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# SCREAMING INTO 2024!

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### Scaling Success: The Journey of Timberstone Contracting Group with LMN Software



#### Q: Can you introduce yourself and describe your role at Timberstone Contracting Group?

A: I'm the CEO and founder of Timberstone Contracting Group, which started in 2009. Initially, I handled most tasks myself, growing the company from a modest \$60,000 in revenue to about \$1.5 million by 2015. Today, I oversee our diverse operations, including A.M. Woodland Outdoor Design, Lotz Custom Carpentry, and Pro Edge Painting, with a team of around 120 employees.

#### Q: How did your company evolve, and what services do you offer?

A: Our journey began with lawn mowing and property maintenance, gradually expanding into landscape construction. We now offer a wide range of services, including commercial landscape bid build, residential design-build, snow removal, and landscape maintenance.

#### Q: What challenges did you face before implementing LMN, and how has it helped?

A: Before LMN, we struggled with understanding our business's financial aspects, such as bidding, budgeting, and profitability. LMN has been instrumental in clarifying these areas, allowing us to make informed decisions and set realistic goals.

#### Q: What has been the most significant impact of LMN on your business?



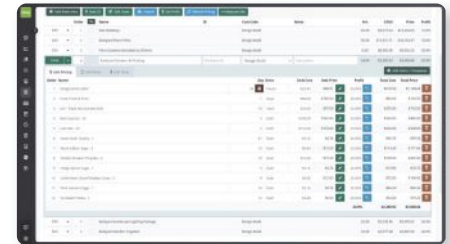
A: The biggest benefit of LMN is the profound understanding it has provided of our business finances. It has helped us in daily job management, overhead recovery, and overall smooth business operations.

#### Q: Can you describe the growth your company has experienced with LMN?

A: Since integrating LMN in 2015, we've seen substantial growth, from \$1.5 million to an anticipated \$20 million in 2024. LMN has facilitated this expansion by enabling effective goal setting, accountability, and progress tracking.

#### Q: How has LMN improved the efficiency of your crews?

A: LMN's time features, job planner, and crew notes have significantly aided our crews in staying on track



and maintaining efficiency on the job.

#### Q: Which LMN feature do you find indispensable?

A: The budgeting feature is crucial for us. It ensures accurate estimates by tying each job to our overall budget, making it essential for our operation.

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**Andy Migacz**  
Founder & CEO  
Timberstone Contracting Group  
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#### Q: Would you recommend LMN to other contractors? Why?

A: Absolutely. LMN has been a game-changer in understanding and growing our business. It provides essential financial insights and day-to-day operational clarity, which I believe is vital for any growing business.

#### Q: What has exceeded your expectations with LMN?

A: The speed and accuracy of LMN's estimating capabilities have been impressive. We can quickly

A: LMN has revolutionized our internal operations. With a clear organizational chart and defined responsibilities, our teams operate seamlessly.

#### Q: In conclusion, what final thoughts would you like to share about your experience with LMN?

A: LMN has been a transformative tool for Timberstone Contracting Group. It has not only streamlined our operations but also provided a deep understanding of our business's financial and operational aspects. This clarity has been instrumental in our growth and success. For anyone in the landscaping or construction industry looking to scale their business and improve efficiency, LMN is an invaluable asset. It's more than just software; it's a partner in growth and success.

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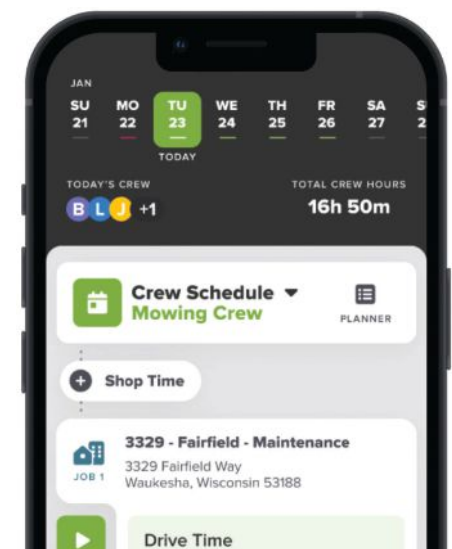
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create detailed and accurate proposals for large-scale projects, thanks to the well-structured templates and production rates.

#### Q: How has LMN contributed to the organizational structure and efficiency of your company?





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## HEADQUARTERS

1360 East 9th St., 10th Floor • Cleveland, OH 44114

## EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor-in-Chief **Seth Jones**

785/542-2627 | sjones@northcoastmedia.net

Associate Editor **Rob DiFranco**

216/675-6001 | rdi franco@northcoastmedia.net

Associate Editor **Brian Love**

216/675-6000 | blove@northcoastmedia.net

Art Director **Tracie Martinez**

216/280-6127 | tmartinez@northcoastmedia.net

Graphic Designer **Courtney Townsend**

216/363-7931 | ctownsend@northcoastmedia.net

Graphic Designer **Kendra Taylor**

216/706-3780 | ktaylor@northcoastmedia.net

Senior Digital Media Manager **Danielle Pesta**

216/363-7928 | dpesta@northcoastmedia.net

Senior Digital Specialist **Joey Ciccolini**

216/363-7925 | jciccolini@northcoastmedia.net

## ADVERTISING STAFF

Group Publisher **Bill Roddy**

216/706-3758 | broddy@northcoastmedia.net

Associate Publisher **Craig MacGregor**

216/706-3787 | cmacgregor@northcoastmedia.net

Eastern Regional Sales Manager **Dan Hannan**

216/363-7937 | dhannan@northcoastmedia.net

Western Regional Sales Manager **Jake Goodman**

216/363-7923 | jgoodman@northcoastmedia.net

Account Executive **Nader Hassen**

216/363-7932 | nhassen@northcoastmedia.net

Account Manager **Chloe Scoular**

216/363-7929 | cscoular@northcoastmedia.net

## BUSINESS STAFF

Operations Manager **Petra Turko**

216/706-3768 | pturko@northcoastmedia.net

Events Manager **Allison Blong**

216/363-7936 | ablong@northcoastmedia.net

Manager, Production Services **Karen Lenzen**

216/978-3144 | klenzen@northcoastmedia.net

Senior Audience Development Manager

**Antoinette Sanchez-Perkins**

216/706-3737 | asanchez-perkins@northcoastmedia.net

Audience Marketing Manager **Hillary Blaser**

216/440-0411 | hblaser@northcoastmedia.net

## MARKETING/MAGAZINE SERVICES

Reprints & Permissions **Wright's Reprints**

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List Rental **Brahm Schenkman**

The Information Refinery, Inc

800/529-9020 | bschenkman@inforefinery.com

Subscriber, Customer Service

847/513-6030 | landscapemgmt@omeda.com

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## CORPORATE OFFICERS

President & CEO **Kevin Stoltman**

216/706-3740 | kstoltman@northcoastmedia.net

VP, Finance & Operations **Steve Galperin**

216/706-3705 | sgalperin@northcoastmedia.net

VP, Marketing **Michelle Mitchell**

216/363-7922 | mmitchell@northcoastmedia.net

VP, Graphic Design & Production **Pete Seltzer**

216/706-3737 | pseltzer@northcoastmedia.net

VP, Content **Marty Whitford**

216/706-3766 | mwhitford@northcoastmedia.net

Editorial Director **Seth Jones**

785/542-2627 | sjones@northcoastmedia.net

Editorial Director **Kevin Yanik**

216/706-3724 | kyanik@northcoastmedia.net



## Be featured in Landscape Management

We're always looking for great stories from our readers. Has your company recently completed an interesting project, have a new exciting partnership or made a new acquisition? We want to hear about it.

Email Editor-in-Chief Seth Jones at [sjones@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:sjones@northcoastmedia.net) for more information and to let us know what's up!

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**SETH JONES**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Contact Jones at 785-542-2627,  
sjones@northcoastmedia.net or  
via Twitter @sethajones.



## My keys for a great 2024

**S**ince October I've been asking sources for the magazine, 'What is your key to get 2024 off on the right foot?' This is a magazine for businesspeople and, internally, we thought this could make for a compelling cover story and get our own year off on the right foot.

Here at my fingertips, I have about 50 different sources telling me what they saw as the key to starting off 2024 strong. The answers were quite diverse. As you can imagine, many were about overcoming labor difficulties. A lot of landscape and lawn care business owners told me they need to better organize their systems to get the job done each day. Improving marketing efforts and educating homeowners came up more often than I expected.

My story on starting 2024 off right begins on page 12. The story takes some twists and turns but includes a diverse cast of sources speaking on a variety of topics. Hopefully, some of the advice in that story can help you as we all get ready for what is sure to be a productive, busy, and, at times, challenging year.

I'll play along with our own issue theme and tell you a few things I want to do here at *Landscape Management* to help us continue our upward trajectory as the premier publication covering the industry.

**Participate on LinkedIn more.** Whenever I need to take a mental break from work, my go-to social media is X, formerly known as Twitter. In recent months I feel like that platform has become more random with less content

**“Here at my fingertips, I have about 50 different sources telling me what they saw as the key to starting off 2024 strong. The answers were quite diverse.”**

that I find useful. Meanwhile, when I visit LinkedIn, I see more thoughtful content. I learn about the people in my network and the good work they're doing. Maybe this is comparable to just growing out of Saturday morning cartoons in favor of the news, but I hope you see me on LinkedIn more in 2024, and I hope to see you and your noteworthy business stories there too.

**Make more meaningful connections.** I meet a lot of people each year, particularly during trade shows and industry events. But I'm hopeful to make more meaningful connections in 2024. There is strength in numbers, but a stack of business cards means very little if that stack doesn't result in sources I can trust and rely on. I'll do this by slowing down, listening (hopefully over a meal or a drink) and less running from place to place, with a fear of missing out. Be present, Seth.

**Speak at industry events.** I've raised my hand a couple of times and soon I think I'll be able to take the stage at a few of our industry events for longer than 30 seconds. What will I speak about? Well, you'll have to be there to find out.

**Stop to take the photo.** One thing I've learned about my new iPhone 13 is that what it lacks in cell service (my signal is lousy out here in the country) it makes up for with the camera. In fact, my iPhone 13 might be more camera than phone. But it takes amazing photos and videos that reproduce beautifully in the magazine and on our YouTube channel. Now I just need to remind myself that, while I'm slowing down at these industry events to make more meaningful connections, I'll need to pull out the iPhone 13 to commemorate the moment with a couple of good pictures.

**See more live music.** OK, this one doesn't fit in as a goal for the magazine, but as a goal for me personally. Rarely do I regret spending money on seeing a band I enjoy. I also love traveling to a different city to see a great show, as it adds to the experience when I'm in unfamiliar territory and at a venue I've never visited before.

But maybe I can still make that one about the magazine. Who knows? Maybe some *LM* readers and I can find an excuse to see a show at the new Las Vegas Sphere. The Grow Group, McFarlin Stanford, Envisor Consulting, Jeffrey Scott ... I think someone needs to incorporate this idea into a peer group meeting agenda.

Whatever steps you're taking, let's make 2024 a year for the record books. I'll see you out in the field soon. 📷



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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](https://LandscapeManagement.net).

## What is one change you plan to implement in 2024 to either continue growth or help your business grow?

**“We hired two marketing and PR gurus in-house and let our 20-year marketing company go. We also got a new outside marketing company to ensure our lead generation picks up.”**



### 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.

**“We have hired our first employee experience director. This will allow us to further our mission to be the best landscape employer in Nebraska!”**



**“We are going to keep hustling and making our own luck by prospecting and selling work. We teach our clients at the Grow Group the same mentality. No excuses!”**



**“Working more closely with suppliers is allowing us to further expand our reach without overextending resources. Great partners fuel great businesses and our focus in 2024 is to be in better alignment with our existing and new colleagues to help everyone grow.”**



**“The biggest need I see is for companies to relearn and retune how they sell; from the screening process to the sales and upselling process. Don’t take leads and clients for granted, and don’t rely on demand outstripping supply.”**



**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 Don't go chasing waterfalls** Jake Goodman (left), *Landscape Management's* western regional sales manager, with Dan Hymas, president of Smart Rain, in front of Smart Rain's massive water feature in their booth at the Irrigation Show in San Antonio.



**2 Casa Rio run** The Underhill International crew were kind enough to let *LM* Editor-in-Chief Seth Jones (front) choose his favorite restaurant on the River Walk, Casa Rio, for dinner. Clockwise from Jones are Tom Burke, Jason Schwartz, Goodman, Ken Newcomb, Austin Underhill and Underhill International President Ed Underhill.



**3 A chance encounter on the River Walk** At the Irrigation Association Conference and Show Jones bumped into (left to right) Selena Sutton-Jensen of Sutton Irrigation; Carmen Magro, Ph.D., CGCS, of Pogo / Stevens Water Monitoring Systems; and Scott Sutton of Sutton Irrigation, Las Vegas, Nev.



**4 Quality time with Quali-Pro** The *Landscape Management* team, along with its sister publications *Golfdom* and *Pest Management Professional (PMP)*, traveled to Houston to visit the team at Quali-Pro. From left to right are: Marty Whitford, *PMP*; Jones; Mayra Castorina, Quali-Pro; Kevin Stoltman, North Coast Media; Bill Roddy, publisher, *LM*; Erica Cardenas, Quali-Pro; Sam Pass, Quali-Pro; Mike Joyce, *PMP*; Craig MacGregor, publisher, *Golfdom*; and Tim Walker, Quali-Pro.

PHOTOS: LM STAFF

**5 How 'bout those Chiefs?** Jones, a Chiefs superfan, was thrilled to nab a selfie with Travis Kelce, tight end for the Kansas City Chiefs, while out on the golf course.







## Making ‘big business gains’ at the 2023 Irrigation Show

The Irrigation Show & Education Week returned to San Antonio, offering networking opportunities for pros nationwide.

Irrigation professionals from around the nation visited San Antonio to see new and cutting-edge tech in the irrigation industry **BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

**T**he 2023 Irrigation Show & Education Week took place Nov. 27-Dec. 1 in San Antonio and featured 45 new products for the industry, dozens of educational seminars and plenty of opportunities to network with fellow irrigation professionals.

Mark Stuhlsatz, vice president of regional operations for Ryan Lawn & Tree, Merriam, Kan., said he attends the show about every other year. He described this year’s event as “very good” and said the show is invaluable

to the success of Ryan Lawn & Tree.

“Most of the big business gains we’ve made in the last 15 years come from products that we learned about at this show, almost all of them,” Stuhlsatz said. “It’s very educational and I’ve seen a lot of new products.”

Stuhlsatz told *Landscape Management* one of the most impressive products he saw this year was the new GeoRipper from MiniTrencher. The GeoRipper has a two-stroke engine developed specifically to handle the rigors of digging into the earth. (Keep

an eye on LM’s YouTube channel for a video featuring the GeoRipper.)

Simon Dirazonian, national sales manager for MiniTrencher was happy to hear Stuhlsatz’s review and said the MiniTrencher booth had steady traffic at the 2023 Irrigation Show.

“It’s a great show, a great time to network with people, meet new friends and see old friends and show them what’s good and what can make their jobs easier,” Dirazonian said.

### SEEING AND BEING SEEN

This was the first Irrigation Show for Leilanny Bujanda, a project engineer for Rain Bird. She said a highlight for her was attending many of the educational seminars at the show,



including the “Next Year is Now: 7 Key Industry Trends for 2024” panel.

“Knowing other people that do what you do — that work around the same area as you do is really important. It’s good to connect with people and understand other points of view on the same stuff,” she said. “I also got to see a bunch of products and companies.”

Dan Hymas, president of Smart Rain, echoed Bujanda’s sentiments. Smart Rain announced its new soil sensor, which will be released in 2024. It’s completely wireless with about a mile of line-of-sight communication. Rather than one point of moisture reading, it does two levels and delivers pH reading and temperature. The company expects the battery to last about eight years.

“For us (the Irrigation Show) is about recognition, wanting people to know who we are because we are kind of the new guys,” Hymas said. “We want people to know who we are and that we’re here to stay.”

During the IA General Session, Irrigation Association CEO Natasha Rankin thanked the attendees for their dedication to the industry and the association.

“I want to thank you for showing up and opting in. Each of you and your companies represent what’s best about the industry,” Rankin said. “Walking the show floor and seeing your products and the solutions you champion, visiting with you during our networking events, recognizing the incredible knowledge and passion you bring to ensuring the long-term sustainability of our planet’s water and natural resources, it’s a reminder of the incredible honor I have in representing you and the essential role that the Irrigation Association plays in unifying our voices.”

The 2024 Irrigation Show & Education Week takes place Nov. 4-8 in Long Beach, Calif. 📍



Attendees say educational sessions were a highlight of the 2023 Irrigation Show.

## MARIANI ADDS COLORADO BUSINESS TO PREMIER GROUP

Mariani Premier Group added Colorado-based Rocky Mountain Custom Landscapes to its family of companies.

Bobby Head and Jason Ulberg founded Rocky Mountain Custom Landscapes in 2000. Headquartered in the Vail region with two additional offices in Denver and Aspen, the company offers a variety of landscaping solutions, including landscape design, installation, maintenance services, water features and fencing.

“We are thrilled to welcome such a respected company to the Mariani family,” said Mariani Premier Group Chairman Frank Mariani. “I know we’ll be enriched by Rocky Mountain Custom Landscapes’ industry expertise and will gain much from what their team brings to the table.”

Companies that join the Mariani Premier Group continue to operate under their own brands, with decision-making at the local level. The acquisition marks the 16th company acquired by Mariani as part of its national expansion strategy.

## SavATree expands into two new states

SavATree, No. 7 on the 2023 *LM150* list, merged with Arborscapes, Mr. Amoto Lawn & Tree Service and Sussex Tree. The new partnerships will bring SavATree to Nebraska and North Carolina for the first time, expanding the company’s service area to 34 states throughout the U.S.

“Our vision at SavATree is to cultivate a national team where expertise, resources and passion for the environment are shared and valued,” said Carmine Schiavone, CEO of SavATree. “Partnering with Arborscapes, Mr. Amoto and Sussex Tree exemplifies the magic we create together — it’s an environment where companies thrive, cultures blend and the future is greener.”

Arborscapes has two decades of experience in Charlotte, N.C., providing plant health care services, landscape implementation, design and maintenance. Jason Tebben and Nathan Morrison founded the company. The duo say their entrepreneurial path began when they were kids as classmates in school.

Mr. Amoto Lawn & Tree Service has provided lawn and tree care services for more than three and a half decades in the Lincoln, Neb., area. Owners Rob Boyd, Matt Boyd, and Matt Miller took over the company in 1996.

Sussex Tree, with two locations in Bridgeville and Lewes, Del., offers tree care, plant health care, irrigation, landscaping and crane services. The father-son team of Jeffrey Meredith Sr. and Jeffrey Meredith Jr. run the company.







# HOW TO CRUSH

## 2024

## COMPLETELY

**We asked and they told us:  
industry professionals' keys  
to starting off 2024 right**

BY SETH JONES | *LM* EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
AND JOEY CICCOLINI | *LM* DIGITAL EDITOR

**New Year's resolutions? You won't find any here. What you will find is some sage advice from a myriad of industry experts — landscape and lawn care professionals, industry partners and our own group of consultants.**

**We asked everyone the same question: What will it take to get your 2024 started off on the right foot? This is what they told us.**



Gabriel Compagna, owner of Unbroken Lawn Care in Simpsonville, S.C., test drives an Exmark mower at Equip Exposition. His company's slogan is "Stand firm. Hold fast. Stay free."

PHOTO: KRECH/HIGDON PHOTOGRAPHY;  
ILLUSTRATION: PHOTOTECHNO/DIGITALVISION VECTORS/GETTY IMAGES

Continued from page 13

## Planning ahead

A longtime *LM* columnist, Ken Thomas, a principal with Envisor Consulting, has been coaching

lawn care and landscape professionals for a dozen years. He's been in the industry for 30 years, having built and sold three successful landscape companies.

With the new year underway, Thomas says now is the time to make the tactical plan.

"If you haven't already completed your tactical plan for 2024, you need to get it done here in the first quarter," Thomas says. "It lays out your sales goals, your margin goals and your key initiatives for the year. It sets a timeline and accountabilities for who is going to hit those."

Annual planning is the most important thing, Thomas says. He has all his clients read "Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business" by Gino Wickman and asks his clients where they want to be in one year, three years and 10 years.

"Our vision is multidimensional, but we need to narrow it down to a bullseye," Thomas adds.

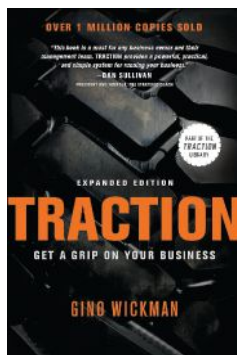
Mike McCarron, owner of Image Works Landscape Management in Fairfax Station, Va., says he thinks 2024 is going to be "pretty decent." If gas prices can stay down and interest rates can calm down, it will alleviate clients' anxieties, he says.

He has two bits of advice for companies to get 2024 started off right.

"First, clean up your books, clean up all your accounting and get a real grip on where any money leaks are, or loss leaders," McCarron says. "Second, measure everything within your operation. Get all your production standards for all your different pieces of equipment. Get all your production stan-

**"FIRST, CLEAN UP YOUR BOOKS, CLEAN UP ALL YOUR ACCOUNTING AND GET A REAL GRIP ON WHERE ANY MONEY LEAKS ARE, OR LOSS LEADERS"**

Mike McCarron



**TIP:** Ken Thomas has all his clients read "Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business" by Gino Wickman and asks his clients where they want to be in one year, three years and 10 years.

dards for flat, semi-rough and really rough terrain, so when you're bidding steep hills and storm drains, it's completely different from bidding a flat, wide-open area. Everybody uses software that measures, but they don't realize that the terrain is so different, what you're measuring from the sky it isn't the same as what is going on on the ground. It could throw you off 20, 25 percent."

## The right direction

Chris Stoudt, owner of Stout Lawn Care, Pottstown, Pa., has a goal of growing slow and steady in 2024. It's a method that has worked for him

in the past, and he advises others in the industry that there's nothing wrong with growing slowly.

"Our biggest key to success in 2023 was getting the employees that we needed to cover all the services that we wanted to get done in a timely manner. Last year was a perfect example of that," he says.

"We started on time and ended on time with a very productive year. In 2024, we definitely want to continue steady growth. We like to grow slow, mean and lean. That's our business plan. We don't really like to blow up and be fighting to get the services done in a timely manner. We like to grow nice and slow and with great customers and clients. That's what we're going for in 2024. Again, continued slow, steady and lean growth."

Mitchell O'Banion, franchise owner of GrassRoots Turf in Madison, Miss., echoes Stoudt's thoughts.

"Find the right people and put them in the right place so you can grow and serve your customers," he says. "We want to continue steady growth. We've grown at a rapid pace. I want to slow the growth down and manage it a little differently — a little slower."

Todd Christianson, president of Titan in Anchorage, Alaska, says his business has "exploded" and he wants to control his growth.



Ken Thomas



Chris Stoudt



Mitchell O'Banion







Todd Christianson

His key, he believes, is to spend some time on his organizational chart for the management team.

"It's time now to reel it in and get everyone in their key positions. As you grow, your organizational chart switches," he says. "We run two different types of businesses. We have our summer book of business and our winter book of business. It's time to look at hiring someone to run the summer book and someone to run the winter book."

One tip John Amarosa, COO at Pine Lake Nursery and Landscape in Tampa Bay, Fla., offers is to schedule appointments on your calendar with your business leaders each quarter. Meet and be honest about where the company is going.

"Know where you stand. Every company, every owner/operator, every large company and everyone in between, have certain key areas, call them key performance indicators or whatever you like.



John Amarosa

Know where you are, then plan," he says. "Where do you want to go? The first thing I think about is, I can see where I want to be by January 2025. What is the low-hanging fruit? What is the easiest thing I can do and tackle it first. Not because it's easy, but because I know that's where I can gain the most ground. Stop, get your key people around a table for an afternoon and plan, starting with the low-hanging fruit."

Peter Haakon, co-founder of Nuleaf Lawn Care, Lorton, Va., says it is important for all employees be on the same page. All of his employees have personal and professional financial goals, which helps create a winning culture.

*Continued on page 18*



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Peter Haakon

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2024

## Industry partners offer their best advice

**They don't own a landscape or lawn care company — but they know a lot of people who do**

“I think 2024 will be the year of smoothing out. There was so much turbulence over the last few years between COVID, supply chain issues, pricing and all those different pressures that everybody felt. I think in 2023 things have settled down a lot, but I still think there was a lot of uncertainty out there in the market. I think 2024 is the year that everyone can truly plan, get out there and then execute.”

— *Allen Hollen, territory manager, The Andersons*



“Begin the year by crafting a concise mission statement and establishing specific goals to clarify expected results for revenue, employee growth, enhanced customer experience, safety, quality and efficiency. After setting these objectives, ensure the entire company comprehends both the goals and the strategies to ensure execution. Investing in comprehensive staff training is crucial; too often, business owners introduce new systems and processes without adequately training their staff, hindering rather than enhancing efficiency — it's imperative that employees understand the purpose and functioning of these systems for meaningful improvement.”

— *Mark Bradley, CEO, Landscape Management Network*



“Based on the conversations that we've had with people in the industry, I'd say the biggest thing is finding the right help and maintaining the right help. The biggest thing we see from everybody is labor. It's all been, 'Supply is getting back to where it should be, (and the) cost of everything is decent enough. It's just finding the right guy.' They're still out there; it's just a matter of finding them and then keeping them on their staff.”

— *Caleb Myers, sales representative, Steel Green Manufacturing*





“From what we’re seeing and the conversations with our customers, I think the biggest key to success for the industry in 2024 is learning how to be more effective with the dollars you have. Inflation is obviously hitting everywhere and for these guys to produce the same results and keep their profit margins intact, I think it’s going to be the key for the whole green industry in 2024. To be able to do the same job with less money while keeping their profit margins there.”

— Jeff Rampino, Florida Territory Manager, Quali-Pro



“I think one of the biggest things is the labor shortage problem. Through planning and presentation of your company, you can entice better talent into your organization and that’s going to make the biggest difference going forward.”

— John Perry, CEO and president, Greene County Fertilizer Co.



“There’s no more effective way to start a year than to paint some crystal-clear targets for the end of the year that you want to hit. For most companies, these are things like sales goals, profitability goals, hiring plans and equipment plans. Put it all together and you’re building your company an operating budget that you can use to guide you all year in making sure you achieve the results you set out to achieve at the beginning of the year. So having clear targets is really important.

But just as important is having a few key metrics that tell you whether you are trending toward those targets or not. Numbers like revenue earned per man-hour are really simple ways of measuring both estimates and actual jobs to ensure that things are on track toward hitting your goals.”

— Mike Lysecki, CTO and co-founder, Landscape Management Network

“Acquiring and keeping good people. Personnel is always the issue in anything, whether it’s a manufacturer, distributor or lawn care company, it’s always No. 1. If you have good people, everything will fall into place.”

— Russ Mitchell, director, Albaugh Specialty Products



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# 2024

Continued from page 15

"We want to make sure everyone's moving in the right direction and following through with our core values," Haakon says.

## A unique crossroads

Landscape Management Network (LMN) is one of the industry's leading business management programs. Since the company launched in 2009, its customers have budgeted more than \$125 billion, priced over \$25 billion in design/build, maintenance and snow contracts and recorded 37 million clock-ins.

The company's co-founder and Chief Technical Officer, Mike Lysecki, says he foresees 2024 as an interesting year for the green industry. He predicts strong growth in the service side of the industry. The design and build side, which is more of a luxury than a need, is where he predicts interesting dynamics are going to happen.

**TIP:** "Paint some crystal-clear targets for the end of the year that you want to hit," says Mike Lysecki.



Mike Lysecki

"2023 still had a lot of carry-over work from times when interest rates were extremely affordable and gave people the purchasing power to do bigger and better things with their outdoor environments than at literally any other time in the history of humankind," Lysecki says. "But now, as money gets tighter, it will necessitate that green industry companies drive continued growth through efficient work habits and not necessarily because they're the only contractor willing to say 'yes' to a job. Becoming more efficient at what you do, especially in the construction side of the business, will be integral to maintaining growth and profitability over the next few years since the supply of money is going to be a bit tighter than we've seen in the last couple of years."

Whatever the economic forecast is for 2024, Envisor's Thomas says this is a good time to be in the lawn care and landscape industry, and suggests everyone take full advantage.

"We're in a unique crossroads, our industry, where private equity has increased the attention and the professionalism of our industry," Thomas says. "We're a much more sophisticated industry than we were 20 years ago. Business owners are required to be more business savvy in order to be competitive and successful. We've raised the bar. Everything points in the right direction for a great future for our industry." 📌



## BUSINESS BOOSTERS

# Why communication with customers is key to ornamental success

**Landscape experts offer proven strategies to make intelligent ornamental choices while satisfying client expectations** BY MIKE ZAWACKI | LM CONTRIBUTOR

**O**pen dialogue is paramount in selecting the ideal ornamentals for residential and commercial landscapes. Savvy contractors have honed their strategies for guiding clients toward choices that not only enhance their properties for the long term but also complement the client's aesthetic vision.

**More is better.** Clients often believe planting one or two flowering shrubs will significantly improve a space. They may assume a single tree they admired at the local garden center will transform their landscape, or a few bushes will suffice to populate a barren landscape.

Instead, it's prudent to direct them to adopt a bold planting scheme utilizing large quantities of a few plants to make a dramatic impact or achieve a desired aesthetic, says Chad Oberson, president of Cincinnati-based Oberson's Nursery and Landscapes. Oberson's service portfolio is around 50 percent maintenance, 30 percent snow and ice management and 20 percent landscape construction.

"One of the first things I try to communicate when working with a client is the value in mass plantings, and that a tree here or a bush there isn't practical," he says. "I encourage them to look at really well-designed landscapes and notice that it's not a lot of different (plant) material, rather a lot of the same material."

A large commercial building or a large residential home can visually overpower a landscape, Oberson adds.

Employing consistent ornamental representation throughout the landscape provides much-needed balance.

"I can do a big, mass planting of knockout roses, and that'll give you a lot of color and visual appeal," he says. "And I can fill a border up with a bunch of boxwoods, which will look really nice. I try not to make a sales pitch to the client (about plant variety); rather, I advise them to keep it simple and to plant it up. More is better."

**Plant prudent choices.** When choosing appropriate plant material for a space, client conversations, whether commercial or residential, must include establishing realistic expectations based on what the environment will support and sustain, says Eric

Brown, director of agronomy at Orlando-based Massey Services. Lawn, tree and shrub care comprise about 90 percent of Massey's service portfolio, with the remainder a mix of installation and landscape renovation work.

Initially, clients are often enamored with plant materials that

will provide intense colors or contribute a unique or exotic presentation, Brown says. However, he says the space in question usually can't support that type of plant life, or it won't survive over the long term.

"You can certainly plant anything anywhere, but often that's not sustainable, and it'll be a waste of (the client's) money over the long term," Brown says. "They need to choose the right plant palette for the space, so I encourage clients to pick plants that will do well with the

native soil type and climate conditions where they'll be planted. And native plants often fill those requirements."


In addition, it's essential to discuss with clients how the plants will grow over time and whether they may quickly outgrow their space. Another issue to review is whether the sunlight will meet or overpower the plant's needs. Will plants under consideration require special nutritional and irrigation needs? Or is the client willing to devote the time, care and attention to high-maintenance ornamentals?

"It takes vision for clients to see the future," Brown says. "Mother Nature does all of the heavy lifting, so you need to encourage clients to choose the right materials for the specific location."

**Honest options.** Whether a contractor is dealing with a client with a specific ornamental vision or a customer who doesn't know a perennial from an annual, education is an important component of a landscaper's dialogue.

"Communicate what you know about the site with your client," says Sarah Pitcher, a landscape designer with Davis Landscape, a full-service landscape design, build and maintenance company based in Lisbon, Maine. "Then, present them with a list of the plant materials, trees and shrubs appropriate for their space. It'll help them narrow down their choices."

She adds that it's a contractor's responsibility to provide the knowledge and background the average homeowner wouldn't have about plant choices.

"Even though they may want that specific tree, they also want you to tell them that it's not a good idea, that it won't work, but 'Here's an option that accomplishes the same aesthetic goal and will work in that habitat,'" she says. 



Chad Oberson

Mike Zawacki is a freelance writer with nearly two decades of experience covering various aspects of the green industry.

## MAINTENANCE SHOP

# Best practices to keep your spray tanks clean

Experts share their top tips for keeping spray tanks clean

BY BRIAN LOVE  
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**W**hether it is a truck-mounted sprayer meant for large-scale jobs or a sprayer-spreader for those on the smaller side of things, all lawn care operators (LCOs) must take care of their sprayer tanks.

Donny Pitts, operations manager at Graham Spray Equipment, and Caleb Myers, manufacturer representation for Steel Green Manufacturing, explain the necessary steps to ensure your spray tanks are as clean as can be.

## THE WHY

Tanks that aren't regularly maintained and cleaned suffer from leftover residue from previous applications, Myers says. These leftovers can lead to cross-contamination and, potentially, serious turf damage.

Additionally, accessories like hoses, nozzles and even the tank itself can be in danger if you don't follow proper cleaning procedures.

"Too much buildup and residue over time can also lead to issues in suction or returns lines," Myers adds. "That buildup could interrupt flow and rates. In addition, not taking the proper maintenance can eventually lead to damage in the tank itself over a long period."

## THE HOW

Pitts likes to keep things simple when it comes to cleaning tanks. He recom-

mends a combination of dish soap and water. He recommends crew members wash the tanks at least once a week, though he prefers washing them daily.

Along with washing, crews will need to brush them down for a true clean, especially on fiberglass tanks. To remove stains, Pitts says crews can use oxalic acid or an aluminum acid.

**“Too much buildup and residue over time can also lead to issues in suction or returns lines.”**

—CALEB MYERS

Steel Green's spreader-sprayers have specific adjustments meant to help make it easier for operators to clean out the tanks from the inside, Myers adds. Two adjustments he points out are easily removable suction lines and the ability for LCOs to drain from the bottom of the tank.

Some products or combinations "gum up" lines easier than others, Myers says, meaning LCOs should be extra vigilant with cleaning when utilizing those products.

"Some guys will mix types of granular into their tanks and try to spray it," he says. "Those can create problems.

So that's why we tell everybody that you need to clean your tanks as often as possible to avoid any complications."

## MISTAKES TO AVOID

There are plenty of potential tripping points for LCOs when it comes to cleaning their spray tanks. But Myers says that the most common is the lack of a schedule. He warns that, especially during the summer months when the hours are long and the days are hot, some operators will only give the tanks a quick rinse before continuing to operate them.

"Cleaning the tank is really not a difficult process," he says. "It's about making sure you're committed and repetitive with your cleaning."

Pitts adds that to keep your entire spray rig clean, it's crucial to know what products you're using, how they may interact and how they could affect other facets of the rig — the exterior surfaces included.

"When it comes to cleaning your tank, a big thing that you want to do is keep all of your fertilizers, harsh chemicals or any additional products from sitting on the bed or frame of the trucks," he says. "You don't want to deal with those things corroding or rusting away at the truck." 🚚

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## TIPSHEET

# Top tips to extend root growth

## How organic fertilizers and biostimulants boost plant health

BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

To help soil break down nutrients and bring root systems back to life, many professionals are taking an environmentally friendly approach to lawn care by incorporating organic fertilizers and biostimulants.

### INCREASE APPLICATION RATE

These products enhance the nutrition-use efficiency, combat environmental stresses and promote root health, says Steve Fent, key account executive of turf and horticulture at Hello Nature in Ovid, Mich. The timing for applying these products isn't as important as with conventional chemicals, and the benefits are broad for both plants and turf.

"Biological products make plants healthier to fight off insects, diseases, pests and drought," Fent says. "The long-lasting effects that you get with the turf are night and day."

Organic fertilizers are made with products like poultry, turkey, fish,

vegetable extract and seaweed, Fent says. Since organic fertilizers have less nitrogen than traditional synthetic fertilizers, operators will need to increase their rate per acre to ensure they are applying enough.

"With most natural products, you can't over-apply them," Fent says. "The biggest mistake I see is guys end up not putting enough product out and then wonder why it didn't green up. You can't treat it like conventional fertilizer."

Biostimulants are composed of materials like amino acids, peptides, biochars or humic substances and can supplement other fertilizers. These also can be used with herbicides, fungicides, biocontrols, insecticides and growth regulators.

During about the first six months, all of the action from the biostimulant is going on below ground to build up the roots, Fent says. The next year of using these products is when operators will see the effect on the turf and plants, if not sooner.

"Biostimulants will help alleviate the stress to the plant because you have stronger roots," Fent says. "The turf will be able to better handle floods, droughts and other stresses."

Fent encourages lawn care operators to do their research on products before incorporating them into their lineup. They should check the labels to review the ingredients and find out if the manufacturer tests its products.

"Make sure you're getting what you're paying for. There's a difference in the quality and ingredients and how it performs," Fent says. "The results are a direct

correlation of the product and if it's made correctly."

### ACHIEVE TURF'S POTENTIAL

Once operators incorporate a good biostimulant product into their lineup, they'll begin seeing a reduction in the amount of traditional nitrogen fertilizer that's needed, says John Perry, president of Greene County Fertilizer Co. Biostimulants also help address the overall health of the lawn.

"It's vitally important to expand the root zones," Perry says. "Operators need to do anything they can to help drought-damaged lawns."

Perry recommends a biostimulant product that combines humic acid, fulvic acid and sea kelp because of the combined bioactivity. This combo is applied with conventional fertilizer when the turf's natural growth cycle is at its peak: spring for cool-season turf and summer for warm-season turf.

"The chemistry together gets a better plant response," he says. "What we love about it is that it's extremely low cost in any lawn care budget, and it can extend the length of green time with traditional nitrogen sources."

It enhances the roots, especially in drought areas, extends nitrogen release rates, adds oxygen to the soil profile and makes the turf thicker and greener, Perry says.

"Customers will see that their turf looks healthier, and operators will see callbacks become less," Perry says. "You're just making the most out of the turf's potential." 📌

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.



John Perry



### IN ACTION

Both had the grower standard applied, and the plant on the left was also treated with the biostimulant Stimtide.





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## TURF DISEASE ID + CONTROL

### What you need to know about pink snow mold

Experts share how pink snow mold can wreak havoc on turfgrass **BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR**

**L**awn care operators (LCOs) in prone areas need to take steps to prevent pink snow mold. Here's what the experts told us.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Pink snow mold (*Microdochium patch*) is one of the diseases LCOs will notice first in the spring, though it can occur anytime temperatures are 30 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit, says Aaron Ha-

thaway, technical services manager for turf and ornamentals, Nufarm.

"It can easily be confused with gray snow mold at this point, but if there was never any snow cover, turf managers can be sure it isn't gray snow mold, as pink snow mold doesn't need snow cover to develop," Hathaway says.

Pink snow mold rarely causes more than aesthetic issues; turfgrass usually recovers as temperatures and sunlight increase. However, it can be a destruc-

tive disease in areas like the Pacific Northwest in the winter when there are few other pathogens to compete with, Hathaway says.

Pink snow mold typically attacks bluegrasses, fescues and ryegrasses. Bentgrasses are the most susceptible type of turfgrass.

In extreme situations, LCOs can apply fungicides before snowfall — though turf dormancy is often enough to knock down the pathogen, Hathaway says. Even if there are foliar symptoms after winter, that doesn't mean the turf is dead.

#### PREVENT DEFENSE

Experts say the best way to control snow mold are preventive applications of fungicides in the fall.



PHOTO: SYNGENTA

  
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“Once growth resumes, moderate levels of nitrogen can help to push growth and recovery,” Hathaway says.

### CULTURAL PRACTICES

Symptoms of pink snow mold include circular to irregularly shaped patches of pink or salmon-colored fungal growth on the lawn, says Ben Pease, Ph.D., turfgrass agronomist for The Andersons plant nutrient group. The patch areas can range from a few inches to several feet in diameter and may have a slimy or matted appearance.

Cultural practices to prevent snow mold include mowing at the optimal height for the turf species, avoiding excessive nitrogen applications in the fall, using a slow-release fertilizer during the growing season, irrigating in the morning, using thatch-reduction products like humic acid and performing core aeration on a yearly or twice-yearly basis, Pease says.

If there’s damage from pink snow mold, operators should gently rake the matted areas to encourage air movement. “Overseed the affected area with disease-resistant turfgrass cultivars,” Pease says. “Apply slow-release granular fertility to help encourage regrowth of unaffected areas or seedlings.”

### SNOW MOLD DIFFERENCES

The best way to reduce or prevent damage from pink snow mold is to plan for fungicide applications in the fall after mowing has ceased but before there’s permanent snowfall, says Matt Giese, technical field manager, Syngenta. Snow mold can be a challenge to manage because visible symptoms are generally not observed until spring melting begins.

“Fortunately, fungicide treatments are effective at suppressing pink snow mold in the spring after the snow has melted, which is not the case with gray snow mold, and damaged areas can persist well into the summer months before full recovery occurs,” Giese says.

Granular and liquid fungicide applications are also best applied in a preventive manner.

“Granular is sometimes best because it does not require a separate tank to be mixed and can be spot-treated to areas of known infestation and only on certain customers’ lawns,” Pease says. “Fungicides containing thiophanate-methyl or azoxystrobin plus propiconazole are excellent options. Chlorothalonil can also be used.”

Pink and gray snow molds can also occur concurrently in a lawn. While separated by the color in their names, that’s not always a good way to differentiate between them, Giese says.

“Close inspection of the turfgrass leaves infected by pink snow mold will indicate the absence of sclerotia-like structures that are only present with gray snow mold infestations,” he says.

To prevent pink snow mold, operators should avoid heavy applications of water-soluble nitrogen sources in the late fall prior to dormancy. 📍

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

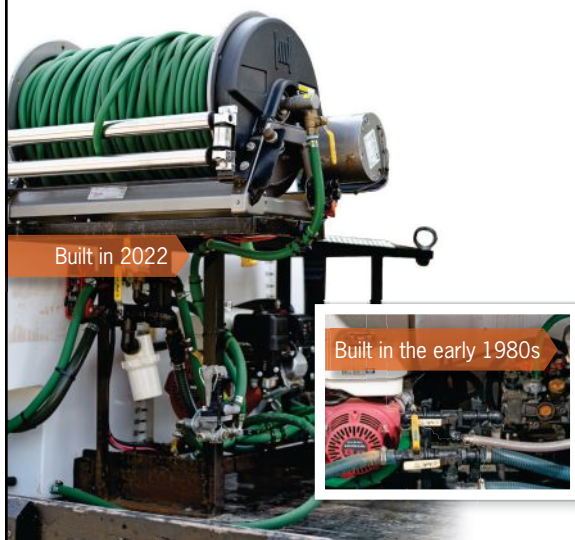
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## FROM THE SOURCE

# Create a foundation marketing strategy to guide success in 2024

**How to make the most out of your growth plan in the new year** BY MIKE SISTI | CONTRIBUTOR

**T**he new year always brings a sense of renewal and refocused energy towards the possibilities ahead. What could you do to improve your company's growth this year?

If you're like most successful companies, you spent the fall writing your business plan and developing a growth plan.

The business plan incorporates all aspects of your business into one document: sales, marketing, operations and administration. With so many aspects of your business, how do you focus on the key to your success as the year begins to unfold?

As a new sales season kicks off with the production season on the verge of being in full swing, how do you create focus for your team? Remember that plan you wrote last fall? Now is the time to execute and deliver.

## FOCUS ON FOUNDATION MARKETING

With so many pieces, which one do you focus on first? This is where the concept of foundation marketing is rooted.

Marketing strategy is the foundation of your business. Before you can create marketing tactics, you need to develop a foundation marketing strategy to develop your best message and provide the support structure for your sales, operations and administrative teams.

You wouldn't build the foundation of a house without a blueprint. Similarly, navigating your business without foundation marketing leads to uncertainty, weak messaging and selling your services on platitudes.

## CREATE DISTINCTION

Foundation marketing helps to uncover the best way to position your company

to your prospects. Rather than going head-to-head with your competitors on the same features (price, quality and service), think about leading with new differentiators your customers value.

This approach creates an entirely new way to compete and a clear distinction between your company and your competitors. While everyone else talks about price and great service, you're speaking about how easy it is to do business with you or how your agronomic program provides healthier turf for the long term.

This takes some real thought and the ability to ask the right questions about your business and the way you are trying to reach new customers. Once you've uncovered it, your marketing message will be stronger and allow you to build your sales, operations and administrative systems in a clear, consistent manner.

## YOUR TAGLINE MATTERS

After building a foundation marketing strategy, how do you communicate it both internally and externally? How can you keep your team's focus on the differentiators? This is where a carefully crafted tagline helps. A properly constructed tagline will quickly define what separates your business from the pack.

When I launched my first lawn care company in the early 2000s, New Jersey was saturated with several large national companies, franchise systems and some strong regional independent companies. How could my new company with no name recognition compete?

One thing I noticed was my main competitors sold their services on platitudes, namely, overused features that provided no clear distinction. To name

a few: fertilizer, weed control, a green lawn and guaranteed service.

My company pulled soil tests for all new customers and then reported the results back to our customers. We noticed a couple of consistencies in our area. First, there was plenty of available magnesium, yet calcium levels were deficient. We shifted from dolomitic lime to high-calcium lime. Second, the phosphorus (P) levels were sufficient.



Mike Sisti

Before the zero-P initiative, most fertilizers contained P. We purchased a custom blend without P, which was better suited for our clients' lawns and helped us save on input costs. Over time, we aggregated the results and developed an agronomic program based on the soil conditions of each territory.

As a result, we developed the tagline: "The *first* lawn care program based upon science." There is marketing power in being first, it helps you stand out as a leader.

Now, was my company the first in the world to pull a soil test? I certainly doubt it. However, we were the first in our market to lead with that distinction.

## STAY ON TRACK

As the days get busier, it's important to understand where you want to go this year to take your business to the next level. Here's to a successful year ahead with a focus on building your foundation marketing strategy. 🍷

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.



# AERATION EDUCATION

## The basics of when, why and how to aerate your customers' lawns

BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

**B**efore aerating a lawn, employees must understand what aerators do, why this service is important and how to achieve the best results.

Aeration should be a part of lawn care operators' (LCOs) services to promote turf health, says Jeb Fregm, sales and marketing manager of Earth & Turf Products. Aerators poke holes in turfgrass to allow air, water and other nutrients to reach the roots, where soil is compacted. This practice is especially important for lawns and turf areas with high traffic because the soil will become hard on the surface, which doesn't allow water to be absorbed.

### GETTING STARTED

Before aerating, employees should pick up any debris or items on the lawn and ensure the soil isn't dry. Fregm suggests attaching a drag mat to the aerator to smooth out cores that are left behind and bring the surface back to normal. Operators should avoid using an aerator on driveways or surfaces that could be damaged or hurt the equipment.

For turf areas with compacted or clay soil, making a second pass with the aerator can make a big difference. "It takes a little more time, but it can really advance the soil if it needs to be loosened up," Fregm says.

While aeration is important, it works best when LCOs include it as part of the bigger picture of turf health.

"Poke holes to let the turf breathe and then topdress and overseed alongside it

to get fresh turf to come out. That will give you something nutritional to fill in the holes after you aerate," Fregm says. "If you can add in the other parts of the recipe, the results will be better, and the customer will be happier."

### ACHIEVE DENSE AERATION

In most cases, LCOs aerate turf annually, says Brandon King, product manager for Billy Goat. Warm-season turf should be aerated between mid-April and June, whereas cool-season turf should be aerated between the end of August to mid-October.

"If you loosen up the soil, it frees up the roots to grow easier and deeper," King says. "The deeper the root grows, the more drought resistant the plant becomes."

Mowing the turf shorter before aerating helps the tines better penetrate the soil. King recommends cutting it about 1/4-inch shorter a few days before aeration is planned. If it hasn't rained recently, operators should water beforehand to ensure they achieve deep cores. Things like shallow TV cable lines, dog fences, sprinkler heads and valve boxes should also be marked ahead of time so they aren't damaged, King adds.

The soil's compaction, goals for the turf and the type of aerator being used will help determine if more than one pass is needed. For example, drum aerators can disturb about 2 percent of the soil in a single pass, and reciprocating aerators can do about 8 to 10 percent in a pass, King says.

### BACK TO BASICS

It's important to map out your route before aerating a customer's lawn to avoid obstacles both above and below ground.




Brandon King

"If you're looking to do a good job, dense aeration is a must," King says. "Try to get a density in the 8- to 10-percent range to notice the effects of the aeration."

Operators should also map out their paths near fences and houses so they are able to turn the machine without hitting the structures or getting stuck in an area, King says. They should also limit their foot traffic across driveways or sidewalks.

"Walk in the same spots so you can minimize what you have to clean up," King says.

Crews often underestimate how fatiguing aeration can be on the equipment operators, so it's important to have enough employees to handle all of the aeration projects without wearing out your team. 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

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## THE BIG ONE

# Across the pond

BY ROB DIFRANCO  
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**LOCATION** Gallatin, Tenn.

**COMPANY** Milosi

**DETAILS** This project, the client's second residence, saw Milosi overcome several weather and staffing issues.

A flash freeze during the winter of 2022 threw a wrench into Milosi's plans. The sudden temperature change decimated trees and shrubs, leading to a large removal and replacement process in the spring.

Additionally, the contractor says this problem was exacerbated by a lack of trained gardeners needed for the ornate plantings. To solve this issue, Milosi utilized its horticulturists to create and lead a team of skilled interns.

The client wanted to create an English-influenced landscape with well-maintained shrubs and trees. Milosi added seasonal color to the landscape through large pots in both the front and back of the property. Each pot is equipped with emitters that run through the irrigation system, eliminating the need for hand watering.

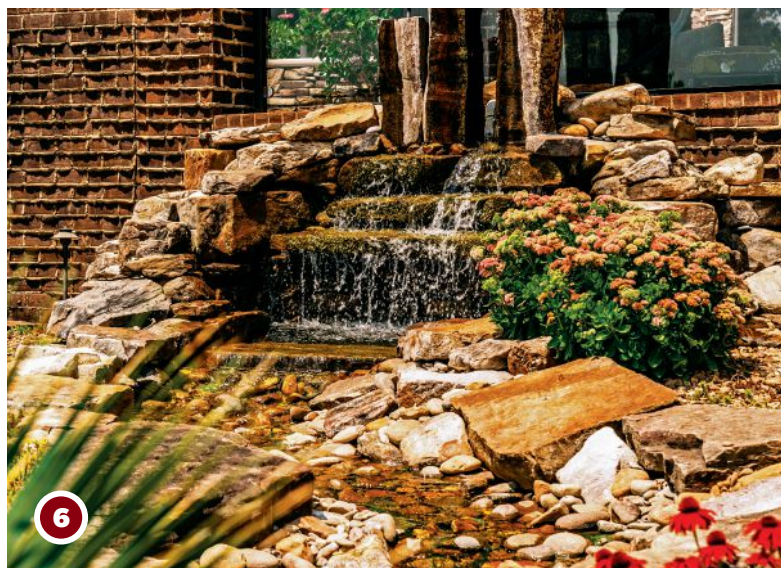
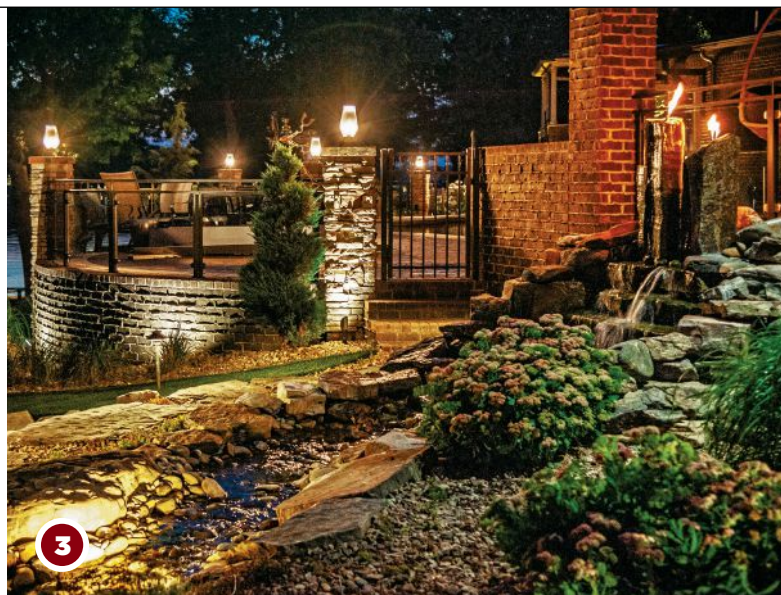
Milosi won a silver award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence Program for this project. 🏆

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



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MILOSI





**Captions** | 1. Milosi utilized low-voltage lighting throughout the property, designed to highlight the trees, shrubs and seasonally planted pots. 2. Milosi's horticulture team planted each pot with what it says are different, but complementary, "spillers," "thrillers" and "fillers." 3. A night view of the backyard water feature showcases more of Milosi's lighting selections. 4. Milosi carefully designed this water feature to avoid erosion and debris from invading the turf areas of the property. 5. Low-voltage fixtures light each planted pot to highlight the seasonal colors at all times of the day. 6. Despite the majority of the property's plantings being in pots, Milosi did add several perennial flowers in various mulch and rock beds. 7. A view of the property's back porch showcases more of the newly planted shrubs and pots following a flash freeze in late 2022. 8. Areas, like this one, were a major feature of Milosi's design to meet the clients' request for an English-inspired design.



## PRODUCTS THAT WORK



### M18 FUEL STRING TRIMMER

**COMPANY:** Milwaukee Tool

**URL:** MilwaukeeTool.com

The M18 Fuel 17-inch Dual Battery String Trimmer is fully compatible with the entire M18 line and features two cutting swath options — 15 and 17 inches. The unit weighs 16.4 lbs. when equipped with two M18 Redlithium batteries and can reach full throttle in less than one second, according to the company.



### 525iLST

**COMPANY:** Husqvarna

**URL:** Husqvarna.com

The 525iLST string trimmer is designed for full-time use and is complete with an 18.1-inch cutting diameter. This trimmer is also equipped with a metal skid plate to protect the motor from daily wear and tear. All items in the company's 525i battery series come equipped with a Husqvarna E-Torq motor which supplies the power needed to meet the performance of 25cc petrol equivalents.



### LXT STRING TRIMMER

**COMPANY:** Makita

**URL:** MakitaTools.com

Users can rotate the head 180 degrees, converting the trimmer into an edger. According to the company, this two-in-one system reduces the number of tools needed. The XRU24 features a compact size for precision trimming and edging. It features a Makita-built motor that runs at 7,800 rpm. The 18-volt LXT 4.0Ah batteries deliver up to one hour of run time.



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## FROM THE SOURCE

# Take your business to the next level with software

Is 2024 the year your company should invest in business software?

BY JANNA BRADLEY | CONTRIBUTOR

Implementing technology into day-to-day operations at your landscape business is no longer just a luxury “maybe next year” item. It’s a necessity for those who want to thrive and grow while becoming the go-to service provider in their community.

The right business software goes beyond maintaining the books and ensuring healthy profits. It serves as a catalyst for fostering a vibrant team culture, enhancing operational efficiencies and delivering unparalleled customer service that keeps clients happy and coming back for more.

If you’re still on the fence about bringing business software into your landscaping business, it’s time to hop off and join the future because this technology is not just another tool, it’s the key to taking control of your business and propelling it into new levels of growth and profitability.

### BUILDING A FRAMEWORK

Business software provides all the necessary frameworks to go from survival mode to thriving, beginning with implementing processes and increasing financial understanding. Whether you’re working with \$2 million or \$200 million in revenue, the processes and procedures are the same — you always need a budget, to understand overhead, to look after your equipment and the tools to train your employees.

The right business software, specifically a program built with an understanding of the myriad of intricacies within the industry, will help you establish all of the internal procedures to quickly assess and understand where your business is

at financially. This in-depth information allows businesses to understand what service areas they are excelling at and can double down on in sales outreach while helping them shore up other areas that are not performing as well.

Additionally, it allows you to implement processes that act like a digital assistant, taking you from lead generation through the final product. Creating these processes rapidly increases efficiency in your business and ensures your entire team is on the same page throughout the journey.

### COMMUNICATION KEYS

Employee retention and recruiting is one of the biggest challenges our industry faces. But the proper business software can help create a company culture that keeps employees feeling deeply engrained in day-to-day operations as contributors; while also motivating them to take advantage of the tremendous career opportunities provided by the landscaping industry.

Even something as simple as Slack can help your crews and the office be in constant communication throughout the day in well-organized threads for each job.

Beyond simple tools, there is amazing software out there that allows your employees to clock in, provide job updates, and get additional training, all from the comfort of their smartphones. This software provides workflow clarity to your crews and generates increased efficiency, all while giving your team opportuni-

ties to invest in themselves through training programs. It leads to happier employees who are more likely to stick around and become vital members of your team.

### CUSTOMER-FOCUSED

Most importantly, business software will greatly improve your relationships with customers. The right software allows you to effectively communicate things like lead calls, job estimates, schedules, invoicing and collecting payments, ensuring every promise to them is established and met within the agreed-upon schedule. It even lets you go above and beyond in this realm.

For example, if there’s a job site with time restrictions on site access or neighbor concerns, you can note this detail through the software to make sure your crews avoid confrontation when working there. Even something as simple as noting that a customer loves red flowers can go a long way in guaranteeing a client will be delighted and recommend your business to others as well.

This is just a small taste of what business software can do for your company in 2024 and beyond. The team efficiencies and financial understanding gained mean the software will quickly pay for itself while taking your landscape company to the next level. 📲



Janna Bradley



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## RECOMMENDER

What **engine(s)** do you use on your **mowers** and why?

Mower engine choice often comes down to availability for contractors. The more available parts are, the more common an engine may be.



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**TOMMY THORNTON**

**PRESIDENT  
SOUTHERN ECO SCAPES  
MACON, GA.**



"We run Gravely, Scag and Exmark mowers. Kawasaki engines are really good. They have a commercial-style cannister air filter, versus the plate-style air filter, that's a big plus. A lot of it comes down to availability. And the dealers who are close by ... we have good dealers who will have parts for us.

Our engines have around 2,300 hours. They have good air filters and a good life for the engine. We change the oil on schedule, every 150 to 175 hours. In the spring and summer when it gets really hot, we do it more often.

If you keep regular maintenance on them, they won't go down."

**GABRIEL COMPAGNA**

**OWNER  
UNBROKEN LAWN CARE  
SIMPSONVILLE, S.C.**



"I'm rolling with Wright mowers because that's what my dealer has. They have Kawasaki engines and I love them — they're unstoppable. I've had issues with other engines, mainly with getting parts.

The Kawasaki, you can buy it and put it on a smaller frame. That's great because gate sizes keep getting smaller and smaller. Plus, they'll run forever. I usually change my oil every 100 hours and twice a year I change the hydraulics."



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## HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

# All about the details

BY BRIAN LOVE | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**LOCATION** Chicago


**COMPANY** Mariani Landscape

**DETAILS** With a growing family and a desire to integrate more experiences into their home, the clients felt it was a perfect time for a remodel. Renovations for the landscape included the separation of the client's property from the city, giving the family more privacy due to the urban environment surrounding it.

This project featured many elements being constructed at the same time, creating challenges for Mariani crews. These features included a multi-level design, multiple fire features, a vegetable garden, an outdoor family room, a teen lounge, a gourmet outdoor kitchen and a gathering space reserved for parties.

The property's downtown location meant space was a central concern for crews. Precision and careful communication with the architect and interior design team were required. To overcome this hurdle, teams had to complete their projects simultaneously by working closely with the client and the architect.

The project's success was attributed to the levels of cooperation and patience from the team.

Mariani Landscape won a Gold Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence Program for this project. 

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



PHOTOS: JEREMY WITTEVEEN





**Captions** | 1. Limestone with bronze detailing makes up the front of the house. Thirty-foot-tall maples surround the front of the house. 2. Every piece of the space was involved in the project. With extensive reconstruction happening, there was little to no landscaping in the surrounding area of the building. 3. Original bronze sculptures finish off the upper roof deck, complete with a water wall that echoes the copper panels from the fireplace on the lower level. Two-facing fireplaces serve as seating areas on each end of the space. 4. A custom fireplace waits around the corner. It features a color theme inspired by the mural. It has bluestone steppers that echo the geometric pattern of the upper levels of the property. The colors in the Adirondack chair complement the green palette of the lower garden. 5. The existing landscape was demolished prior to the renovation. 6. The rear of the property features a gravel path winding through the birch grove. Layered in the front for added color are hydrangeas and ornamental grasses. 7. A private park bench greets visitors down the path. It is surrounded by evergreens as a screen from the road. Planted nearby is a mixture of iris, heuchera, Japanese forest grass and Whitespire birch trees.



## » RECOMMENDER



Whether it's a towable drill or a skid-steer attachment, drills can be a useful tool for design/build contractors.

## What is the **No. 1** feature that contractors should look for in a drill/auger?

**JOE HAYNES**  
PRESIDENT  
LITTLE BEAVER



Safety is the No. 1 aspect to keep in mind for earth drills and augers. Mechanical drills often have a centrifugal clutch to protect against jarring. For many hydraulic earth drills, a hydraulic pressure relief valve reduces the risk of exceeding the maximum pressure the drill can withstand. Little Beaver Earth Drills also feature a unique steel torque tube that transfers kick back away from the operator. With so many safety factors influencing what earth drill to use, talk to an expert like Little Beaver to learn what's best for your business.

**BRANT KUKUK**  
PRODUCT MANAGER  
DITCH WITCH



If you're looking to up the ROI of your stand-on skid-steer, investing in attachments is a good place to start. Attachments enable a single machine to tackle a wider array of tasks on a job site or help operators easily transition between jobs in various industries. One attachment that is helping operators enhance operational efficiencies is the auger attachment for stand-on skid-steers.

Designed for landscapers, an auger attachment can help expedite the creation of holes, allowing operators to plant trees or install fence posts more quickly compared to hand-digging methods or relying on hand-held augers. By speeding up these tasks, operators can take on more jobs in a day, increasing their ROI. Auger attachments are available in a variety of bit styles and sizes which typically range from 6 to 36 inches.



## PROS' TOOLBOX

# A new vision for design/build projects

One Ohio landscaper explains how Walk Your Plans has helped save him time and money

BY ROB DIFRANCO  
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

For Chris Zbin, owner of Zbin Landscaping in Rocky River, Ohio, Walk Your Plans is an invaluable tool. Walk Your Plans is a projection facility that allows design professionals and builders to present their blueprints to clients on a real-world scale.

Zbin Landscaping, which provides design/build and maintenance services to a mix of high-end residential and commercial properties, has utilized the service for several months. It's helped him save both money and precious time needed to nail design/build projects on schedule.

"I think it's a very valuable tool in your belt when it comes to the landscape design process in today's world where you're no longer just throwing a table and chair on a 12 by 12 patio," he says.

### SEEING IS BELIEVING

At Walk Your Plans' Lakewood, Ohio, location, Zbin walks his customers through a full-size projection of the design blueprint. The space includes a floor projection, complete with color, and a display wall, which can show additional views of the project.

"It's a big, clean, neat and climate-controlled space, which is not something



we're used to working in," he says. "You take (the customer) for a walkthrough of their future patio and landscape, and they get an exact understanding of the space."

Zbin says his customers are usually left in awe after seeing their design laid out in front of them.

"From there, the questions start coming out, and then that's where you get to the point where they start thinking about it in reality a little bit and they will bring up any ideas for changes," he says. "The good thing about having it on the floor is you can potentially stop them from making a mistake they might regret down the road."

### TIME IS MONEY

Besides the wow factor, Zbin says that Walk Your Plans helps provide useful context for customers when it comes to pricing.

"A lot of times, when you get down to pricing, the customer starts going, wow, that's expensive when you're looking at a blueprint," he says. "In reality, the numbers are big nowadays, and when you throw it out on the floor, it makes it a lot easier for them to get a grasp on the project as a whole."

Zbin estimates his company has saved upwards of \$10,000 to \$15,000 on projects utilizing the service.

"The client will often say 'Hey, I want this a little bigger,' 'Hey, I

want this a little smaller,' or 'Hey, the table and chair aren't going to fit here,'" he says. "(By walk-

ing the design) you're heading off a lot of potential add-ons or changes down the road. You can get in, bang it out, and get onto your next one."

Timing is another crucial part of the equation that Zbin believes Walk Your Plans aids in.

"You're not going to have a one-week add-on where your next project is late and it affects you down the road where," he says. "If you take everybody through this process, you'll have a tighter schedule, which might open time up at the end of the year, so you might be able to do another job or two."

### DESIGN FATIGUE CURE

Zbin adds that the intangible benefits of services like Walk Your Plans are invaluable. The ability to show up-to-date blueprints on a real-world scale, he says, generates extra enthusiasm towards the project.

"We're going through this on a \$800,000 patio right now," he says. "You sometimes see the customer get design fatigue, just like construction fatigue. Getting them to see the plan coming together can really be a big rah-rah moment for them." 📍

**MORE TO COME SOON**  
Walk Your Plans currently operates out of one Lakewood, Ohio, location, but has plans for expansion to Omaha, Neb., in the future.

**MORE TO COME**  
Irrigation experts expect wireless technology to continue its growth for years to come.



## IRRIGATION TECH

# Is it time to cut the cord on your irrigation system?

Industry experts explain why wireless technology innovations can address irrigation shortcomings and simplify system issues **BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR**

**L**egacy irrigation systems are a headache for technicians and their clients. Aging sprayheads, leaky valves and especially old, wired controllers use water inefficiently, communicate poorly and are a costly, logistical nightmare to maintain and upgrade.

Innovations in wireless technology are more attractive solutions that can rejuvenate an irrigation system, improve efficiency and keep it in service longer.

### LONG-TERM FIX

Seth Bangerter considers himself an irrigation system's best friend because he can make any irrigation system wireless.

"It doesn't matter what (brand of irrigation) controller you have, and it doesn't matter how old, new, smart or dumb those controllers are, we get rid of the wire from the controller out to the valve," says the president and co-founder of Thrive Smart Systems, maker of the Thrive EVO, a wireless controller solution for the residential, commercial and golf markets.

A wireless communication path optimizes an existing irrigation system, which increases water savings for the customer, albeit indirectly, Bangerter says. For example, a client has a bad wire or lost a valve somewhere in the system. An irrigation contractor has two options: retrench or divide the existing system with an additional controller.

"The problem is nobody really solved the problem," Bangerter says. "Instead, these are Band-Aid solutions. One is really expensive, and dividing the system isn't a (long-term) solution because

the wire is prone to fail. Suddenly, two controllers become five, which becomes seven, which becomes nine ... So, as valves get separated from their controller, they become orphaned, they become unmanageable and useless, and you are no longer water efficient."

Wireless controllers take those orphaned valves and adopt them back into the existing irrigation system. It's a plug-and-play solution that protects the original investment in the system rather than making a temporary fix, Bangerter says. As a result, the irrigation system is controllable from anywhere, it behaves as it's designed to, and all the alerts are informative and accurate, he says.

"Make it wireless, and the system is complete," he adds. "You just saved time and money with (a product) that takes less than 30 minutes (to install)."

### UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

Wireless technology offers the irrigation industry a lot of potential to serve their clients better, whether commercial or residential, says Chris Klein, chief product officer and co-founder of Rachio, which offers smart irrigation controllers.

Recently, Rachio combined its wireless controller technology with a weather station via the cloud, allowing an irrigation system to process data and make real-time adjustments. This marriage represents the first integration with Rachio's new hose and timer products.

"We've created the architecture where the weather station can communicate


through the cloud with our valves, and we've built it in such a way that our valves can act as zones," Klein says. "So, instead of just having to go device to device to control it, you can actually coordinate them together (to run sequentially)."

Suppose a contractor is adding zones to a property's existing irrigation; those can be run like an above-ground system and maintain optimum water pressure, create schedules and integrate with other components, like weather stations.

"While you once needed a piece of hardware to coordinate zone one, zone two and zone three, now you let (a wireless controller) coordinate across devices, and those devices don't need to know about each other," he explains. "Then your central computer creates the schedules and sends down individual calendars that coordinate all the different devices, which allows you to add to that scale with modularity."

Wireless innovations will allow opportunities to retrofit clients' existing systems, which is a more cost-conscious option than a total overhaul.

Klein anticipates this technology will continue to improve, allowing pros to program and coordinate schedules across multiple devices based on more detailed data.

"The hardware and radios exist," he says. "But being able to make them all work together will involve (innovations) in that software layer." 



Chris Klein

Mike Zawacki is a freelance writer with nearly two decades of experience covering various aspects of the green industry.





## PRODUCTS THAT WORK

### Rotors



#### PGP ULTRA

**COMPANY:** Hunter Industries

**URL:** [HunterIndustries.com](http://HunterIndustries.com)

With a non-strippable drive and automatic arc return, the PGP Ultra turret can turn without causing damage and return to its original arc regardless of where it is turned. Other features include 34 nozzle options with several radius choices and a headed slot and set screw. The PGP Ultra offers system installers an array of options on any site.



#### 5000 SERIES

**COMPANY:** Rain Bird

**URL:** [RainBird.com](http://RainBird.com)

Rain Bird 5000 series rotors are ideal for residential, light commercial and commercial applications. 5000 series rotors have pre-installed pressure regulation. The rotors have a pressure-regulating swing joint for the larger rotors; pressure regulation can give 50 percent water savings. Rain curtain nozzles deliver even distribution over the entire radius including large wind-resistant droplets and gentle close-in watering.



#### T5

**COMPANY:** Toro

**URL:** [Toro.com](http://Toro.com)

Arc adjustments from 40 to 360 degrees can be made quickly on the T5 by twisting the turret. The RapidSet slip clutch also protects against gear damage caused by intentional vandalism or inexperienced users. The T5 RapidSet rotor comes with a full set of eight standard nozzles (25-degree trajectory) and four low-angle (10-degree trajectory) nozzles.



#### SUPERPRO

**COMPANY:** K-Rain

**URL:** [KRain.com](http://KRain.com)

SuperPro rotors feature Intelligent Flow Technology that simultaneously and proportionately reduces distance and water flow by up to 50 percent. Users can turf off water flow during nozzle installation or adjustment, with the riser remaining in the popped-up position.

## BUSINESS BOOSTERS

# Don't trip with drip irrigation

**Customers love hearing their water bills can be lowered, but there are other ways to sell drip irrigation** BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**C**lients hate seeing their money go down the drain, and that is also true with water. In some states, water is a precious — and expensive — commodity. And more environmentally conscious customers hate to see waste, and that includes unnecessary overwatering.

Drip irrigation can be an easy sell to a client when the many benefits are discussed: water savings and healthy plants. But there are other benefits to consider, including eliminating the possibility of slips, or water damage to buildings or concrete.

### PREVENTING ACCIDENTS

John Amarosa is the chief operating officer of Pine Lake Nursery and Landscape in Tampa Bay, Fla. Pine Lake Nursery is the parent company of Pine Lake Services, a landscape maintenance company. The company also offers fertilizer applications, pest control, irrigation management and arbor repair, among other services.

Amarosa says the company frequently installs drip irrigation systems in plant beds. He believes it's easier to maintain a healthy landscape with drip, and he thinks it's better for the plants than overhead irrigation.

But that isn't how he sells his customers on drip irrigation systems. He talks about how litigious society has become, with so many attorneys hollering into TV cameras for commercials or holding a sledgehammer next to their 1-800

number on a billboard.

In this litigious day and age, drip irrigation is the safe play, he says.

"Let's prevent accidents, let's prevent lawsuits, let's prevent injuries," he says. "I see a lot of times with overhead irrigation especially, specifically around plant beds when they water more than the plant needs, you're causing puddles. You're causing standing water on sidewalks and concrete and hardscapes. And everybody's lawsuit happy. If you talk to your customers about preventing lawsuits and telling stories that you've actually been a part of, then it's easy."

### FLOOD DAMAGE

Amarosa has been in commercial landscaping since 1985, working stints with ValleyCrest (now BrightView), ASI Landscape Management and Down to Earth along the way. In those years, he has witnessed some irrigation mishaps.

He's seen several instances of overhead irrigation in shrubs either dry rot and break, or get broken by a trimmer, and the irrigation water shoots into the top of the building, flooding it. "This has happened to me multiple times and it's a really easy story to tell clients, especially when we want them to get drip irrigation around the building."

Hunter and Rain Bird are the two systems Pine Lake Services most frequently installs. Beyond liability, he also talks to his clients about saving money and how drip irrigation promotes healthier plants.

"We know it's a lower volume of water, but we also have a lot of iron in the water here in Florida ... there's a lot of rust-staining on buildings, concrete or hardscapes (with overhead irrigation). You don't get that with drip," Amarosa says. "And it promotes healthier plants — not having the wet leaves, not having standing water, not overwatering. You can prevent weeds because you're not watering all around."


### A CHEAPER WATER BILL

Tommy Thornton is president of Southern Eco-Scapes in Macon, Ga. He started the business in 2008 and employs 25 people. The company offers maintenance, design, drainage and sod installation to its clientele.

Because of the heat and humidity in Georgia, Thornton says his company recommends drip irrigation systems to clients regularly, especially on large trees and shrub bed installations.

"The two biggest things would be water efficiency — it's going to save them on their water bill, and it's also going to be better for the plant because you can get a lot deeper, watering down to those tap roots," Thornton says. "If they have an existing irrigation system, we'll use (drip) as an upsell to help them save more water, and really get that deep watering as opposed to just using your spray heads and rotors, and just watering the top of the plants."

Thornton says he is loyal to Hunter's drip irrigation systems. He says it's an easy install for him and his crew, and the customers are always happy with the end result.

"From the installation side, drip irrigation is a lot easier to put in than an extra pipe and a head," he says. "And the customers always love seeing their water bill go down." 



John Amarosa



# FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

## Adam Callison

**PRESIDENT AND CEO**  
**DONE RIGHT LANDSCAPES**  
**ST. LOUIS, MO.**

### 1 What can you tell me about Done Right Landscapes?

It started with my dad's push mower, pushing it up the street and I grew it from there. When I was 20, I found out my daughter was about to be born, so I bought a business that was for sale and started building it from there. Today we have about 40 employees. We do a lot of installs — retaining walls, pavers, drainage, irrigation. We do snow control and ice removal in the winter. We had a maintenance division and we sold it about 10 years ago, but now we're getting back into it. We're deeply invested in transforming outdoor spaces into stunning landscapes that blend both form and function.

### 2 How big is your family now?

I have a wife and a daughter who is 18. She plays soccer and got a full ride to the University of Missouri — St. Louis, so I'm definitely proud of her. We also have two-year-old identical boy twins. They're cool because out of nowhere they started loving trucks and excavators and Bobcats. So we like to go to the shop, it's a memory I think they'll always hang on to, jumping into those machines. They're just watching me now, but eventually they'll know how to use them.

### 3 Do you see any trends in the industry, or trends with your customers?

I think it's harder to get that final payment on the install side. We struggle getting the final payment in a timely manner. We try to communicate with them throughout the job. At the start of the job they know, at the end, when they're happy, it's time to pay. We send constant reminders throughout the job. We try to set a date the day before, a date and a time. We say, 'We know we're going to be done tomorrow at 3:00, are you available for a final walkthrough?' It takes great communication — if there's great communication it goes through seamlessly.

### 4 This isn't your first interview; you're used to being interviewed — except it's normally on TV. What can you tell me about the local TV segment you do in St. Louis?

We do something on Channel 4, it's three minutes, once a month. We pick a topic, we pick three questions and they ask me the three questions and it's live. It creates brand recognition. We did it 10 times in 2023 and we already signed up for 2024. It's good. I don't always like going on TV and being in the spotlight, but I'll do it for the company. It's all about getting our brand out there. Our phone does start ringing because of it.

### 5 Do you have a most memorable day at work?

For everybody out there growing your business, there are times when you feel like there's no light at the end of the tunnel. I remember I once felt hopeless in someone's front yard. I started tearing up. I had a young kid at home and a wife. You feel like there is no end, no light at the end of the tunnel. Where does this business go? But you just keep pumping forward. Thinking back on that and how far we've come, it's inspirational. (M)

#### BEST ADVICE

"It's simple: Do the right thing. It comes from Richard Lusa. He owned a fence company I worked for when I was young. That's always stuck with me. He also told me, 'Watch your pennies and your dollars will add up.'"



# A LOOK AT PACIFIC LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT'S GROWTH STRATEGY

## Acquiring existing companies in Washington helped to combat growth concerns

BY LAUREN DOWDLE  
CONTRIBUTOR

**W**hen Pacific Landscape Management began to outgrow its service area, the company looked to expand beyond Northwest Oregon, says Bob Grover, president of Pacific Landscape Management in Hillsboro, Ore. That expansion helped the business see a 34-percent increase in revenue from 2021 to 2022.

Pacific Landscape Management is No. 66 on the 2023 LM150 list of the top landscaping companies in the country. After providing landscape management services to commercial properties and homeowner associations in the Portland area since 2001, Grover says the company began running out of opportunities and feared their growth would slow down.

Pacific had customers asking when it would expand to Seattle, where many of them had additional properties. So Grover decided it was time to move into a new state. Pacific acquired Earthworks Landscape Services and the commercial landscape maintenance division of His Hands Lawncare in 2022. Those moves brought in four branches with a team of 150 new professionals to serve the Puget Sound region.

"There's a significantly bigger opportunity to grow in Seattle," Grover says.



"We are really excited to bring what we're doing in Portland to Seattle."

Grover says he believed his company would be more successful by expanding through acquisition, instead of launching new branches there. Not only did it give them a larger customer base to grow from, it also seemed like the natural next step for the company to take, he adds.

Before the acquisitions, Pacific had about \$36 million in revenue. The acquisitions added \$12 million in revenue. Grover says Pacific will consider acquiring other businesses in the future.

The new branches ran their own systems until they could implement Pacific's software, system and service offerings. They later rebranded as Pacific Landscape Management.

One aspect of the transition that Grover says he's especially proud of is the partner system his team developed. Pacific paired existing account managers in Portland with ones in Seattle.


"That buddy system was tremendous as opposed to just going up there and giving them a book and putting

them through a seminar on how to do things," Grover says. "It creates a team spirit that's helped us thrive."

The company also held regular sessions during the transition to help the new team members learn processes. Grover says his team realized those classes could be beneficial company-wide, so they began offering weekly training for all team members.

"There are 52 modules that all of the account managers and field managers go through," Grover says. "These weekly modules have been a great way to get our entire operations and account management team on the same page."

The company also experienced 14 percent organic growth from 2021 to 2022 in its Portland-Ore.-based operations, Grover says.

"We don't sell — we help people buy and make it easy for them," he says. "We help people invest in their landscapes and work to help solve problems. Our focus is on providing a sustainable product." 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

Applications are open for the 2023 LM150 list. Fill out the form at [landscapemanagement.net](https://landscapemanagement.net) to submit your information, or email Special Projects Editor Marisa Palmieri [MPalmieri@NorthCoastMedia.net](mailto:MPalmieri@NorthCoastMedia.net) for more information.





**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](mailto:jeff@truenature.com).

# Stop making visual marketing a happy accident

**E**ntertainers and creators consider it part of their jobs to acquire and curate performance videos that can open doors to future opportunities. Professional actors, comedians and speakers understand there is no better marketing than demonstrated proficiency in your craft.

Visual evidence is also vital for growing a business in the landscaping industry. Seeing your range of capabilities is believing when it comes to persuading buyers to work with you. This is why I find it puzzling that many landscape professionals neglect to build their visual marketing assets like photos and videos.

In addition to helping you sell products and services, photos and videos are also important for winning landscape awards competitions, recruiting, training and general communication with clients.

As a former design/build contractor, I know it can be difficult to capture the beauty of landscapes. If you decide to hire professionals to shoot your projects, you'll be disappointed with the results if your team is not intimately involved in the process. You and your team understand the property, the client and the objectives of the project. Therein lies the story that will be assembled through a collaboration with the photographers and videographers.

Whether you go that route or choose to shoot your own projects, the following practices will help eliminate common mistakes and set realistic expectations to enhance your outcomes.

**1 Find the best light.** The worst time for taking photos is midday

when the light is intense. The best time is early morning or late afternoon when there are shadows, and the light is softer. I recommend shooting every project just after sunrise and before sunset to determine which works better.

**2 Shoot it again.** In the days of film photography, one of my landscape architecture professors suggested pre-shooting every site without film to better understand it. That's still good advice. Before taking photos, try to see the project with fresh eyes, as if you are seeing it for the first time.

**3 Get multiple perspectives.** If you want eye-catching photos, you must experiment with perspectives. Our favorite tactic was using a 14-to-16-foot stepladder to give our photos a flatter composition. Conversely, lying on the ground can create compressed layers of turfgrass, perennials, ornamental grasses and shrubbery that are stunning.


**4 Make a composition.** Every photo, including your next selfie, works best if there is a primary and secondary subject that gives it

context. Move the main subject to one side to highlight a secondary subject, like an interesting foreground or background that adds to the visual narrative.

**5 Tell your story.** If your landscape company's mission is designing and building outdoor environments for people, then they should be part of your marketing. You can do this in subtle ways without revealing their identity. This approach creates marketing with a signature nod to your brand distinction.

Most of us are guilty of shooting abundant photos and videos with the intention of finding the occasional happy accident. Being intentional with these best practices will help you build the visual assets your marketing needs.

## BONUS TIP

In addition to shooting your projects, build the habit of compiling photos of landscape projects you admire. You'll discover clients will be interested in the ideas that inspire you and may be willing to give you opportunities to stretch your capabilities and grow. 





**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](mailto:jeff@jeffreyscott.biz).

# Becoming a Mighty Oak: The four pillars of growth

**W**hat does it take to achieve true success? Over the past 15 years, I have worked with many landscape business owners and their leadership teams and have witnessed and coached all kinds of growth.

While every company has a unique growth path, I've found that the most inspirational entrepreneurs in our industry have excelled in four specific areas (or pillars).

We use these same four pillars in our Leader's Edge Peer Group, where each year we nominate a member (from each group) who has shown the most growth and success. The winners are chosen by their peers and presented with the Mighty Oak Award.

## **Pillar 1 Financial performance**

In the end, your report card comes from your financial results. We look at the bottom line "net to owner" profit percent, top-line revenue growth, along with a strong balance sheet, cash flow and a few other indicators. We give weight to improvement *and* consistency.

While business is not just about money, it is like your heartbeat. Without it, you will die. To stay

healthy and growing you must give serious accountability to this metric.

## **Pillar 2 Company development**

To achieve great results, you must build your team and company. This includes developing your "people, products and processes," curating a Destination Company™ culture and making bold moves in terms of hires, acquisitions and strategic decisions.

This is the true work of a business builder, and we support all our peer group members on this journey. I am extremely proud of the work we have done here.

## **Pillar 3 Professional growth**

Your company can only grow to the level of professional growth achieved by your owners and leaders. If the owner is not growing, the company will stall or meander. To win the Mighty Oak, members must show that they have progressed in their own learning and development.

This can happen through coaching, reading, traveling and, of course, membership in one of our peer groups.

It also comes from how you interact with your team: how you put yourself in a position to learn and stretch yourself beyond your comfort zone.

## **Pillar 4**

### **Personal Growth**

This answers the question, "What are you doing this all for?"

Too many entrepreneurs

make the critical mistake of having a *business affair*, i.e. they are married but spend all their time with their business. I have seen too many affairs, divorces and unhappy lives come from skewed priorities.

For this reason, it's critical to divide your time wisely by investing in your family, personal hobbies, community, travel, etc. For each owner it's different, but, as they say, "you know it when you see it."

## **THE MAKINGS OF A MIGHTY OAK**

Last year we awarded seven business owners with this prestigious award at our Summer Growth Summit in August. Many of the winners sat on a panel to present their experiences and how they developed their own secret sauce to success.

The owner/winner who shared the most was Ivan Katz, founder of Great Lakes Landscape Design in Oak Park, Mich. He shared his personal struggles and demons, how he overcame them and what he did over the years to build momentum in his company and his life.

The audience was riveted. At one point he queued his team of 12 leaders, and, in unison, they stood up and recited their company mission statement. It was not planned, which made it amazing.

Over the years it's become clear that success is not measured by money, but by understanding how to pursue all four Mighty Oak pillars and enjoy the journey.

We are starting up a new Leaders Edge peer group meeting on March 4-6. Visit [JeffreyScott.biz](http://JeffreyScott.biz) to apply for membership. 🌳



### **WINNER, WINNER**

Jeffrey Scott and his 2023 Mighty Oak winners. Scott says these winners excel in his four pillars of success.



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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](mailto:marty@growgroupinc.com).



## Nice People Don't Finish Last

**Y**ou've probably heard the adage that nice people finish last. I think that's because we assume unkind people around them use them to get ahead. This chain of thought has never sat well with me. I never liked to believe that you had to be mean and nasty to get ahead in life, and in my business, I haven't observed that to be the case at all.

In fact, I've seen the opposite. Owners and leaders who act like ogres have a hard time keeping team members, and the constant turn-over weighs down their companies, restricting their growth and success.

I recently stumbled upon an article in *Time* on this topic. In it, a professor from Wharton Business School observes that there are three types of people within organizations: takers, matchers and givers.

What he found was interesting: Takers were more successful in the short term and less so in the long term. Meanwhile, givers saw the opposite results. In short, nice people may finish last early on, but their generosity and kindness pay off in social capital and lessons learned that make them more successful later on.

This idea jives with what I've observed to be true both in my work at Grunder Landscaping Co. (GLC) and in my work as a coach and educator at The Grow Group. There are a few lessons I want to share here as you read this column and prepare to start this year off on the right foot:

**“When a teammate asks you for help, treat it as an opportunity to either learn something new or share your knowledge.”**

### BE GENEROUS WITH YOUR TIME

Clay Mathile took over Iams when it was doing \$500,000 in revenue and grew it into a business he was able to sell to P&G in 1999 for \$2.3 billion. He was a mentor to me and many in the Dayton community. One of the many things I learned from him was that giving back with your time is one of the best ways to make an impact.

He often reminded me that it was easier to give money than it was to give time but sharing your wisdom was the best way to pay forward what wisdom was shared with you. I think this is true whether you're volunteering your time at your local food bank or teaching a teammate how to do something new.

Being generous with your time builds stronger connections with the people around you and helps you learn and grow as a landscape professional. It's a win-win.

### HOLD YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE

Grow Group Vice President Vince Torchia and I talked about accountability on an episode of our podcast, *The Grow Show*, in November. Nice people admit when they make mistakes, focus on solutions over placing blame and look for opportunities to recognize the people around them. All of this is part of being accountable.

### LOOK FOR THE OPPORTUNITY

Nice people are helpful people, too. One of the traits I see in many “helpful” people is they view asks and challenges as opportunities. This is something GLC President and COO Seth Pflum does so well, and it's one of the many reasons he's had such a successful career at our company.

When a teammate asks you for help, treat it as an opportunity to either learn something new or share your knowledge. When a challenge presents itself, treat it as an opportunity to prove your skills or find a better way to do a task.

A mindset where you look for opportunities, rather than complain about challenges, will serve you well.

At GROW! 2024 on Feb. 6-8 in Des Moines, Iowa, I'll do a keynote talk where I'll share the ways that every landscape pro can be a nicer person and have a more successful career as a result. I think you'll be impressed by this Midwest town. Every time I visit, I'm blown away by people's kindness and hospitality.

In addition to main stage sessions like this one, GROW! 2024 includes a tour of RJ Lawn & Landscape for all attendees at no extra cost and breakout sessions on topics ranging from recruiting team members to running snow operations. I hope you'll join me there:

[growgroupinc.com/grow-2024](https://growgroupinc.com/grow-2024). 





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