward. And people — my team — make this magazine what it is.

Only time will tell how much new technology will change our lives. But as I read this month's cover story, "The Future's Coming Fast," I couldn't help but think about my own job, how I do it, and how fast things are moving. 🍷

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EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD



MORE ONLINE

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

What's one tip for effective maintenance and service calls?

“Make sure the people that go out know not only agronomically and horticulturally what they are talking about, but also know good customer service. Cancellations and service calls are intertwined.”



Landscape Professionals

Richard Bare

Arbor-Nomics Turf
Norcross, Ga.

Troy Clogg

Troy Clogg Landscape Associates
Wixom, Mich.

Pam Dooley

Plants Creative Landscapes
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Paul Fraynd

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The Grow Group
Dayton, Ohio

Phil Harwood

Tamarisk Business Advisors
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jeffrey Scott

Jeffrey Scott Consulting
New Orleans, La.



“Set your team and clients up for success with comprehensive and preplanned service schedules and intervals. For example, a proactive summer irrigation check can find issues and allow you to adjust before they become a problem.”

“Cross-train technicians and team members across your range of services. They don't need to be able to fix everything. But if your people can identify a problem and effectively communicate with your team, it will save repeat visits and allow you to be more proactive.”



“Have a point person to organize them based on priority and route. Sometimes service folks can bounce around without a plan.”



“Use current technology to send wraparound communications (before, during and after) with the ultimate question in mind: ‘Would you recommend us to a friend?’”



“Remember that every interaction is an opportunity for a sale. Simply training crew members to ask, ‘Is there anything else we can do to help you, your property or someone you know?’ after every service can dramatically increase sales performance.”



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Cuyahoga Community College shares the keys to its NCLC win

Jim Funai, Ph.D., assistant professor of plant and landscape technology of Tri-C's program, highlights the importance of opportunities such as the National Collegiate Landscaping Competition for his students

BY JOEY CICCOLINI | LM SENIOR DIGITAL SPECIALIST

The National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) 2023 National Collegiate Landscaping Competition (NCLC), held at Mississippi State University, saw a new team taking home top honors.

Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) in Cleveland, Ohio, secured a first-place finish and unseated Brigham Young University (BYU) of Provo, Utah, which won the competition every year since 2017. Tri-C has done well in the past — finishing second in the competition last year at North Carolina State University. Tri-C student Peyton Musgrave also finished as the top overall student in 2022. However, this marks the first-ever first-place victory for Tri-C.

LONG-STANDING GOAL

Jim Funai, Ph.D., assistant professor of plant and landscape technology of Tri-C's program, has been helping drive toward this first-place goal since 2009.

"To have had that goal for 13 straight years and finally get it was huge," said Funai. "It's the perfect proof that we're teaching everything here that you get at a university, just we're doing it much cheaper."

With Tri-C only offering a two-year program and students cycling through every two years, Funai said it adds to



the difficulty of winning the competition since there is less time to train the team and familiarize them with the competition. Funai credits the team's perseverance and an intense six-week training schedule leading up to the competition as some of the factors that led to the team's success.

"We trained more, we trained harder, this team was ready. They had that thirst (to win)," said Funai.

OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND

This year's NCLC saw nearly 700 horticulture and landscape students from more than 50 universities and colleges test their skills in 30 real-world, competitive events. Funai described the importance the competition represents for the green industry.

"A big problem we always face is the stigma that we cut grass, and that's such a miniscule part of what we do. (NCLC) helps us tell the story of what we do," explained Funai. "The competition is a good example of the myriad of careers that students can get into. It helps people wrap their heads around just how gigantic the opportunities are in this whole field."

Tri-C's team will look to create their own winning streak at the 2024 NCLC, as BYU hosts next year's competition, set for March 13-16, 2024. 📍

Students from Cuyahoga Community College took home their first NCLC title at the 2023 event.

EQUIP EXPO REGISTRATION IS OPEN WITH GOLDEN TICKET GIVEAWAY FOR 40TH ANNIVERSARY

As part of Equip Expo's 40th anniversary, the event offers a golden ticket giveaway for early registration — before July 31. Register for Equip Expo at [EquipExposition.com](https://www.equipexpo.com) and use the promo code "VIPLMNC" to get a 50-percent discount on your Equip Education registration.

Forty winners will receive a ticket to the show, a choice of one educational session, a meal voucher for the show and \$50 to spend on Equip Expo merchandise.

One grand prize winner also will receive (in addition to the

above items) a three-night stay at an Equip Expo Hotel room block; two front-row tickets to the Thursday night headliner concert featuring Third Eye Blind at the KFC Yum! Center; and a \$400, pre-paid Visa card to help with travel expenses.

Registration also opens for Hardscapes North America, which is co-located with Equip Expo. Hardscape contractors and dealers, landscape professionals, design professionals and industry students and professors can register at [HardscapeNA.com](https://www.HardscapeNA.com) for the \$25 early bird rate through Sept. 7.

California landscapers could face prison time after insurance fraud charges

Three brothers who co-own Green View Landscape & Tree Service of Escondido, Calif., and two of their wives, who the company lists as supervisors, face multiple charges of insurance fraud in a complaint filed by the California Department of Insurance.

According to the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, two of the defendants face six counts of insurance fraud and a maximum of 10 years in prison if convicted. The others face charges of five counts of insurance fraud and up to nine years in prison if convicted.

The defendants include owners of Green View Landscape & Tree Service: Antonio Martinez Resendiz, 36, of Murrieta, Calif., Ismael Martinez Resendiz, 34, of Fallbrook, Calif., and Jorge Martinez Resendiz, 32, of Temecula, Calif. The two additional defendants listed as supervisors include Ariana Martinez, 34, of Murrieta, Calif., and Silvia Reyna Martinez, 34, of Temecula, Calif.

The San Diego County District Attorney's Office alleges the defendants' operation underreported employees' wages to their insurance company to unlawfully save on workers' compensation insurance premiums.

The *Union-Tribune* reports the offenses occurred between 2016 and 2021. An additional offense involving two of the brothers occurred between 2014 and 2015.

Mariani's growth continues again with addition of New Jersey-based Borst

Following major moves in 2022 and the recent addition of Glengate, Mariani Landscape, No. 20 on the 2022 LM150 list, is at it again. This time with the addition of Borst Landscape & Design, a full-service commercial and residential company in Allendale, N.J.

Mark C. Borst founded the company in 1989. The company introduced an organic landscaping program in 1995. Today, the company focuses on maintenance and enhancements, turf management, tree and shrub care, landscape lighting, seasonal enhancements, organic lawn care, design/build services and commercial snow and ice removal.

Borst becomes the 11th family-owned residential landscape company in the Mariani Landscape group. In 2022, Mariani added Berghoff Design Group and BDG Maintenance in Phoenix, Ariz.; Designs By Sundown in Littleton, Colo.; Hoffman Landscapes in Wilton, Conn.; NatureWorks Landscape Services in Walpole, Mass.; Rocco Fiore & Sons in Libertyville, Ill.; R.P. Marzilli & Co. in Medway, Mass.; and Woodlawns Landscape Company in Mundelein, Ill. Earlier this month, Mariani added Glengate in Wilton, Conn. Ed Castro Landscape, a full-service operation in Roswell, Ga., also joined the family of brands earlier this year.

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Jeffrey Scott opens his playbook

Longtime industry consultant will lead two classes on running successful businesses

BY BRIAN LOVE | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Landscape Management Columnist Jeffrey Scott continues his love for teaching others with two classes during the 2023 Equip Exposition, held annually in Louisville, Ky., in October. One walks attendees through mapping out a successful business plan and the other highlights the importance of open book management and key performance indicators (KPIs).

The first class, “Open Book Management and Using KPIs,” takes place on Wednesday, Oct. 18, from 12:30 to 2 p.m. Attendees will learn how employee buy-in helps companies reach goals. This includes transparent book-keeping and a focus on KPIs to take a company from good to fantastic.

The second class is “The Ultimate Succession Plan: Setting Up Your Business to Run Itself.” It takes place Thursday, Oct. 19, from 10 to 11:30 a.m. It will teach attendees how to improve their company’s profits, manage numbers and empower a team or employees so a business owner could take more than a few weeks off every December.

“People show up wanting to learn,” Scott says. “They’re hungry and motivated. That’s the perfect audience to talk to. You want to talk to somebody and share your experience with people who are hungry to learn, grow and implement. It’s the perfect recipe. I love doing that.”

Class is in session

When it comes to Wednesday’s lesson, Scott says learning about KPIs is a “must-do.” He explains KPIs will steer the company’s profitability and growth to the end goal set by the business owners. He considers the open book management aspect of the class an exciting opportunity. This combination of educating team members on the finances of the business and company KPIs helps push the company forward.

“I’m going to share best practices that I have developed and seen work over the years,” Scott says. “This comes from years of coaching and consulting over 300 companies in the landscape industry.”

Setting up a succession plan is about the decisions and paths one can take with a business, Scott says. Building a plan for making tough decisions will simplify this complicated work. As a result, owners can take a step back and enjoy life more.

Scott has created seven points for this plan, which he




calls “retiring in place.” It all starts with both a vision and a cultural foundation set for the business. After the company completes this, the company can build its leadership team. From there, Scott adds the company needs to take further, steps such as setting up internal accountability and creating a long-term road map.

“I understand their challenges,” Scott adds.

He brings decades of experience as an investor, consultant, entrepreneur and owner of two 7- and 8-figure businesses to Equip Expo. His passion for the green industry comes from positively impacting people. He sees these classes as an opportunity to continue this drive, especially when he hears from industry members he’s helped.

“It’s what gets me out of bed every single morning,” Scott says. “It’s really the drive behind what we do here. When we’re all done with that talk, there are going to be a lot of people and they will have questions. The other half will just want to say thank you for helping, for giving them a roadmap.”

Register now

Attendees must preregister to attend LM’s educational sessions. To register for Equip Expo and classes, visit [EquipExposition.com](https://www.EquipExposition.com). Use the promo code “VIPLMNC” for a 50 percent discount on early bird Equip registration. 

BACK AT EQUIP
Jeffrey Scott returns to Louisville in October to lead two sessions at Equip Expo. One on Oct. 18 and one on Oct. 19.

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THE FUTURE'S COMING FAST

Compact equipment has come a long way in the last decade. Insiders share what's in store in the next five to 10 years.

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR



DREAMS OF THE FUTURE

Experts say the future of compact equipment will bring more ways for contractors to increase efficiency in the face of labor concerns.

The compact equipment market has exploded in the past decade. Machines that didn't exist just a short time ago now help design/build contractors sleep better at night — quite literally in some cases.

"Five or 10 years ago, someone may have been doing these jobs with a shovel and a wheelbarrow," says Brady Lewis, North American product manager for emerging products and technology at Case. "Now, you have small articulated loaders that have taken some of these jobs out of contractors' hands."

Now after that decade-plus of innovation, landscape pros ask what's next?

"We're on the edge of what some of this technology is going to really bring us," says Lewis. "When I start to think about what the industry will look like 10 years from now, it is going to be pretty different from what we are looking at these days."

LM spoke with equipment manufacturers about what to expect as the industry pushes ahead into another period of innovation.

IT'S ELECTRIC

Battery-powered solutions aren't a new idea for compact equipment manufacturers. The electrification of machines has grown alongside the demand for compact equipment in recent years.

"People are more concerned with sustainability and environmental impact than ever before, and this industry is working hard to answer those concerns," says David Caldwell, product manager at Takeuchi.

The results of those efforts are already hitting the trade show floor. Manufacturers such as Takeuchi, John Deere and Bobcat showcased their latest entries into the battery-powered equipment ring at ConExpo-Con/Agg — in 2023.

Luke Gribble, solutions marketing manager for Deere, says the company introduced its first fully battery-powered option at the show, the 244 X-Tier compact wheel loader.

Gribble says the company has received plenty of feedback since unveiling the 244 at ConExpo in Las Vegas — both from customers interested in switching to battery power and those who'd rather stick with gasoline-powered machinery.

"The industry knows these solutions aren't for everybody," he adds. "We're continuing to look at diesel solutions. Where it makes sense, we will offer those electric options. But it won't be one or the other."

Brant Kukuk, product manager at Ditch Witch, adds that in some states — notably California, which has already shown a willingness



Brant Kukuk

to ban gas-powered landscape equipment — contractors might not have a choice.

"Regulations will drive that (switch) in some cases," he says. "The machines out there right now that are electrified are more than capable while they're running. But, there are some concerns involved when it comes to run time and affordability, in the minds of customers."

HEADS UP!

If you want to get an idea of what advancements might be on their way to the world of compact equipment, look no further than larger equipment available from these manufacturers.

Gribble says several technologies, including smart grade capabilities, vision and detection systems gravitate toward compact equipment and will continue to do so.

"Whether it's a compact loader or a skid-steer, contractors want the same benefits they'd get from a larger machine because many use it as their main production tool," he says.

Gribble adds that the company recently introduced a new vision system on its skid-steers and compact track loaders, which offers bird's-eye views of an operator's surroundings. It's similar to something found in the company's larger construction equipment.

John Deere also recently introduced a new smart detection feature for its larger utility loaders. It could pave the way for autonomous operation in the future, Gribble says.

"On our larger utility loaders, we can now provide operators with alerts when both people and objects are behind the machine," Gribble says. "We'll look for opportunities to add detection and vision systems to compact equipment because we hear more and more that if it can help avoid damage to the machine, it's a plus."

A NEW DIMENSION

Some technologies offer contractors more real-time data than they've ever had available before, says Luke Hill, excavator product specialist with Bobcat.

"Our Depth Check system gives the user a vital extra piece of information that says, 'you're close to your (excavation) depth,' or 'you're at the correct depth,'" he says. "Customers have started to overcome the technological fear they may have experienced as they've got their hands on these technologies."

Hill adds that indicate technologies, like Depth Check, have been game-changers for contractors and will continue to be in the future.



Luke Gribble

Continued on page 14

Continued from page 13

He says, with the addition of machine control and semi-autonomous operation, contractors will be able to get the job done quicker and have confidence it's done correctly.

Other technologies aimed at making the job easier include 3D control, Gribble says. Although he notes that the industry is still in an early phase with grade control solutions.

"It was introduced to the market within the last two to three years, and it's taking off," he says.

OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

Case's Lewis says larger equipment isn't the only place where the industry gets ideas for innovation.

"We're leveraging a lot of technology from the automotive world," he says. "That's where the technology is really getting better and better exponentially.

Continued on page 16

MAKING THE GRADE

Compact equipment manufacturers say grade control technologies give professionals an added layer of precision while on the job site.



PHOTO: JOHN DEERE

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ELECTRIC AVENUES

While electrification of compact equipment is still a work in progress, equipment manufacturers say the technology is rapidly improving.

Continued from page 14

We're still in those beginning stages (in this industry). But we're starting to see an upward trend in terms of power and affordability."



Brady Lewis

It's not difficult to remember when Tesla broke the mold with an all-electric vehicle, Lewis adds, but take one look around a car dealership now and you will notice an electric option from almost every single manufacturer.

That is thanks to the continued research and development put into batteries by the automotive industry. Soon, the green industry will reap the benefits.

Continued on page 18

PHOTO: CASE

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Continued from page 16

“The cost in dollars per kilowatt has come down drastically and will continue to do so,” he says. “The battery itself is getting cheaper and more capable. Now, we’re starting to be able to offer run times that will fit into what a customer needs for some of the more involved applications.”

IT IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT

All of these technologies, Lewis says, are not only there to make a contractor’s job easier but can also help with ongoing problems they face on the labor front.

“Labor challenges aren’t getting any better,” he says. “Because of that, you’re going to see technology that tries to help fill that gap for customers. We don’t know what that next technology might be. That’s something that a lot of the smart minds in the industry are working on.”

Continued on page 20

FULL TILT WITH ATTACHMENTS

Compact machines themselves aren’t the only tools to get major upgrades. Luke Hill, excavator product specialist with Bobcat, says the attachment space has seen its fair share of innovation.

“Tiltrotators have exploded in North America over the past few years,” he says. “(Professionals) are seeing the benefits of this tool on their larger equipment in terms of unlocking what your compact excavator can do.”

Tiltrotators — which function as a wrist between the quick coupler and the tool — add versatility to a compact excavator and, in some cases, can consolidate several jobs that might have required the use of multiple machines and employees.

David Caldwell, national product manager for Takeuchi, says some popular attachments used in conjunction with tiltrotators include couplers, grip modules, clamshell buckets, grapples, leveling beams, augers and trenchers.

“Tiltrotators are also great for picking up and placing stone or other aggregates for hardscapes and cleaning up brush,” Caldwell adds.

A tiltrotator also adds the ability to work in confined spaces with a compact excavator because of its ability to tilt and rotate the attachment, Caldwell says. The add-on can help contractors save time as well, as with fewer machines on a job site, there could be less ground disturbance.

“While tiltrotators are an investment, they’re an add-on to compact excavators, so they don’t necessarily increase the cost of the equipment itself,” says Caldwell. “There’s a learning curve with tiltrotators, so adding one to a compact excavator will extend ‘training time’ to some degree, but not enough that it should deter someone from purchasing and using one.”



David Caldwell

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ALL IN ON ATTACHMENTS

Tiltrotators bring a new element to machines such as compact excavators, allowing for added versatility and control, experts say.

Continued from page 18

Machine control and semi-automation will evolve further to meet those needs, Lewis says.

“Maybe the employee you’re able to hire doesn’t have the experience

of someone who has been using the machine for 20 years,” he says. “That technology, in some ways, could help contractors get these employees to do the job that the experienced operator could do because

machine assistance can help close that (knowledge) gap.”

At the end of the day, what contractors want will ultimately drive where the industry moves, Kukuk adds.

Continued on page 22

PHOTO: TAKEUCHI



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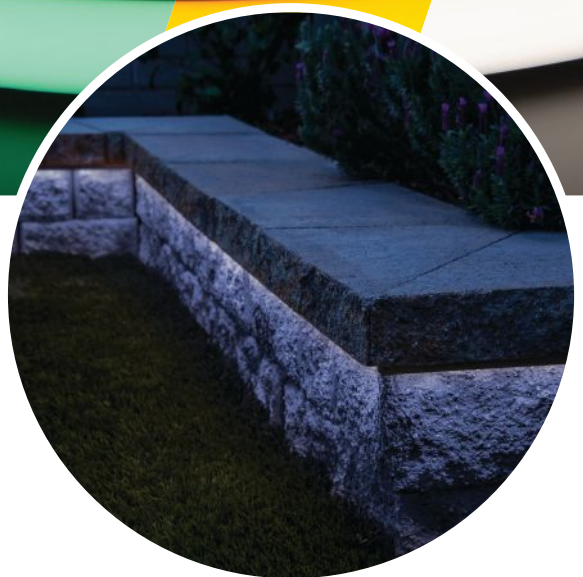


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HERE TO HELP As compact equipment continues to evolve, manufacturers say continued education and training is key to stay ahead of the game.

Continued from page 20

“If it’s something you’ve heard from 50-plus people, you’ve got to weigh that opinion,” he says. “There are a lot of opinions and you’ve got to make sure that what you move forward with matches what the majority of your base is asking for.”

He adds that there’s a lot of research done based on those opinions to confirm that it’s viable, reliable and efficient.

Electrification will certainly be a part of the industry’s future thanks to increased regulation.

“I had a customer tell me they had won a contract because the client required electric equipment,” says Katie Gall, product development specialist for Bobcat. “So, we want to make sure that we have (electric equipment) readily available for contractors, whether they’re renting or purchasing.”

Like Deere and Bobcat, Takeuchi introduced its first battery-operated compact excavator, the TB20e, at ConExpo. Caldwell tells LM the feedback the company has received tells him all he needs to know about the future of the technology.

“That tells me that the demand for these cleaner, quieter machines is flourishing and unlikely to slow down anytime soon,” he says. “We plan on developing more machines that operate on alternative power in the years ahead as part of our (environmental, social and governance) goals and, also, simply because the demand for them obviously exists.”

“SOME PEOPLE WILL LEARN BEST FROM SIMPLY DOING IT THEMSELVES OR SEEING SOMEONE DO IT, BUT OTHERS DON’T. THAT’S WHERE WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO GIVE THE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT THE CUSTOMER NEEDS TO LEARN HOW TO USE IT.”

— Luke Hill, excavator product specialist, Bobcat

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FERTILE GROUND

Learn the science behind control-release and enhanced-efficiency fertilizers

Get an inside look at these beneficial turf boosters and the best times to deploy them

BY BRIAN LOVE | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

As spring shifts to summer, lawn care operators (LCOs) look to maximize their fertilizer applications. Over the past few years, the industry has embraced controlled-release and enhanced-efficiency fertilizers — reducing labor costs and saving time. Ben Pease, Ph.D., turfgrass agronomist with The Andersons, says these fertilizers help LCOs save on applications.

“The LCO doesn’t always have to be there as these fertilizers allow for much more even feeding for the turfgrass,” he says. “Money and time are saved by lowering labor costs while still maintaining a quality lawn.”

Pease says these fertilizers can boost color and growth with balanced feeding.



Ben Pease

These fertilizers also offer LCOs the ability to apply control products at once.

“There (may be) herbicides and insecticides incorporated, so you can do two things at once with a granular application,” he says.

“These fertilizers are so versatile,” John Fowler, vice president of sales for Anuvia Plant Nutrient’s turf division, says. “They are a great delivery system for preemergent chemistry and insecticides, sometimes at the same time.”

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A VERSATILE OPTION

Controlled-release fertilizers (CRF) are granular fertilizers that gradually release nutrients into the soil over time. While traditional fertilizers typically last one or two weeks, CRFs last between 60 and 180 days.

The controlled element of a CRF is the release of nutrients into the soil. According to Pease, the nutrients released in these fertilizers range between 20 and 100 percent slower than in traditional fertilizers.

LCOs may choose different types of CRFs — with a different rate of release or a CRF with nitrogen, potassium or phosphorus — depending on the needs of the turf. Most controlled releases include sulfur-coated urea, explains Pease. He says CRFs can use chemically treated urea, such as methylene and some use inorganic and natural sources of nitrogen.

SLOW-RELEASE

Enhanced-efficiency fertilizers (EEFs) are another form of slow-release fertilizer. They decrease nutrient losses while increasing nutrient availability for the turf. EEFs also regulate the release of nitrogen for more effective nutrient delivery.

Different types of EEFs include urease and nitrification inhibitors, which can be homogeneously distributed or coated with urea. In addition, there are slow-release nitrogen fertilizers, such as compost and manure.

John Perry, founder and president of Greene County Fertilizer Co., says LCOs should consider late spring and early summer as the most effective times to apply these fertilizers.

One restriction around the use of these fertilizers is nutrient blackout periods in certain cities and states. This



John Perry

is the time frame where LCOs cannot apply fertilizers containing nitrogen or phosphorus — typically from early June through late September and usually in tropical or subtropical climates.

MAINTENANCE MATTERS

Still, even with fertilizer innovations, lawn maintenance still requires routine checks, Perry says.

Another element LCOs should remember when using CRFs and EEFs is to change the spreader calibration settings depending on the product.

To make the most of these fertilizers, remember to work with your local distributor representative, Fowler says.

“Distributors are valuable resources,” he says. “They see many different types and sizes of fertilizers and have a great deal of experience solving problems.”

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FROM THE SOURCE

Know your ideal client to boost your bottom line



Learn how targeted marketing helps your team stay focused during the busy season **BY MIKE SISTI | CONTRIBUTOR**



With peak selling season upon us, it's important to understand your ideal customer. There's a saying in sales: "Marketing to everyone means marketing to no one."

Sometimes, we get so caught up in the spring rush — handling the phone and estimate requests, training new technicians and ensuring you have product for spring rounds. Then a curveball; Your equipment breaks down; you lose a key employee or the weather doesn't cooperate. It's easy to get distracted and sell as much as we can, but do you know who your ideal customer is?

BUILDING A PLAN

Building my first lawn care company started with one man, one truck and some part-time help in the office for sales and customer service calls. Before sending out my first batch of marketing brochures, I developed a plan.

We targeted properties within 15 miles based on route density and a lawn size that would keep our product cost manageable and ensure our routes were efficient. As we filled the first truck, we followed a similar process for the second, targeting manageable property sizes, about 6,000 square feet on average. It seemed like we already marketed to every house in the area.

While we kept a database of the leads and continued to follow up year after year, eventually, we had to find other properties. To keep our routes tight, we naturally marketed to the

next town over. However, the property sizes jumped to 18,000 square feet on average.

While we charged more, it also took longer to service these stops and they required significantly more product. After getting through our early rounds, blowing through plenty of fertilizer and control products, we analyzed the numbers. We had higher top-line revenue, but our product cost percentages were up. This meant less margin for the business.

With the smaller properties, we had less top-line growth; however, our margins were higher. We could service nearly four 4,000-square-foot properties with the same bag of fertilizer that could cover one 15,000-square-foot yard. Our service price on four 4,000-square-foot properties was much higher than one 15,000-square-foot yard. Also, think of the additional opportunities to sell tick and mosquito services, grub control, aeration, along with tree and shrub care.



Mike Sisti

UNDERSTANDING DEMOGRAPHICS

Understanding the basic demographics of our prospects provided additional ways to reach potential customers and establish ourselves with our current customers.

For example, we researched specifics on customers in several towns with ideal lot sizes that provided the most profit. We began to notice trends: First-time homeowners with young families and senior citizens preferred a professional to handle lawn care.

As a result, we focused on additional ways to reach these types of people in the community. We understood where they worked and played. Sponsoring the youth baseball team, participating in local parades and volunteering at our church were additional ways we'd interact with our ideal customers.

We targeted these same demographics to help systematically grow our business. Growing families are busy. Selling the benefit of having more time with the family without the hassle of maintaining the lawn spoke volumes. Our older clientele preferred doing other activities rather than caring for their lawn. With the peace of mind that our program was top notch, we guaranteed the work with a 48-hour service call policy. It allowed us to build high retention numbers and accelerate our growth.

LOOK FOR TRENDS

Before your next selling campaign, look at your most profitable customers. What trends do you notice? What do their properties look like? Where do they live, work and play? Where do you have the fewest callbacks and the highest retention rate?

Odds are, you'll see a trend. That's your ideal customer. Next step, as part of your marketing strategy, locate similar property developments to where your ideal customers live. 📍

Sisti is the North American marketing manager for FMC. He formerly worked in the green industry as a franchise owner and grew his business from a startup to 1,000 accounts in four years.

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THE BIG ONE

Not bluffing here

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

LOCATION Winnetka, Ill.

COMPANY Rosborough Partners

DETAILS Rosborough Partners maintains this property on a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan. The client wanted a large outdoor space with roses. The project's location is challenging due to storms off the lake, which can erode the shoreline and bring debris.

Maintenance on the property includes storm and beach cleanup and twice-a-week erosion assessments. Crews also inspect the property's lakeside stone steps and cobble walls to ensure they're safe for the client to use.


"The courtyard has a visually interesting boxwood hedge that frames the home and enhances the cobble driveway beautifully," says Jose Mercado, director of maintenance at Rosborough Partners. "Our team takes great care of keeping those lines perfect."

Rosborough Partners selects hardy plants to survive high winds and spray from the lake. Lucio Torres, plant health care department manager at Rosborough Partners, says the property's location is tricky.

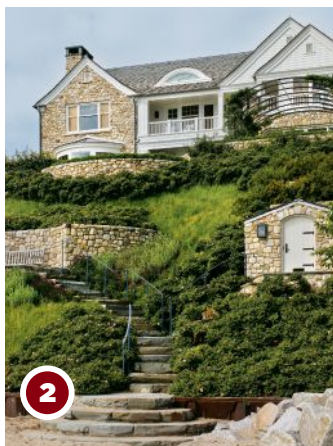
"Due to the location, we monitor for mildew during high humidity and for issues the unique microclimate the lake shore presents," Torres says. "The wind along the bluff creates a challenge for applying treatments due to drift."

He says crews monitor the site to prevent drift when making applications.

Rosborough Partners deploys five seasonal color installations throughout the year. It focuses on blues, whites and pink to complement the property's light-colored stone, white framing and patio furniture.

Rosborough Partners won a Gold Award from the 2022 National Association of Landscape Professionals Awards of Excellence program for this project. 

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



Captions | **1.** Crews prune shrubs twice a year to maintain unobstructed views of Lake Michigan. The client spends considerable time outside during the warm weather months. **2.** Stone steps surrounded by roses lead from the cliffside home down to the lake below. Detail work includes pruning and deadheading roses to keep the path open and the plantings healthy. **3.** On the south side of the home, access to the backyard is via a bluestone walkway with a wrought iron trellis adorned with young clematis plants. Wyman crabapples, boxwoods and a combination of roses, catmint, Russian sage, peonies, geranium and astilbe line the walkway. **4.** The home's approach is a short allée lined with Firebird crabapples, boxwood and pachysandra. Crews weekly hand prune the pachysandra and scout for diseases and prune the crabapples and boxwoods twice a year.



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For the majority of properties, our crews like the 72-inch floating deck mower from Scag. You get a lot of square footage mowed and you also can get into a lot of areas. The price point also makes a big difference. The 61- and 72-inch are similar in price, but when you go up to the 96-inch, the price really jumps. You also have to consider your mode of transportation. If you're driving a little Toyota Tacoma or if you have a Ford F-250, take that into consideration. The 72-inch seems to be able to fit in most trailers and can be towed by most trucks. It's a nice size we've stuck with. Manny (Martinez, maintenance operation manager) adds that the Scag has suspension on the frame and wheels, (which is) ideal for operator comfort and decreases fatigue.



PHIL SCHOGGEN

VICE PRESIDENT
AND CO-OWNER
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CLINTON, MISS.

We use Exmark gasoline mowers for non-industrial (properties). Our industrial and municipality crews run Kubota diesel (mowers). We have one 36-inch mower — we use it on two properties and that's it. We go from a 36-inch mower up to an 11-foot-wide WAM (wide area mower) from John Deere. We ask, 'What is that route going to be? What kind of properties are we servicing? Is it residential and some small commercial properties where you just need a 48-inch? Or is it an industrial property where you need 60- and 72-inch decks to cover more ground quicker?' Our biggest concerns are A) what kind of property is the route servicing and B) what is the most efficient machine for it? If the 48-inch is able to do everything we need, and there's another property where we could use something bigger, we're just taking the 48-inch and it's going to take a little longer on that one property.



SCOTT LAMON

OWNER
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Each of our crews has a 52-inch and a 61-inch Scag, and sometimes, depending on the route, we also have a 36-inch walk-behind. There is no one-size-fits-all answer. The 61-inch Scag Cheetah II is my favorite because it does the best stripes and it is productive. It has a big Kubota engine. But you also need the 36-inch walk-behind because you always have a property with some goofy gate you can't get the bigger machine through. Our guys feel like we have the best mowers in the business. They love these machines for comfort, quality and speed.



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HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

A hero's welcome

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LOCATION Bay Shore, N.Y.

COMPANY Goldberg & Rodler

DETAILS The client — South Shore University Hospital — requested this space be an outdoor dining area where visitors and employees could get a break from the fast-paced world inside the facility.

Ashley Haugsjaa, design office manager and landscape designer for Goldberg & Rodler, says the existing space needed plenty of work. Crumbling stairs and inadequate railings surrounded the century-old building and the space didn't comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

"It looked like a bit of an afterthought, rather than an outdoor dining space. It also served as a main thoroughfare and entry to the main hospital building," says Haugsjaa.

Crews needed to install railings on ramps and make additional changes, she says.

"Sometimes, when people hear 'ADA compliance,' they just think, 'We need a ramp,'" Haugsjaa says. "Yes, it does involve ramps and slopes and all sorts of math you need to do. But you need to have specifics down with steps and visual cues for changing pavement and types of traffic."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the client added a memorial area to the plans. Goldberg & Rodler installed engraved plaques and pavers for the memorials throughout the project.

Manufacturer Techo-Bloc played a major role in supplying materials for the project when materials weren't easy to come by, Haugsjaa says.

"(Techo-Bloc) enabled us to find stock when everyone else had supply chain issues," she says. "They donated some of the materials, specifically the permeable pavers. That was very beneficial, especially on a developed campus, to manage runoff."

The project earned Goldberg & Rodler a Silver Award from the 2022 National Association of Landscape Professionals Awards of Excellence program. 🏆

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



Captions | **1.** The previous dining area featured several unsafe grade changes and zero shade for the wooden picnic tables. **2.** The construction of a new parking garage changed this space from a dining area to a high-traffic area with an entrance to the hospital. **3.** A view from above: Crushed stone allows for stormwater runoff to filtrate naturally and access to utilities as needed. **4.** A pollinator garden was a special request from a hospital employee passionate about native plants.



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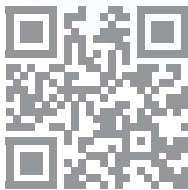
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Water features are a great way to retain customers over time, experts say.



BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Get your feet wet with ponds and water features

For those looking to boost profits and growth goals, ponds and water features are attractive additions to your design/build portfolio **BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR**

If you wish to broaden your service offering or jump-start growth, ponds and water features are a logical addition. Here are compelling reasons to add this service to your professional repertoire.

CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

Whether it's a large pond or a simple fountain, consumers value water elements. These features don't need to be complex. For example, a simple set

of 3-foot basalt columns with water flowing at the top adds beauty to an established outdoor area.

"Landscaping, in general, is silent, and water features bring a pleasant, mellifluous dimension to that environment," says Demi Fortuna, director of product information at Atlantic-OASE.

Brandt Reynolds, contractor sales manager at Blue Thumb, says the average customer desires the benefits water features add to an outdoor environment.

"Someone can sign up for a \$30,000 patio installation with a fire pit and patio seating area," he says. "But nine times out of 10, their favorite element is that base fountain tucked into a corner by the patio door. Or it will be the fountain by the fire pit that places elements of fire and water into the landscape."

EASY ADDITION

Experience with irrigation installations and pool construction is a solid foundation for water feature services. Familiarity with pump sizes and filtration requirements also applies to this work. In addition, landscape and design/build

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contractors generally have the equipment — from hand tools to compact loaders — to complete these jobs.

In addition, many suppliers offer water feature kits and turnkey packages simplify the installation process for contractors. Fortuna says kits are a great place to start.

“The kits give you the information you need to guarantee a successful project before you really know what you’re doing,” he says. “They’re set up for beginners or even experienced pond builders. They make it easy to gain experience with water features. And they (prepare contractors) to do custom installations.”

Partnering with a local pond supplier offers newcomers essential knowledge and know-how to minimize mistakes and ensure project success, says Todd Cruikshank, owner of The Pond and Rock Shop.

“Vendors are always willing to lend a hand on-site with your projects, and ponds are no different,” Cruikshank says. “I would recommend lining up site visits from my vendors on the first couple of jobs to ensure we install their products according to the manufacturer’s specifications.”

ATTRACTIVE MARGINS

Adding water features to existing hard-scapes is an attractive profit center. While the profit margin for this work is attractive, every project has challenges. Factors such as project size, complexity, location, accessibility and even the unknown, all affect costs and the bottom line.

“The more complicated it gets, believe it or not, the less profitable they are,” Fortuna adds. “The projects can get a little crazy, and those really are for the more experienced contractor.”

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

After installation, discuss an ongoing service plan with your client to properly maintain the feature. For example, a fountain bathed in sunlight for 8-10 hours daily will develop an algae problem.

There are recurring opportunities to put these systems to bed for winter and get them going again in spring. Lastly, Reynolds says clients often develop a passion for their water features that drives them to expand their environment.

“Nine times out of 10, they want to make it bigger and add a different element,” he says. “The opportunity is there. Once they’ve got that passion, they’ll want to change something within a few years, and that’s a new installation for you.”

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



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WATER WORLD

Major upgrade, major savings

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

LOCATION Santa Rosa, Calif.

COMPANY Landesign Construction & Maintenance

DETAILS Landesign Construction & Maintenance converted 36 apartment complexes to Weathermatic's SmartLink system, a remote-managed smart irrigation control system including on-site weather stations. In the first year of the project, the company conducted a case study on 10 sites in the Santa Rosa area to analyze water consumption and the sites slashed water use by 38 percent.

JJ Fitzgerald, chief operating officer at Landesign, says the client wanted to invest in its properties to conserve water. With mandates to reduce water use by 20 percent in the Santa Rosa area, the company implemented an operations plan to bring the entire irrigation portfolio online.

"Rather than just cutting all the water back 20 percent, we were able to install weather stations and apply water when it was most needed and still achieve over 20 percent water savings," he says.


Jorge Lugo, irrigation manager for Landesign, says while the team of account managers expected to see 20- to 25-percent savings, the results surprised them. Lugo says Landesign plans to continue to tweak the systems to boost the water savings even more.

"We can achieve greater success while keeping one of the biggest investments for the customer — which is their landscaping — in good health," Lugo says. "It's our goal to educate our clients on water conservation and proper management of the landscaping."

With this targeted approach to irrigation, the landscaping responds positively, Lugo says.

"You start noticing that you can train plants and trees to reduce their water use and maximize water uptake when irrigated," he says. "Instead of giving them an excessive amount of water, we've cut that back through weather-based irrigation and the landscape has looked healthier."

Fitzgerald says there was an initial learning curve and some sites suffered from connectivity issues during installation early on. However the team at Landesign worked with Weathermatic to get everything connected.

"Now that we've worked out a few kinks in the last two seasons, our techs are excited about this program and see the benefits as they work with these controllers," he says. 



Captions | **1.** Landesign COO JJ Fitzgerald says integrating Weathermatic's SmartLink system helps Landesign recruit, retain and train talent. This is because the company continues to adopt technology and improve the team's skill set. **2.** Landesign conducted a case study of 10 sites in the Santa Rosa area to analyze water consumption with the help of this technology. In the first year, the sites slashed water use by 38 percent. **3.** Fitzgerald says Weathermatic's online connected irrigation helps the company reduce non-billable hours and increase revenue.

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.

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EXPERTS' TIPS

Irrigation contractors share the value of partnering with distributors

Education, support and inventory management are among some of the benefits green industry businesses can experience **BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR**

Distributors don't only provide supplies. They also can be trusted partners for irrigation contractors to turn to for educational, industry and product support.

Kyle Harris, enhancements manager of Genesis Landscape Solutions in Mesa, Ariz., and Cotey Livesay, branch manager of Yellowstone Landscape in Nashville, share their firsthand experience working with distributors.

STARTS WITH A RELATIONSHIP

From finding more cost-effective options to introducing you to new technologies — distributors can provide a wide range of benefits. It all starts when contractors build a connection with contractors, says Harris. Genesis offers commercial landscape and turf management, irrigation, tree management and lawn care services and uses Horizon Distributors.

Horizon lets the company know about product availability and when products are on back-order, so they

don't sell them to their customers when they are out of stock. Horizon also provides continuing education classes for the Genesis team, as well as on-site support.

"If we need help with a controller, weather station, head or anything, they will meet us on the site to give us one-on-one support on how it works," Harris says. "It goes back to that relationship we've built."

A common misconception smaller companies may have about working with a distributor is that they only work with contractors looking to buy in large quantities, Harris explains.

"Distributors sell in big quantities, but they also sell a single sprinkler head just the same," he adds. "You might feel like you don't belong there and are afraid to ask questions. But, we all have to go in and ask questions."

Harris encourages irrigation contractors from any size company to take advantage of their local distributor's pricing and expertise.

"If you don't know how to do something, they're more than happy to walk you through it and explain it," Harris says. "When you build relationships and loyalty, you start seeing benefits you might not know you're missing out on."

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

"With irrigation technology constantly changing, distributors can share what products are coming months or even years ahead of time," says Livesay.

His company offers commercial landscape maintenance, installation, enhancements,

tree care, irrigation management and snow and ice removal.

Yellowstone works with multiple distributors, including SiteOne Landscape Supply, which provides both on-site and in-house support for their team.

Livesay explains that, during Yellowstone's lunch-and-learn events, distributors such as SiteOne will come and teach the team about products and practices. Yellowstone also brings in distributors for its quarterly safety audits to hold training sessions.


"We read industry magazines and books to keep up to date," Livesay says. "But to have someone come in and train us, that's vital."

SAVING TIME

Distributors manage some of Yellowstone's inventory and deliver to job sites — saving the company drive time. SiteOne and other distributors' pricing connects and updates within Yellowstone's Aspire Software account, so project managers don't have to call for pricing.

"There are no cons to partnering with someone because they bring so much to the table," Livesay says.

Yellowstone's distributors also notify the company about early order programs and other rebates that would benefit the business financially. With the ever-changing industry, Livesay says it's been a major advantage to have a distributor Yellowstone can rely on.

"Find someone who will work with you and treat you right. That's more valuable to me than going by the price," he says. "Don't look at them as just a vendor. Look at them like a business partner." 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.



THERE FOR YOU
Contractors say a common misconception is distributors only work with large companies.

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SNOW STRATEGY

A year-round approach to snow can help your bottom line



BY NEAL GLATT

Neal Glatt is a green industry sales coach and managing partner of GrowTheBench.com. Contact him at Neal@GrowTheBench.com.

Snow and ice management services are by far the highest profit center of any exterior maintenance category in terms of the percentage of spend and gross margin. And with good reason — winter services are demanding and risky. Crews must be available 24/7. Every storm presents its own challenges. Slip-and-fall liabilities can destroy profits. Crews almost always perform the work in cold, dark and dangerous conditions. The rewards for those are substantial yet well-deserved.

Yet there is an additional self-inflicted risk that far too many companies assume when it comes to snow and ice: taking a seasonal approach to snow. Waiting until the weather turns colder to work on a snow business is a costly mistake when compared to the potential of a professional company offering winter services.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EARLY CONTRACTS

A year-round approach is a necessity for those serious about service and profit. Clients award nearly half of all winter maintenance contracts in the spring. Customers, especially those with large snow portfolios, don't have anything to gain by waiting until there is a threat of winter weather in the forecast to secure a vendor. But by delaying until the fall, dozens of issues may arise in contract performance with a late award. As a result, there has been a dramatic shift in the market for when to deal with snow contracts.

Yet, only companies with a year-round approach can take advantage of these opportunities. Those who focus on snow seasonally pick up whatever work remains.

Securing contracts just before the snow season begins, limits a company's ability to balance its contract risk. Snow contracts generally pay

on a per-occurrence basis — where services rendered result in payment — or on a per-season basis — where a client pays a fixed price regardless of services rendered.

Given the unpredictability of snowfall in any market, companies must keep a balanced portfolio to have enough guaranteed revenue to cover all fixed costs with enough variable revenue to cover the labor, fuel and materials used in heavy snowfalls.

Achieving a contractual balance is hard enough, but limiting opportunities for contracts and introducing time pressure by taking a seasonal focus makes it immensely more difficult. Snow service providers who take a year-round approach can win a group of contracts by early summer and then make an informed decision about its portfolio balance to know what to target in the fall. With the extreme snowfall variations across the country in recent years, there is simply no other way to responsibly manage a winter division.

PLANNING AHEAD

A year-round approach to snow has benefits that go far beyond contract management. It's no longer possible to order trucks, heavy equipment or snow-specific necessities like plows and spreaders weeks before the first storm. Pandemic-induced supply chain issues showed the need to plan a snow operation months earlier than ever before. The only way to guarantee an efficient and capable fleet of snow equipment is to plan and purchase when few others are thinking about winter.

Snow and ice service companies today do more reporting and



DON'T LIMIT YOUR ABILITY with a seasonal approach to snow management. A proactive, year-round approach will set the stage for success.

verification of services. While there has been a proliferation of new and improved software solutions specific to the industry, selecting and implementing one is neither quick nor easy. It can take months to properly set up a new system and integrate it into a larger operation, not to mention training all the employees who must now utilize the software. Once again, a year-round approach becomes a necessity.

Securing insurance for snow and ice operations has become arduous and time-consuming. The same liabilities that justify immense snow profit lead to fewer opportunities and increased cost of coverage. Working with an advisor to understand processes and risk-management practices of a snow business is only possible with the advantage of time, and even the best insurance agents can do little to nothing to help a business with innovative solutions once snow is in the forecast. Only those with a year-round approach can leverage the expert help of great providers.

“Achieving a contractual balance is hard enough, but limiting opportunities for contracts and introducing time pressure makes it more difficult.”

USE THE SUMMER TO GET STRONGER

Finally, there is the training component for snow and ice. Professional companies serious about growing and improving their business will focus this summer on increasing sales competencies, operations and management by improving processes, attending snow-specific events, participating in peer groups and working to level up their workforce. They understand that getting to the next level requires a full-time commitment and the results are more than worth it when they break through.

A year-round approach to snow only requires a change in mentality and a small investment in time by key leaders to dramatically move the needle. One meeting every two weeks to plan and implement snow and ice management initiatives can revolutionize the winter without affecting green season services. Taking just a few days to attend a great event can provide all the insights needed to shift snow operations or sales from good to amazing. Simply having a year-round attitude can make all the difference.

If you're interested in improving your snow and ice business, I recommend attending a Snowfighters Institute event. These events feature great education, networking and facility tours. Space is limited. Visit SnowfightersInstitute.com for the full agenda and to register. It's time to take snow and ice management seriously and shift to a year-round approach. 📍

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FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Monty Theiss

OWNER/PRESIDENT

**THEISS LANDSCAPE WORKS
HOCKLEY, TEXAS**

1 What would you like me to know about Theiss Landscape Works?

We are a family-owned and operated business. My dad started our company in 1968, so we've been around for a long time. In 1999, my dad decided to retire. My brothers and I took over the company. And then in 2004, I bought them out. Now I'm the owner. Randy, my younger brother, still works here. We've done a little bit of everything over the years. Most recently, I'd say within the past eight or 10 years, we've strictly done design/build. Anything to do with landscaping and outdoor living spaces, we pretty much have designed and built it.

2 What is a 'hell yes!' customer?

We learned of this type of customer through working with (consulting firm) Ramblin Jackson. All customers are good customers, but a 'hell yes!' customer is the best fit for our company — in terms of our service area, the size of the project and the type of project. It is more profitable working with a 'hell yes!' customer. We've learned to target our marketing to that customer. We've designed our website for that customer. And we prequalify through our website and some other efforts. For example, we have started charging for consultations. That helps us make sure the person we're dealing with is serious about hiring a landscaper.

3 What trends are you seeing with your customers there in the Houston area?


Hardscapes, backyard renovations and additions to outdoor living spaces tend to be something that is becoming more important. The landscaping around here has been destroyed twice in about three years by the freezes we've had. So, now, everyone wants hardier plants that will make it through our winter — if we do have a hard winter. Some of the plants we normally would've used five years ago aren't as popular anymore. So as far as plants go, that's one thing we're seeing.

We're seeing people spending more time in their backyards. They definitely don't want to spend a lot of time working in their backyard. They want to spend their time enjoying it. So, low-maintenance landscapes are another trend.

4 What is your favorite tool to get the job done?

Our mini skid-steer. It's a Vermeer. We have the largest compact track loader they make. We can pick up a pallet of grass, which means a lot to be able to move something like that around. It is very powerful and there are a lot of things we can do with it that we can't do with the smaller ones. *(Editor's note: Theiss' Vermeer mini skid-steer is featured on this month's cover.)*

5 Do you have a family?

My dad owned 76 acres. Over the years, he's sold two acres here and there. I bought 13 acres from him. The 13 acres I bought from him are where we have our office. One of my daughters and her husband and their four children live here on the property. My son and his wife and two children also live on the property. My parents still live on their 45 acres. My sister and my brother and their families all live here. My niece and her family live here. My aunt lives here. So, we're one big family. I can say that I've lived on the same piece of property since I was 3 years old and I'm 57 now. 

BEST ADVICE

"My dad is 85, and he is still a very hardworking man. He has a saddle repair shop — he's known as the best saddle repairman in the area. The advice he's always given me is, to be honest and do what I think is right. And that really stands out to me."





BY BEN GANDY

The author is principal of Envisor Consulting. Reach him at bengandy@envisorco.com.

What are we looking at?

Tips to be effective in the field

There's nothing easy or obvious about effectively managing people in the field. Communication is hard. So are motivation, education and developing skills. Nevertheless, we deliver the value we sell in the field.

Enormous opportunities and risks are inherent in how your teams execute. Let's start by considering what to look for.

Safety: Safety should be the top priority. Make it straightforward. Are the crews wearing PPE? Is the truck properly coned? Are the crew members using the equipment properly? Are there particular hazards on the site? Assessing safety is a moral and financial responsibility that shouldn't take long.

Quality: Quality is considerably more nuanced. Landscapes vary from simple to elaborate. The value clients place on their landscape varies from a lot to very little. The maturity and history of a particular landscape impact what's possible and reasonable. Assessing quality must be based on the minimum standards of your organization and on the property itself. Most organizations have a minimum standard of green, mowed turf, reasonably weed-free beds and maintained ornamentals. Most experienced managers can recognize good quality and react to deficiencies.

EVALUATING PRODUCTIVITY

Productivity is a big lens that you must look at, especially with planning, training and efficiency. Planning involves assessing the scope, time, equipment, people and sequence.

Scope: Is the crew performing the right scope?

If they perform more than or less than the scope, there's an issue with how the crew understood or the team planned for the job.

Time: Time consideration matters in multiple dimensions. Schedule retail clients early in the day. The same goes for medical buildings. Service hotels midday. Each activity's duration matters. If a mowing activity takes three times as many labor hours as all the other activities, it plays into how many mowers you should deploy, given the crew size. Understanding activity duration is key to developing a balanced plan that levels the workload between crew members. This creates accountability for a reasonable pace and level of production.

Equipment: The size, type, number of units and safety considerations matter when considering equipment. Most of us dispatch a standard set of equipment on our trucks, and yet we see crews jockey equipment around from truck to truck daily. Why? Because equipment needs vary from site to site. Not having the right equipment puts a big dent in productivity.

People: People considerations matter in terms of having the right

skill sets and numbers. More people do not necessarily mean greater efficiency. Great mower operators may not be the best choice for detail work.

Sequence: For weekly service visits, it's more efficient to have the detail and pruning activities happen before mowing. String trimming follows after mowing. Ensuring this happens is a matter of both planning and training. For landscape enhancements, the sequence is demo, infrastructure (drainage and irrigation), hardscape, trees, shrubs, sod, mulch and cleanup. Not all enhancement jobs have all these services, but the order remains the same. Getting these elements out of sequence is costly and frustrating.

EVALUATING EFFICIENCY

You can gain efficiency by eliminating activities that do not add value to the client. Unnecessary string trimming adds no value. Mowing dry or stressed turf does not provide client value. Deadheading back to the truck for fuel does not provide value. Reducing steps and activities that add no value increases productivity without asking people to work harder. It takes practice to develop the ability to see the steps and activities that do not add value to your business. It takes planning and training to counter them, but this is a key to sustainable efficiency.

Learning what to look for is only the first step to effective field management. But all journeys start in the same place — the first step. Deliberate consideration of safety, quality and productivity is a great first step. 





BY GREG HERRING

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

Questions to ask yourself as an owner of a landscape business

I like to ask questions. Sometimes I ask questions of others, but often the most powerful ones are those I ask of myself. Asking myself questions does not mean I think I have all the answers; I do not. Asking questions helps me brainstorm. It expands my thinking. It forces me to be creative and consider many possibilities. It makes me better.

As we serve clients at The Herring Group, here are some questions we ponder as if we were owners of a landscape company. Perhaps these questions will expand your thinking. You may also want your team to brainstorm some answers.

What do we do (or what could we do) better than anyone else?

In business strategy, the answer to this question is called sustainable, competitive advantage. It represents a company's secret sauce for higher-than-average growth and profitability.

In the landscape industry, a competitive advantage typically would involve a process. Examples might include hiring, training, employee retention, production efficiency, routing, quality control, customer acquisition and customer service.

Private equity firms are pouring money into the landscape industry. What opportunities do these firms see that I am not pursuing?

Some private equity firms probably believe that bigger landscape companies are more efficient. I disagree. If that were true, BrightView would either be highly profitable or have most of the revenue in their markets.

Most private equity firms see an opportunity to increase management effectiveness by bringing an MBA

approach to the landscape company. This approach would include enterprise-grade software, regular reports and key performance indicators in regular meetings, and higher levels of accountability for the results that drive customer satisfaction and profitability.

What competitive advantages do owner-operated companies have over private equity-funded companies?

There are many. Here are two. First, customers and employees can speak directly to the owner. Second, owners can make decisions and adapt to changing local circumstances and opportunities faster.

What am I doing (or not doing) that is creating a lid for the company's growth and improvement in profitability?

In The Herring Group 2022 Benchmark Report, 58 out of the 151 participating companies had an operating profit margin (operating income divided by revenue) of less than 4 percent; 31 of those companies lost money. It was a similar story in our 2021 Benchmark Report.

In our experience, most companies in this category perform consistently year to year. In other words, the systems that the company's management has in place produce the results.



Those people and systems are a lid to improving profitability. Those companies need to do something differently if they want to improve profitability.

What will happen to our landscape company during the next downturn in the economy?


The last recession in the U.S. (other than COVID-19) occurred from December 2007 to June 2009 — about 15 years ago. Many of today's landscape companies were not even operating 15 years ago, which means many owners and managers have no context of the impact of a recession on their businesses.

Landscape companies with low operating profit margins will have to change rapidly to survive the downturn. Alternatively, the owners may have to invest cash or sell the companies for a very low price.

High levels of profitability help companies in a downturn in two ways. First, during years of high profitability, companies increase cash balances and reduce debt or both. Second, higher levels of profitability mean that a company's revenue can decrease (typically in a recession) and the company can still be profitable.

How can I become a destination employer where people want to work here and grow their careers here?

Turnover is a cost buried in an income statement in the form of lost opportunity and inefficiency. You see the ad costs and the recruiter costs but not the value of the knowledge walking out the door.

Now that you've read my questions, what questions are you asking? 



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.

How open book management leads to uncommon profit growth

My experience implementing open-book management (OBM) is that it helps good firms become great and helps underperforming firms up their game.

Keep in mind, it's not enough to just show the accounting books to your troops and expect magic to happen. On the contrary, opening your books can backfire (just like any other management tool) unless you roll it out thoughtfully and correctly. Here are some tips to help you implement OBM.

NINE TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTING OPEN-BOOK MANAGEMENT

1 Keep it slow and simple: Start by sharing basic information with a limited number of people who can have the maximum impact on the business. After your inner circle grasps the concepts and the numbers, you can ramp it up and show more of the financials or show the same numbers to more of your people or both.

2 Commitment: Be consistent week to week and month to month. Build habits and credibility. Set recurring dates and meetings when you plan to share and discuss numbers. Only start this when you know you can be consistent.

3 Accuracy matters: If your numbers are not accurate, you will lose credibility. Make sure you have your accrual accounting processes buttoned up. Start with your senior leaders and work out the bugs and errors before sharing further.

4 Yearlong plan: It can take a couple of years to get your larger team to understand what they are

looking at. Plan to be on this educational journey for the long haul.

5 Focus on what matters: Start with the data you want your team to focus on. Don't treat everything equally. If they don't manage it, don't show it initially. That or don't emphasize it. Help each team connect the dots to what they control.

6 Charts and graphs: Convey your numbers using pictorial representations to show how your operation is doing. Many people cannot grasp and interpret a list of numbers. However, everyone can understand visuals like a goal thermometer. If need be, hire someone to create and update visuals for each presentation.

7 Support: Identify the people and brainpower needed to put your numbers together and set up the handouts. If you don't have the resources internally, get outside support to follow through.

8 What's my number?: Your meetings should not consist of you (or your financial director) doing all the talking. Involve as many leaders as practical. People need to talk to internalize and process the results. Plan on the different leaders owning a piece of the results and the conversation. Then, make sure those


listening ask enough questions. Don't let it become a lecture.

9 What's in it for me? You must answer the question "What's in it for me?" for your team members. You want your team to feel that a benefit comes to them when the company wins. Ownership thinking takes over when people feel like they have skin in the game.

SKIN IN THE GAME

I see dramatic profit improvement in the landscape firms I work with, especially when they implement gain-sharing. For example, I have worked with Drost Landscape in Petoskey, Mich., for a while now, and their team gets increasingly better results each year. Last year they ended with well over 20 percent net profit and had the most profit sharing ever. This commitment from the Drost team has the employees stoked.

If you want to start but are not sure where to begin, have your leadership team read this article.

If you need help implementing OBM, reach out to me or consider joining my high-impact Leader's Edge peer group as we discuss and implement this. Go to [JeffreyScott.biz/PeerGroup](https://www.jeffreyscott.biz/PeerGroup) for more info. 



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LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT (ISSN 0894-1254) is published monthly by North Coast Media LLC, 1360 East 9th Street, 10th Floor, Cleveland, OH 44114. Subscription rates: For US, Canada and Mexico, 1 year \$64.95 print and digital; two years \$99.95 print and digital. All other countries, 1 year print and digital \$174.95; two years \$259.95. For air-expedited service, include an additional \$75 per order annually. Single copies (prepaid only) \$10 plus postage and handling. For current single copy or back issues, call 847-513-6030. Periodicals postage paid at Cleveland OH 44101-9603 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address change to Landscape Management, PO Box 2090, Skokie, IL 60076. Printed in the U.S.A.



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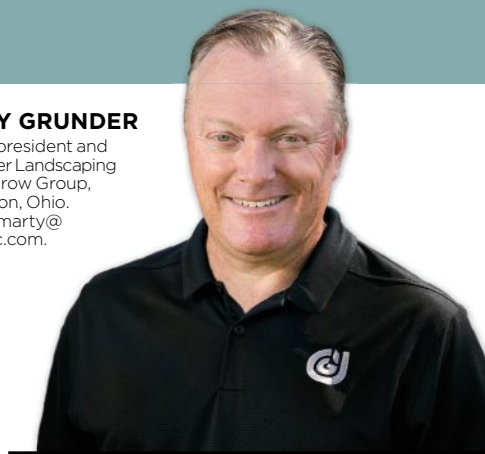
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GROW WITH GRUNDER

BY MARTY GRUNDER

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



How killing them with kindness benefits your operation and your team

Many of you know my friend Teddy Russell from his involvement with NALP. He took over Russell Landscape Group — started by his father Bill in 1987 — a commercial landscape powerhouse in Atlanta. Teddy officially joined the team in 2002 and overcame barriers and challenges to grow the firm into a company providing landscaping services to more than 1,400 properties and netting revenue north of \$62 million annually.

Every company in the country has a story behind its success, and Russell Landscaping is no different. So, what's Teddy's secret? We're going to explore exactly that at our annual Field Trip, held in partnership with the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) on June 6-7.

While I hope you'll join us there, I wanted to give you a preview of what we've learned from the team at Russell Landscape as we prepare for this great annual event.

TENSION ISN'T ALWAYS A BAD THING

Teddy talks about having positive tension in business and a constant pull between three facets of his company: sales and service, operations and administration. Russell Landscape does its best to ensure all three aspects are equally balanced, and none takes an unfair share of the team's focus.

At Grunder Landscaping Co., we've built our unique value proposition around the level of service we provide. While I believe in this model, and it's worked well for us, in recent years,

“At Grunder Landscaping Co., we've built our unique value proposition around the level of service we provide.”

we've realized that when we prioritize service too much, it can come at the cost of operations and administration. We provide a great level of service to our clients, but we're burning out our team or creating inefficiencies to do it.

We've made a conscious effort in the past three years to rebalance, and it's made our model more scalable as we've grown.

Keeping this tension and balancing these three interests allows the Russell Landscape team to successfully expand into new markets, add branches and keep its customers happy.

KINDNESS WILL GET YOU FAR


Teddy is one of the kindest people and leaders I've had the pleasure of knowing. This undoubtedly translates to his leadership style and how his entire team treats clients and one another. You gain so much respect and build trust by treating people with kindness. It pays dividends in what that allows you to accomplish.



The adage that you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar holds true. You get more done when you are kind and empathetic.

In 1978, a blizzard hit Dayton, Ohio, and my family was snowed in for days. The roads were impassable, and my dad, a civil engineer, tried to call his connections in the county to get them to prioritize our street for plowing. Truthfully, he threw a bit of a fit on the phone. Later, when Dad was out of earshot, my mom made her own phone call. She was empathetic and kind when talking to the operator. She just let them know that she had three young kids at home and we were starting to run low on food. The plows had our street cleared soon after. Mom let Dad believe his phone call got them there, but we all knew the truth.

Killing people with kindness works, folks. I'm excited to see how Teddy and his team do just that. If you'd like to join us this summer to see this team in action yourself, reserve your ticket at [GrowGroupInc.com/NALP-Field-Trip](https://www.growgroupinc.com/NALP-Field-Trip).

I hope to see you in Atlanta in June. I know there is so much we can learn from Teddy and his team, and I'm excited to give you all an inside look at this commercial landscape giant who somehow stayed so relatable, even with tremendous growth. 



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