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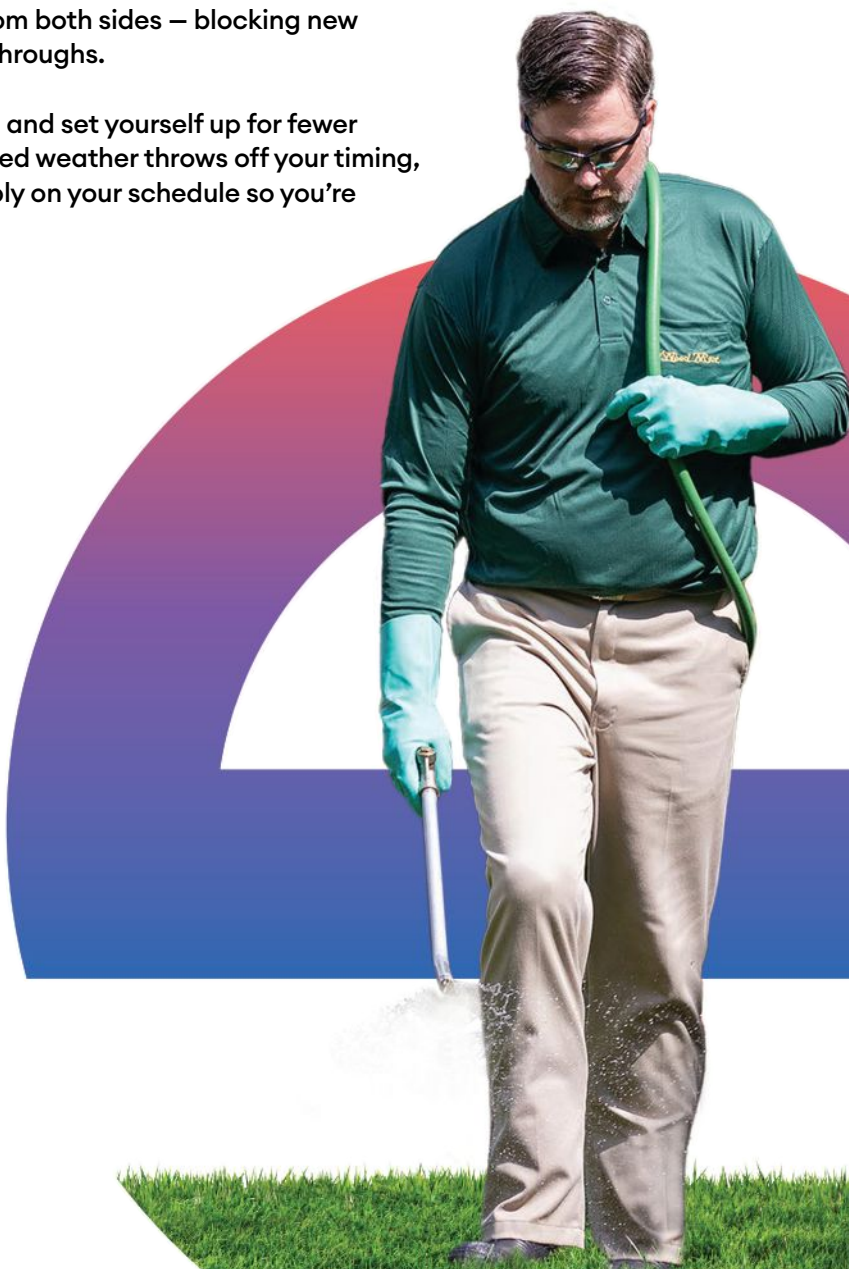


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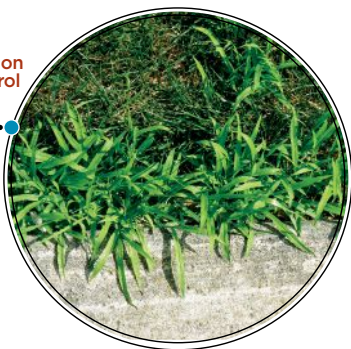
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The Pro's Toolbox

What tool stood out to you as especially helpful this year? Did a certain product step up and help you cross that finish line on your jobsites? If so, let us know!

We want to hear about your favorite tools, machines and pieces of equipment that you found to be particularly helpful, so email Editor-in-Chief Scott Hollister (shollister@northcoastmedia.net) or associate editor Nathan Mader (nmader@northcoastmedia.net) with your recommendations. They might be featured in an upcoming edition of LM!



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SCOTT HOLLISTER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Contact Hollister at 785-424-0932
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Something for everybody

During a recent conversation with a young, aspiring landscape pro, I was asked about the industry's many conferences, trade shows and educational opportunities and which ones I thought might offer the most bang for the buck for someone looking to grow their business.

My first response was to tell this person that they were barking up the wrong tree. I've been a part of the landscaping and lawn care community for about 10 minutes (OK, it's been a year and a half, but it sure as heck feels like 10 minutes). There are people way more qualified than I am to answer that question and provide the kind of advice this person was looking for.

But the query did get me thinking, especially since we're now deep into the season when these events dominate the industry's calendar, and yours truly gets to jack up his frequent-flyer miles to heights previously unrealized. Depending on where you are on your journey, does one conference offer more than the other?

Well, I eventually decided: It depends. After having made the circuit one time through with my second on the immediate horizon — I leave for Equip Exposition 2025 less than 24 hours after writing this column — I sincerely believe there is something for everyone at each of these events, regardless of shape, size or location. Very diplomatic of me, right?

Take Elevate 2025, for example, which we preview in full in this issue of *Landscape Management*. The National Association of Landscape Professionals' big

“Putting one industry conference and trade show in the top spot over the others isn't that important. What is important is that these opportunities exist at all.”

show, which heads to Phoenix Nov. 2-5, enters its fourth year with a well-earned reputation as a more intimate affair with in-depth educational and networking opportunities, plus an exhibit space that matches the event's specific focus.

But don't take my word for it. In this issue, you can check out how Elevate resonates with a trio of industry stalwarts (see “Rise and shine” on page 16) and go in-depth to learn how NALP approaches planning for the event with the association's CEO, Britt Wood (see “The evolution of Elevate” on page 24).

Then there's the big dog, Equip Expo, which is one of the 10 largest trade shows of any kind in the country and was recently named the Greatest Trade Show of 2024 by *Trade Show Executive* magazine.

While it's a massive, potentially overwhelming experience for some, it also offers up pretty much everything that anyone in this business could ask for out of a conference and trade show (including — shameless plug here — a full slate of education sessions sponsored by your friends at *LM*). If you want to learn, network, check out big-name keynote speakers or explore the largest indoor-outdoor exhibit floor on

the planet, then Equip Expo is for you.

But if something smaller than either of those is more your speed, the industry's got plenty of that, too, and you're likely to find just as many benefits at those events. A few weeks back, for example, I spent a few days in Dayton, Ohio, to be a fly on the wall at one of *LM* columnist Marty Grunder's field trips at Grunder Landscaping Co.

There were around 40 folks in attendance at this field trip. We toured his facility, observed a morning roll-out and went deep into how Grunder's company operates at all levels. If you didn't come away with a few new industry friends and a tidbit or two that will help your business improve, then you probably weren't trying.

So, you see, it depends. And like I told that up-and-coming contractor whose question sent me down this rabbit hole in the first place, putting one industry conference and trade show in the top spot over the others isn't that important. What is important is that these opportunities exist at all — regardless of size or scope — for business owners looking to take their game to the next level.

Whether it's Elevate, Equip Expo, a peer group meeting, the *LM* Growth Summit (another shameless plug; learn more at landscapemanagement.net/sponsoredcontent/lm-growth-summit) or a small show-and-tell at a landscape company, I hope you'll take the leap, get out there and say “hi” if our path's cross. 🍷

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“For recognition of the hard work of our team, we hand out gift cards and hold team outings. For clients, we offer loyalty discounts and discounted service upgrades to show our appreciation and retain a strong relationship.”



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Mariani Premier Group
Lake Bluff, Ill.

Troy Clogg
Troy Clogg Landscape Associates
Wixom, Mich.

Pam Dooley
Plants Creative Landscapes
Decatur, Ga.

Paul Fraynd
Sun Valley Landscaping
Omaha, Neb.

Mike Giese
Perfecturf Lawncare
Mt. Pleasant, Wisc.

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Joyce Landscaping
Cape Cod, Mass.

Jerry McKay
McKay Landscape Lighting
Omaha, Neb.

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Everthrive Landscape
Riverside, Calif.

Bryan Stolz
Winterberry Landscape
& Garden Center
Southington, Conn.

Justin White
K&D Landscaping
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Coral Gables, Fla.

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The Grow Group
Dayton, Ohio

Phil Harwood
Tamarisk Business Advisors
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jeffrey Scott
Jeffrey Scott Consulting
New Orleans, La.



“One of our favorite ways to show thanks is by donating time or money to causes important to our clients and employees.”

“One of the best things we do for our team is to take a few hours every year to provide a complete and honest review for each team member. Over the year, our teams pour thousands of hours into our companies, yet most owners fall short on the annual review process. Be there to listen and see how they are doing, align the company goals with their personal aspirations and ensure you meet their needs.”



hello. These always go over well and are really easy to do with your iPhone.”



“I’ve always made a point to recognize excellence or a job well done in front of an employee’s peers. I’ve had employees come to tears when we’ve done that.”

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LM GALLERY

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

1 Winning combination The 2025 NALP Field Trip at McHale Landscape Design in Annapolis, Md., which has won over 400 awards for its work. Here, hosts Kevin (left) and Steve (center) McHale pose with Marty Grunder from Grunder Landscaping Co. and The Grow Group, who facilitated the event.



2 Toot your own horn *Landscape Management's* Bill Roddy (left) and Scott Hollister (right) grabbed a selfie with Emily Lindley, who despite her key roles at both Grunder Landscaping Co. and The Grow Group, had never made it into the pages of *LM* before now.



3 Growth opportunity At Aspire Software's Ignite 2025 event in Anaheim, Calif., Roddy (second from left) and Hollister (second from right) hung out with (left to right) Matthew Bakker from Landscape Design Services, Holland, Mich., Grunder and Vince Torchia with The Grow Group.



4 Take off! Roddy and Hollister grabbed a few minutes with John Foley, a former Blue Angel pilot who was Ignite 2025's keynote speaker.



5 A fond farewell Ignite 2025 marked the end of a storied run with Aspire for founder Mark Tipton (second from left). He took time to grab a photo with (from left) Hollister, Aspire's Jon Gohl and Roddy.



6 The Californians While in Southern California for Ignite, Roddy took the opportunity to visit with Hunter Industries and two good friends of *LM* — Tessa Norton and Luke Reardon.



7



8



9



10



11



12

7 Fun times in Florence The ACE Domination peer group, hosted by McFarlin Stanford and The Grow Group, spent a day in Florence, Italy. Back row: Bret Schmitz, High Prairie Outdoors; Bob Marks, emi landscape; and Aaron Zych, ILT Vignocchi. Middle row: Robyn Schmitz, High Prairie Outdoors; Brie Marks, emi landscape; and Donna Vignocchi, ILT Vignocchi. Front row: Seth Jones, *Landscape Management*, and his wife Adrienne; Paul Myers, McFarlin Stanford and Tracy and Scott Wallingford, McFarlin Stanford.

8 Got your Christmas card photo! Seth nabbed this photo of Nate and Jaime Jensen, Jensen Gardens, as they enjoyed a beautiful sunset in the mountains of Tuscany.

9 Some Americans in the American bar From left to right are Tom Groh, Minnesota Sodding Co., Paul Myers, McFarlin Stanford, Garrett Matthews, Matthews Landscape, and Sam Rankin, Etch Outdoor Solutions.

10 Americans in the American Bar, Take Two After ACE Domination left, ACE

Calibrate arrived. Vince Torchia of The Grow Group (left) joined Nick Jensen, Jensen Gardens, Kayden Glynn and Jones for week two.

11 Another day well spent Jones didn't want this sunset to pass by without a photo with Aaron Zych and Bob Marks.

12 Keeping Up with the Joneses Seth and Adrienne met up with the Grohs — Tom and Dana, of Minnesota Sodding Co. — outside the Duomo in Florence.

ACE peer groups break bread in Italy

McFarlin Stanford and The Grow Group hosted four different peer groups over five weeks

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

For the second time in the span of three years, *Landscape Management* was invited by McFarlin Stanford and The Grow Group for an industry exclusive: a week in Italy meeting and networking with the company's ACE peer groups.

Only this time, there was a new twist. By staggering travel dates between meetings, *LM* was able to meet with two different peer groups, ACE Calibrate and ACE Domination. In all, *LM* met with 17 different companies from 13 different states.

There was plenty of pleasure mixed in with business during the ACE peer groups' visit to Italy.

Business owners and their spouses spent a week near Rufina, Italy, on a majestic 800-acre estate located in the mountains of Tuscany. The peer groups had

several business meetings over the course of the week, including learning about powerful partnerships based on their Gallup Clifton Strengths score; a review and discussion of the book "The Go-Giver;" and member-driven case studies where one member of the peer group reports back on business progress to his fellow peers.

But there was also plenty of pleasure mixed in with the business, including a horticulture hike up the mountains to the village of Acone, a remote town of 200 people; multiple winery tours and two sightseeing trips to nearby Florence.

"These groups have been together five, six years, and we've done so many things in short two-day, three-day meetings,"



Casual conversations over dinner and the ability to bring spouses highlighted the ACE peer groups visit to Italy.

says Jason New, founding principal, McFarlin Stanford. "Those two- and three-day meetings go by fast, and our spouses don't get involved. The Italy experience came about because we wanted to spend a week together doing something many people haven't done before. And the spouses actually get to participate in the conversations and meetings."

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Tom Groh, co-owner of Minnesota Sodding Co. in Minneapolis, says the trip to Italy was invaluable for him and his wife and business partner, Dana Groh.

"Being here in Italy, we've just had some great conversations with everybody," he says. "I got a few takeaways that I have to take back to our team. I need to establish a way for people to solve problems on their own. That's the biggest thing. I need to take the leash off people and give everyone a sense of ownership."

Dana Groh adds that the ACE peer group allows them to have open conversations without holding back, because all the other peer group members are from different areas of the country — so they don't compete.

"It's been super helpful to talk with other business owners and see where



they're finding success and where they're struggling," she says. "Just to have open conversations. All our peer group members are in different cities ... and that helps you open up more. It's more of a free conversation. It's been valuable — you can be real and not hold anything back."

It wasn't the first time in Italy for Bret Achtenhagen, but it was his first time for the ACE Italy peer group experience. The owner of Bret Achtenhagen's Seasonal Services in Mukwonago, Wis., Achtenhagen told *LM* his peer group committed to the trip two years ago, and he was counting down the days to return.

"I love Italy, it's fantastic," he says. "But the best part is being here with 25 friends. We have some educational things planned, and we're going to learn some things while we're here."

New seconded Achtenhagen's comments, saying the most meaningful thing about forming these peer groups is the network of people who care about each other.

"Ultimately, it's a way for you to connect with people that actually care about you, and a way for you to work with people who may be a few steps ahead of you," New says. "People want to help. The people here aren't takers. They're not taking things and running out the door — you can do that at a conference. This is about something more meaningful." 

VIVA ITALIA!

Landscape Management was able to break bread with business owners of the following companies:

ACE Calibrate

- Bonick Landscaping, Dallas
- Bret Achtenhagen's Seasonal Services, Mukwonago, Wis.
- Green Teams Inc., Bryan and College Station, Texas
- Jensen Gardens, Omaha, Neb.
- Landesign Construction & Maintenance, Santa Rosa, Calif.
- Red River Outdoor Living, Paris, Texas
- Sellers Services, Rochester, Ind.
- Sposato Landscape, Milton, Del.
- Vande Hey Company, Appleton, Wis.

ACE Domination

- Benson Enterprises, Victor, N.Y.
- Brothers Lawn Service & Landscaping, Lafayette, La.
- emi landscape, Allentown, Pa.
- Etch Outdoor Living, Des Moines, Iowa
- High Prairie Landscape Group, Kansas City, Kan.
- ILT Vignocchi, Chicago
- Matthews Landscape, Shreveport, La.
- Minnesota Sodding Company, Minneapolis



Chuck Bowen, OPEI vice president, communications and member relations, and Laura Gipe, deputy show director, accepted the Greatest Trade Show of 2024 on behalf of Equip Expo.

Equip Expo nabs top trade show award

Equip Exposition, the industry's largest gathering for landscapers, contractors, dealers and outdoor power equipment manufacturers, was named "The Greatest Trade Show of 2024" by *Trade Show Executive* in its Gold 100 Awards and Summit. Equip Expo also won the "Against All Odds Award" and ranked as the third largest trade show in the country.

"These particular awards are an exceptional achievement by Equip and OPEI staff," says Kris Kiser, president of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI), which owns and manages Equip Exposition. "Last year was challenging as our registration vendor was a victim of a cyberattack days before the show's opening. Yet the staff was able to pivot and deliver the best show we'd had yet, still seamlessly. That shows the strength of the team."

The 2025 Equip Expo, a private, business-to-business show, took place Oct. 21-24, at the Kentucky Exposition Center in Louisville, Ky. This year marked the fourth time in a row Equip's trade show floor exhibit space sold out and, this year, in the shortest amount of time in the show's history.

"The outdoor industry is growing and evolving, and we are with it. Equip has always been a unique show, and we'll continue to seek ways to better serve our members, exhibitors and attendees with new programming, events and experiences," adds Kiser. "For anyone in the landscape, hardscape, irrigation, tree care and similar outdoor living field, Equip is a unique opportunity for them."

Since OPEI took management of the trade show in-house and rebranded it in 2022, Equip has now been nominated for 15 Grand Awards, and has also brought home trophies for "Most Innovative Show" and "Best New Idea."

Trade Show Executive's prestigious Gold 100 & Summit recognizes the top trade shows held in the U.S. and offers associations and independent show organizers an opportunity to highlight their achievements. The awards were presented at a TSE Summit in Palm Springs, Calif.

Fun and learning in Las Vegas

SiteOne's Women in the Green Industry conference brought together industry pros for education, networking and professional development

BY PAYTON SZYMCAK | LM DIGITAL MEDIA SPECIALIST

“What happens in Vegas doesn't stay here.” That was the motto SiteOne Landscape Supply brought to life for its annual Women in the Green Industry conference. This year's event gave attendees the chance to explore women's empowerment in Las Vegas.

Since its start 27 years ago, it's grown to a national event with more than 300 attendees and has become a vital resource for women's professional growth.

“We wanted to bring together owners, leaders and rising professionals to not only sharpen their business and leadership skills but also build a stronger sense of community within the industry,” says Christina Moore, SiteOne's director of events. “The goal was to balance professional development with personal growth, while celebrating the contributions women are making every day.”

Opening the conference was an expo that let attendees explore new products and technology. A welcoming event followed to help first-time attendees break the ice and form new connections, setting the stage for a dinner and keynote speech from Lindsay Roselle, founder of Work Within.

The second day kicked off with a breakfast panel featuring leaders from SiteOne, Sperber Landscaping Services and Plants Creative Landscapes. After a quick networking break, Tony Ricketts, founder and CEO of Lawnline Marketing, took the stage to shed light on how AI can boost your business. Ricketts shared tips on the best AI tools for everyday tasks, busted some myths and explained how it can save time and make business run smoother.



“We were very intentional in choosing speakers who could bring both expertise and relatability,” Moore says. “We looked for leaders with proven success in their fields, voices that could speak to the unique challenges women face in business and storytellers who could inspire action. This mix ensures our agenda delivers real-world strategies alongside the motivation needed to put them into practice.”

Lindsay Roselle's keynote capped off the first day at SiteOne's Women in the Green Industry Conference in September.

To give back to the local community, attendees also had a chance to roll up their sleeves to fill bags with feminine hygiene kits packed with essentials, primarily sent to middle and high schools through the Communities in Schools organization. This hands-on effort captured how the conference represented more than just learning and growing industry skills but also coming together to create a real movement of support.

“I took away a great sense of empowerment, realizing that our voices together can inspire change, uplift one another and pave the way for a future filled with limitless possibilities,” says attendee April Ely, sales representative at Cresline Plastic Pipe Co.

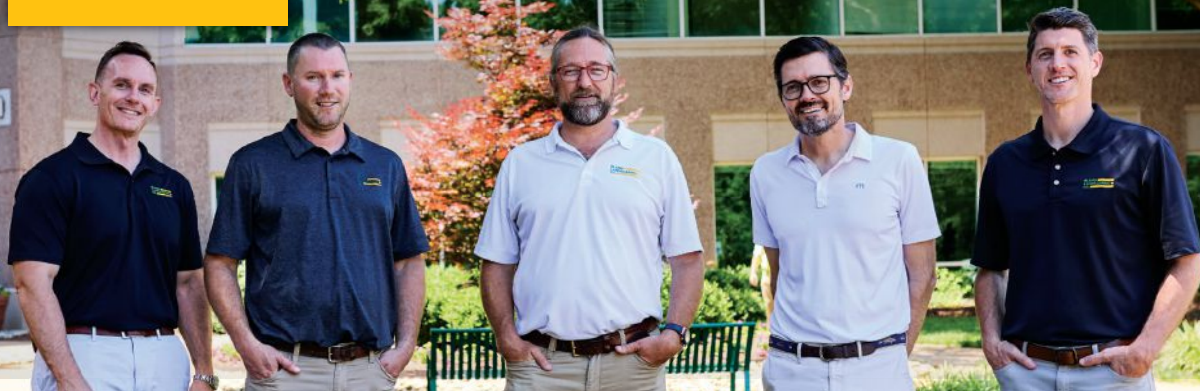
The annual conference remains a space where women in the green industry can connect, learn and uplift one another, shaping what's yet to come.

“We hope attendees leave feeling empowered with practical tools they can bring back to their businesses, as well as renewed confidence in their leadership journey. Just as important, we want them to walk away with new connections and mentors — relationships that extend beyond the conference and help them grow personally and professionally,” Moore says. 🌱



(From left to right) Amber Baker, an executive assistant with SiteOne Landscape Supply; Christina Moore, director of events at SiteOne; Emily Lindley, content and events manager at The Grow Group; and Payton Szymczak, LM's digital media specialist at SiteOne's Women in the Green Industry Conference.

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RISE AND SHINE

Three landscape industry veterans share why they're heading to Elevate 2025 and what they hope to get out of their week in the desert

BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

If you were looking to start a new international education conference and trade show, you'd probably look to launch it during a period of widespread economic optimism where lingering concerns about a global health crisis were more science fiction than reality.

That's not what the National Association of Landscape Professionals found in 2022, however, when it launched Elevate following a split with its longtime partner, GIE+Expo (now known as Equip Exposition). At the time of the first edition of Elevate in Nashville, the country was in the throes of economic challenges brought about by high inflation, and the exhibition industry was still trying to get its feet back under it following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite all that, NALP and Elevate thrived right out of the gate. Year one of Elevate played to rave reviews, and steady growth and acceptance in the industry soon followed. As the fourth edition of Elevate prepares to kick off this month in Phoenix (Nov. 2-5), the event finds itself as one of the nation's fastest growing conferences and trade shows, according to *Trade Show Executive* magazine.

And maybe best of all, according to NALP CEO Britt Wood, Elevate has largely been able to achieve most of the goals it set for itself when the association decided to go its own way back in 2022.

"It's done most of the really specific things that we hoped it would do, most notably to encourage landscapers



FACE TO FACE

The smaller footprint and intimate nature of Elevate has made it a popular event among landscape pros in just its fourth year.

PHOTOS: NALP; BACKGROUND: DEE LIU / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES

from all over the country to attend our event,” Wood said during a one-on-one conversation with *Landscape Management* (see “The evolution of Elevate” on page 24).

“Here’s a perfect example: I think the last time we did something with GIE, we had maybe three or four people from the state of Arizona come to that event,” he said. “We’ve already got 50-plus signed up from Arizona this year, and more signing up every day. We’re reaching an audience we haven’t reached as much when we were all centered in one location. So, we’re really pleased with it, and we’re looking forward to getting it going in Phoenix this year.”

To learn why the industry has embraced Elevate the way that it has, *LM* reached out to a trio of veteran landscape pros with varying experiences in the conference and trade show space to get a sense of what they hope to get out of attending this year in the desert, how Elevate differs from other industry events they attend and what first-timers to the event should focus on during their time in Phoenix.

For more information on all the education and events planned for Phoenix at Elevate 2025, go to **landscapeprofessionals.org/ELEVATE**.

Continued on page 18



EXHIBIT A

By design, the trade show floor at Elevate is smaller, making it easier to navigate and connect with exhibitors.

Continued from page 17

Ivan Katz

Owner

Great Lakes Landscape Design

Oak Park, Mich.

Ivan Katz's business card identifies him as the owner and founder of Great Lakes, a firm he started in 1989 that provides design-build and a full menu of maintenance services to customers in and around metro Detroit.

But those cards also carry another title — visionary — which goes a long way in explaining the success he's realized at Great Lakes, why he's added Elevate to his list of must-attend events in recent years and why he thinks his fellow landscape professionals can get plenty out of joining him at the annual event.

"If you attend the education that suits your skill set or helps you achieve goals you've set for yourself, and if you take the initiative and engage with people — don't wait for people to speak to you first — then you're going to find a lot to like at Elevate," Katz says.

Despite his 40-plus years in the industry, Katz has more in common with those who will be attending Elevate for the first time than meets the eye. While this will be his third consecutive year attending Elevate, other commitments with a group he was involved with prevented him from attending Elevate in year one or at any time when the NALP event was colocated with GIE+Expo/Equip Exposition. Like newcomers to the event, he sees Elevate through relatively fresh eyes.

And what does Katz see at Elevate that's made it an important event for him to attend? The education definitely stands out, he says, most notably the Breakfast of Champions event. "Find a topic you are most interested in or need feedback on, and it will pay off," he says.

The smaller footprint of the exhibit floor at Elevate also appeals to him. "Just walking the floor and meeting the vendors has opened our eyes to new opportunities and innovations," he explains.

At the end of the day, though, Katz says the real value at Elevate — and, really, any other big event in the landscape industry — comes from the people you meet and interact with, so the variety of networking opportunities available at



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CLASS IN SESSION

A robust list of education and networking opportunities await attendees at Elevate 2025.



the event has been a game changer for the way he's viewed and prioritized conferences and trade shows.

"Our industry is an amazing group of people willing to step up and help each other out," Katz says. "Everyone is so approachable, gracious with their time and knowledge, and the opportunity to do that at Elevate really stands out."

Kurt Bland **President** **Bland Landscaping** **Apex, N.C.**

Kurt Bland is no stranger to the landscaping and lawn care industry, and he has more than a few trips to industry conferences and trade shows under his belt.

He was just 14 years old when he started working for the family business founded by his father, Tom. In 2002, he returned to Bland Landscaping on a full-time basis and, with the help of his brother Matt, the company's chief financial officer and chief operating officer, has grown the business into one with locations across the Southeast that now ranks No. 45 on the 2025 LM150 list of the top revenue-generating companies in the industry.

Despite that, it's been more than a decade since Bland has made any of the industry's conferences and trade shows a priority; his last one was in 2009 when he traveled to Louisville for what is now Equip Exposition.

Continued on page 20

LEADER SPOTLIGHT



JUSTIN & DYLAN BATES

Co-Owners of Bates Landscaping

THEN

When Bates Landscaping began in 2009, Justin Bates was cutting nine lawns out of the back of his pickup, while working a full-time restaurant job. A year or so later, Dylan joined the ride, and together they built the business from the ground up. As their client base grew, so did the complexity of their financials. Each year brought a bigger P&L, a steeper learning curve, and more pressure to manage the books without formal accounting training.

NOW

As the business matured, Justin and Dylan realized they needed more than just bookkeeping. They needed strategic financial insight. After joining ACE Peer Groups, they discovered McFarlin Stanford's outsourced accounting services and made the leap. The impact was immediate. Their leadership team gained time and clarity to focus on sales and operations. Today, Bates Landscaping runs on clean, trustworthy numbers and the confidence to manage by them.

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JUSTIN BATES

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"We didn't need a deep dive into journal entries — we needed someone to say, 'Here's where your labor is, here's where it should be.' That's what McFarlin Stanford delivers."



Continued from page 19

“Back in that timeframe, we were dealing with the economic repercussions of 2008 and 2009, and it was just clear that traveling (to these events) was not a priority for us,” Bland says. “We just felt at that time, it was really important for us and the health of our business to hunker down, focus on execution and zero in on what we were doing in our business.”

But what worked for Bland Landscaping back then doesn’t necessarily make sense for what the company has become today, which is why Bland is excited to be heading to Phoenix this month for Elevate.

“I did drive down to Charlotte last year (host city for Elevate 2024) to have dinner with some industry folks that I knew,” Bland says. “Seeing them and talking to them made me realize that it was probably time for me to get back to events like this because I was probably missing out on things that could help us.

“I’ve recognized that there have been a lot of changes that have taken place in the industry, and those are things I need to stay in touch with. And I’ve realized that a lot of my friends in the business are older than me. Maybe I

met them through my dad, but because I started in the industry at such a young age, most of my peers are older than me. So, I’m looking at this as a chance to get a clean, new start. I still want to connect with those old friends, but I’m also hopeful that I’ll meet a lot of new ones, too.”

As a newcomer to Elevate — albeit one with nearly 40 years of experience in the industry — Bland is approaching his week in Phoenix with an open mind. However, an old favorite was one of the first things to catch his eye when he began studying the agenda.

“I was excited to see they were still doing the Breakfast of Champions. I spoke at those a couple of times during GIE way back when and got a lot out of the experience,” Bland says. “So, I’m ready to sit on the other side of the table this time around.”

The networking opportunities in Phoenix — from the larger, more formal events like the Welcome Reception and the Elevate Bash to more intimate, one-on-one conversations — are also high on Bland’s list of must-dos during the week.

“I spend way too much time on LinkedIn, so I’m looking forward to putting names with the faces I know from there,” he says. “Social media is great for building relationships with people, but while you know them, you really don’t. You’ve never sat down, had a meal with them or had a drink, so I’m really excited about the human interaction part.”

And since this will be his first exposure to a national trade show in more than 15 years, Bland also thinks the companies he’ll visit on the exhibit floor will pay dividends for him and his company.

“I’m not looking to figure out which brand of mower best suits my needs — we’re pretty happy with where we are there,” he says. “But I’m really excited about seeing what sort of innovations have taken place, what sort of new products are out there. I do my best to keep up with all that, but to have all that in one place at one time will be super beneficial for us.”

Mike McCarron
Owner
Image Works Landscaping
Fairfax Station, Va.

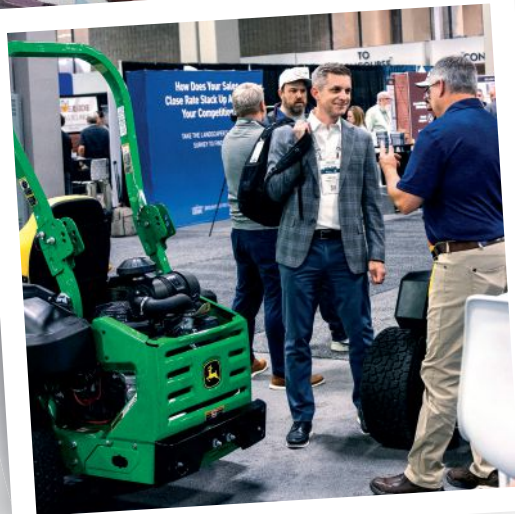
If Mike McCarron’s name and his appearance in a story on landscaping conferences and trade shows sounds familiar to you, you’re not crazy.

It was just a few months ago that we featured McCarron in the pages of *LM*, talking about his experiences at Equip Exposition. But he’s also been a regular at Elevate since

Continued on page 22



CONNECT THE DOTS
 Whether in small-group settings or on the trade show floor, networking tops many attendees to-do list at Elevate.



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Continued from page 20

its inception — something that sets him apart from Katz and Bland — so we thought his unique perspective warranted bringing him back for an encore performance this month.

“We get things out of both shows that benefit us in the long run, so I think it’s important for us to be at both,” McCarron says. “They offer different things, so we have different to-do lists for each one, but I think both of them are valuable.”

McCarron’s belief in the value of these events was born from the early days of his company, when colleagues in other parts of the country would tell him about pieces of equipment that he knew would benefit his operation that simply weren’t available from dealers or distributors in his part of the world.

“There weren’t as many YouTube channels or online options back then to find out about that kind of stuff, so trade shows were really the best option to go down, see all this equipment, what was available and how we could get it in our market,” he says.

Since those first trips to GIE+Expo/Equip Exposition in the early 2010s, McCarron’s and Image Works’ approach to

PARTY TIME

The Elevate Bash, which last year’s visited the NASCAR Hall of Fame, is a must-attend event for many.



these events has evolved. For trips around the trade show floor at both Equip Exposition and Elevate, he and the select team members he brings along treat it largely as a shopping trip.

“I tell the employees who go to look around as if they have an open pocketbook. If it’s something cool that can help our business, I want to know about it. We can figure out how feasible and realistic it is later,” he says.

When it comes to Elevate specifically, McCarron says he takes a much broader, big-picture approach to his to-do list.

“What Elevate has allowed me and one or two of our top people to do is to focus on networking, to work on the vision side of our business, to attend education sessions and meet and mingle with people from outside of our region,” he says. “At Elevate, it’s the high-level management, it’s the owners and the decision-makers. They’re talking vision and strategy, so we try to focus ourselves on those concepts.”

McCarron’s advice to first-timers making their way to Phoenix for Elevate 2025? Make a clear-headed assessment of your operation’s weaknesses, find resources directly associated with those areas and dive deeply into those.

“If you want to improve sales, focus on opportunities that can improve your network, on how to market your company better using social media, on improving your branding,” he says. “If you’ve got operational efficiency issues and you’re not getting out of the gate the way you want to, look for opportunities to focus on that. If it’s more about the big idea, the 10- or 15-year plans, how to scale or add locations, zero in on that.”

“Figure out the areas where you want to improve the most and point yourself in those directions, because I can tell you from experience that you’ll be able to do that at Elevate, and there will be a ton of people there who will help you with those things.”

PHOTO: NALP


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THE EVOLUTION OF ELEVATE

NALP CEO Britt Wood talks about the association's big event, where it's been and where it's going in the future

BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Britt Wood became the CEO of the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) in 2019. In the years since then, few of the association's decisions have been as impactful as the creation of the annual Elevate conference and trade show, which debuted in 2022.

From that first event in Nashville following the split with GIE+Expo (now Equip Exposition) to this year's Elevate in Phoenix, Nov. 2-5, the event has cemented its spot on the landscape industry calendar, annually attracting several thousand attendees and, earlier this year, being recognized as one of the fastest-growing trade shows in the country, according to *Trade Show Executive* magazine.

Before the doors swing open on this year's edition of Elevate, *Landscape Management* sat down with Wood to discuss the state of the event, what attendees and exhibitors can expect from their visit to the Desert Southwest and where he sees Elevate going in the future.

For a full version of this Q&A or to see a video version of LM's interview with Wood, visit landscapemanagement.net.

Landscape Management: This marks the fourth year of Elevate since the split from GIE+Expo. Has the move accomplished what you wanted, and in general, how have members responded to the change?

Britt Wood: I'll be honest ... Elevate has really exceeded some of our expectations. It's done a couple of really specific things that we hoped it would

do, mainly to encourage landscapers from all over the country to attend our event. When we were in Louisville for all those years, it made it difficult for our West Coast folks to want to come every year, and really, at the end of the day, we were hoping to make it more accessible. We're reaching an audience we haven't reached as much when we were all in one location.

LM: How would you describe NALP's approach to education at Elevate and what you're trying to deliver to attendees?

BW: One of the most important things we wanted to do when we created Elevate was to make it an event for landscape professionals, designed by landscape professionals. So, when it comes to the education, the NALP staff can't take any of the credit. It's the committee of landscape pros that really helps design them. We want Elevate to be something where contractors can come, meet other contractors and really come away with a bunch of ideas to run their business.

LM: The trade show floor at Elevate is quite a bit different from what attendees see at something like Equip Expo. What should attendees be on the lookout for on the trade show floor?

BW: When we were going through the process of separating from GIE+Expo, one of the frequent things that we were hearing from a lot of our members was that it was very difficult to talk to suppliers (at GIE) because there were so many people and everything was so massive. We want to make it so



Britt Wood says Elevate has lived up to expectations.

our attendees can walk the entire hall comfortably, not feel like they're running from place to place, and that they can have those good conversations. What we've tried to do is kind of cultivate a space that's intimate and that allows for suppliers and contractors to have really good conversations.

LM: What does the future hold for Elevate? Beyond future host cities, where would you like to see it in three to five years?

BW: I think we want to continue to attract more contractors and ensure that it's a valuable event for exhibitors and attendees alike. Ultimately, we want Elevate to be something that is literally a can't-miss event, something where you want to be at every year because you know you're going to come away with something new that will help your business. We've developed a great reputation in just four years, and we want to continue building on that. 🙌

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TWO STEPS AHEAD

How to keep lawns in check with preventative weed management

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

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You've probably heard it at least a few times from customers, family members or really anyone not too familiar with the turf industry — they think the main part of the job is helping people eliminate the weeds infiltrating their yards.

And to be fair, it is a large part of being a lawn care operator (LCO), but there's a whole lot more that goes into the profession than what meets the eye. Most likely, one aspect that doesn't always spring to peoples' minds is that a good LCO can help remove weeds *before* they even sprout up.

To get this level of control, and to set up a lawn for success down the road, there are a few chemical and practical options LCOs have at their disposal. With a bit of advice and experience, lawn pros can quickly find what works the best and reduce the number of calls from customers complaining about their weeds.

PRACTICAL CONTROL

Roger May, Ph.D., director of technical operations, north, at TruGreen, says one of the biggest ways to prevent weeds is a thick, healthy turf. He explains that a well-maintained lawn can out-compete weeds for space and resources on the ground, making proper maintenance one of the

most important steps to future success and peace of mind.

"Although preemergents are a great tool for preventing weeds, nothing reduces weed populations better than a thick, well-maintained turf," he says. "This means proper fertilization, watering and mowing. I prefer the second approach because even the best pre-emergent strategy will have its flaws if the turf is thin or improperly mowed."

He adds that knowing the type of grass you're working with is also a big factor in keeping out weeds. For bunch-type grasses such as tall fescue, he says fall overseeding is critical to fill in bare spots since weeds will invade these areas naturally.

Another tool at an LCO's disposal is mulch, he says, which can be effective at blocking annual weeds with a 2- or 3-inch layer.

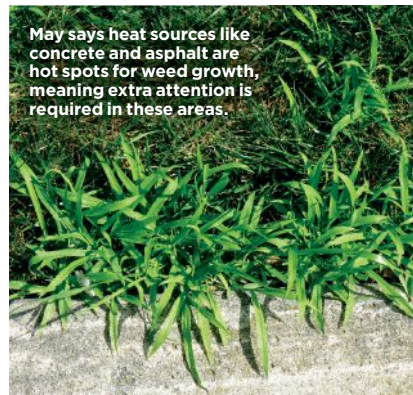
"Existing perennial weeds may still be a problem if they aren't addressed through mechanical or chemical means," May says on the effectiveness of mulching.

CHEMICAL CONTROL

When it comes to chemical options, May says that the timing of preemergent herbicides is everything.

"Apply too early and the active (ingredient) won't last long enough. Apply too late and weeds will already be emerged," May says. "Proper tank agitation is (also) a must, especially with prodiamine because it tends to settle out of solution."

For the northern states, he says pre-emergent applications should be applied in early spring prior to weed seed germination. Down south, he recommends



May says heat sources like concrete and asphalt are hot spots for weed growth, meaning extra attention is required in these areas.

making these applications from early spring to late summer.

And as for products, May recommends prodiamine solutions in the North followed by dithiopyr, especially if spring comes a bit early. Southern states and warm-season turf markets can also take advantage of late-summer indaziflam applications to help reduce winter annuals.

"A simple way to improve the performance of preemergents is to focus on the edges of hard surfaces when applying," May says. "Weed pressure will always be higher around heat sources such as concrete and asphalt. Making a solid trim pass along these areas will really pay off once germination starts to occur. It's very easy to see when applications up to hard surfaces have not been done properly, because that's where you will find most of the weeds."

And for his last bit of advice, May says ornamental bed preemergents can also be a useful tool for preventing weeds thanks to the barrier they create on the soil surface.

"Products containing pendimethalin, flumioxazin or indaziflam do a great job depending on the situation," he explains. 



Proper turf maintenance is the first step in preventing weeds.

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SOLUTIONS THAT WORK

New essential oil mosquito control from Envu

LM and PMP go behind the scenes to learn about Barricor Essential Mosquito Control

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, mosquitoes can spread West Nile virus, dengue and malaria. Just a few infected mosquitoes can start an outbreak in a community.

James Cap, president of NEA Lawn Pro in Jonesboro, Ark., says that while big-ticket landscape installs are trending down for his business, insect control is trending up.

“We’ve had a lot of customers calling in, signing up for insect control,” Cap says. “That’s probably been our biggest add-on this year. Customers are asking for mosquito control because we’re out in the cropland. We have mosquitoes from flooding fields, the rice fields. It’s been a good add-on service, a repeat service, and we’ll keep them on the books for years to come.”

Landscape Management and its sister publication, *Pest Management Professional (PMP)*, accepted an exclusive invitation to the Envu research facility in Morrisville, N.C., to learn about the company’s new biological mosquito control solution, Barricor Essential Mosquito Control.

THE RESEARCHERS AND FORMULATORS

Barricor is a FIFRA 25(b) essential-oil-based insecticide. When used as directed, it delivers a 24-hour mortality rate for mosquitoes and is safe for all other insects, including pollinators and butterflies. The product is water-based and easy to mix. With no signal word or PPE required, the solution is designed to enhance applicator safety and is safe to use in a wide variety of environments.

According to Envu’s Arunas Damijonaitis, Ph.D., solutions development manager, the company went the extra mile to make sure Barricor is eco-friendly.

“This is an essential oil-based product, safe for everything except mosquitoes,” he says. “I’m confident in saying that because we did a lot of research on this. We ran toxicology tests that are required for EPA products. That would not be required for this product — we did it anyway.”

Kyle Denk, formulations and analytics manager for Envu, says lawn and landscape management customers want a product that’s backed by science as being safe to apply around their homes and businesses.

“We have built an essential oil product that is also a safe product,” Denk says. “We’re able to spray a lot lower essential-oil rate compared to some of the other products. That’s the result of the formulation technology that went into building this product.”

Denk demonstrated how Barricor mixes with water and doesn’t separate. He also mixed other mosquito control products, which didn’t demonstrate as consistent of a mixture.

“The product is formulated in a way that’s easy to use for the operator,” Damijonaitis says. “It’s really good in storage. It doesn’t separate. It’s easy to mix. It stays in solution.”

DEMO DAY

Envu research biologist Debbie Koufas gave *LM* a demonstration on how to apply Barricor Essential Mosquito Control. The video is posted on **LandscapeManagement.net**.

“It’s very easy (to apply). Two or four ounces per gallon, pour it in a backpack

Continued on page 32



BRINGING BARRICOR TO LIFE The Barricor development team at Envu includes (from left) Debbie Koufas, Arunas Damijonaitis, Ph.D., and Kyle Denk.



A smarter way to stop mosquitoes

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SOLUTIONS THAT WORK

TEST SUBJECTS

Koufas holds a test box of yellow fever mosquitos, the primary species on which Barricor was tested.



Continued from page 30

sprayer. Fire it up and get to spraying,” Koufas says. “You want to spray the shrubbery where mosquitoes are hiding.”

Koufas says the results are immediate. If a lawn care company wanted to make sure there were no mosquitoes for an event — say, a wedding or an outdoor concert — they could apply it 12-24 hours before the event and expect to have total mosquito control.

“This has been a really fun project to work on,” Koufas adds. “I’ve worked on many over the years with the companies I’ve been with, and this is the shortest one I’ve worked on that’s gone from concept to market.”

Typically, it takes the pest industry four to seven years to bring a new

product to market. Envu launched Barricor in just two years.

Damijonaitis adds that though the spread of disease by mosquitoes isn’t as prevalent in America as it is in other parts of the world, mosquito control is an important service to offer customers.

“Being bit by a mosquito, nobody likes that,” he says. “We’re lucky in this environment there’s not a lot of disease, but not everybody is that lucky. It’s a product that, in my opinion, is really important to public health.”

FUEL FOR THE PIPELINE

Envu formed in 2022 as a spinoff from Bayer Environmental Science. In late 2024, Envu acquired FMC’s Global Specialty Solutions business, which

included products for pest control, lawn care, golf courses and sports fields.

Bernard Jacqmin, head of global innovation at Envu, says the launch of Barricor is another sign that the company is committed to creating solutions for its customers.

“We’ve been able to fuel our pipeline like never before,” Jacqmin told *LM*. “We continue working where we are strong with chemical solutions, but we are also tapping into new technology spaces that are alternatives to chemicals, and we believe society at large is very much interested in these new trends.”

PHOTO: LM/STAFF

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THE BIG ONE

Strong as iron

BY NATHAN MADER
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LOCATION Raleigh, N.C.

COMPANY Myatt Landscaping and Construction

DETAILS When thinking of beautiful landscaping sites, an old steel mill and waste management warehouse likely don't come to mind.

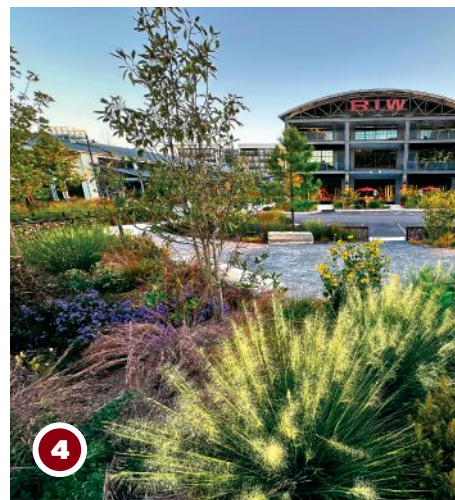
That was the challenge Myatt Landscaping faced with the Raleigh Iron Works site; a property with a long manufacturing history now turned into a multi-use development.

Balancing that industrial aesthetic with an inviting, native landscape was the goal, and Kate Watts, horticulturist for Myatt, says a lot of work was done to provide a full sensory experience with a variety of colors, textures and sounds from the surrounding vegetation.

"We have a courtyard area where we have vines growing up the beams. It provides a wonderful kind of abandoned warehouse look, but also just a very inviting space on the interior of the building," Watts says. "And they left a lot of the original beams exposed, so there's a lot of old with new."

She says a lot of work goes into finding the best and most resilient indigenous plants to use, something that is extra important due to the site's lack of an irrigation system.

Watts also says the project was a group effort from start to finish, and that collaboration culminated in Myatt securing a gold award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' 2024 Awards of Excellence program. 🏆



Captions | 1. To maintain the site, Watts says a landscape crew assists her horticulture efforts a few hours every week with blowing, mowing, trimming and other tasks. **2.** Watts says the interior courtyard with a cut roof is a great example of blending the historical, industrial infrastructure with a modern, beautiful landscape. More than 50 planters are located throughout the site. **3.** Repurposed steel and materials from the site have found a new life as trellises, benches, artistic pieces, swings and more. **4.** While Watts enjoys the challenge of experimenting with native plants and maintaining them on the property, she also highlights the successful collaborations with Future Green Studio's Max Cohen, the landscape architect who designed the site.

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REV YOUR ENGINES

Autonomy in action

Manufacturers provide updates on the autonomous mower market, where it's headed and more

BY SARAH WEBB | CONTRIBUTOR

Within the last several years, autonomous mowers have evolved from small, Roomba-like devices confined to limited areas into powerful, sophisticated machines capable of handling larger and more complex terrains.

"They are no longer just about cutting grass; they are about optimizing entire landscapes with unprecedented efficiency, precision and safety," says David Goff, tech specialist at Sun-seeker. "Adding autonomous mowers is a strategic decision that can future-proof your business, increase its value and free you from the relentless challenges of labor management."

Autonomous mowing experts weigh in on the technology's most recent advancements in the industry.

WHAT'S NEW

One of the most significant advancements in autonomous mowing is the shift from traditional boundary wires to GPS and real-time kinematic (RTK) technology.

Many autonomous mowers also use a sophisticated blend of cameras and computer vision; inertial measurement units that track movement and orientation; ultrasonic and lidar sensors that detect nearby obstacles; and precision mapping and zoning.

Thanks to these upgrades, autonomous mowers are no longer limited to a single property. Instead, they can now travel with landscaping crews from site to site, says Todd Zimmerman, senior vice president of dealer sales, operations and product for Kress, which recently launched its new Voyager 40-inch mower.

"It's meant to go from property to property, where other robotic mowers are 'cut and stay,'" says Zimmerman. "It's really designed to be your next team member — moving and working alongside the crew as part of the team."

As part of the crew, these large, high-powered autonomous mowers do especially well in open areas such as commercial office parks, industrial parks and warehouses where repeatable performance and minimal human intervention are key, says Justin VanderHeyden, product manager, autonomy, John Deere.



A TEAM PLAYER

Autonomous mowers can now travel between sites, allowing them to work alongside crew members and boost efficiency.

However, these mowers aren't limited to wide-open spaces, says Billy Otteman, director of marketing at Scythe.

"There's this misconception that the mowers can only handle wide-open properties — and that's where they really crush it — but we can already handle some pretty complex areas with trees, park benches and a lot of pedestrians," Otteman says.

Other recent autonomous mower updates include:

- Enhanced performance in various cutting conditions, including on uneven slopes and in varying weather conditions.
- Improved user interfaces that make operation easier in the field.
- Centralized platforms through which fleet managers can monitor and control multiple mowers from one dashboard.
- More durable and robust cutting systems.
- Increased battery capacity for longer run times.
- Automated scheduling capabilities, allowing mowers to be programmed to operate in specific areas on specific days and times, with no human intervention required.
- Data analytics in which the machines collect and analyze data on operational metrics like cutting hours, terrain coverage and battery usage.

ADOPTION TRENDS

While some people initially feared that "robots are going to take away jobs," Otteman says the opposite is true, especially in recent years, as the technology has gone from something that's "cutting edge" to more operationalized.

"Robotic mowers actually create more value and more money across operations," Otteman says.

For instance, companies can implement the mowers so their team members can tackle higher-value work, such as trimming, mulching or hardscape tasks, says Jackson Gray, product marketing associate at The Toro Co.

"By creating a diverse fleet that combines the strengths of both autonomous and traditional mowers, landscape contractors can achieve optimal results across a wide range of property complexities, thereby realizing enhanced efficiencies for their crews," Gray says.

Goff adds that companies can even deploy a fleet of robotic mowers at night, reducing labor costs, fuel expenses and noise complaints.

While fear of change used to be another obstacle facing the autonomous mowing sector, Zimmerman says this mindset has shifted.

“The industry is starting to become more open-minded because labor is becoming more of a concern,” Zimmerman says. “None of these companies want to fold, so they have to start looking at alternatives if the labor is not available.”

TIPS OF THE TRADE

For landscapers considering making the switch to autonomous mowers, Gray recommends first conducting an audit of where landscaping crews and machines spend the most time during jobs.

“Once the business identifies areas with the greatest potential for labor savings, it can begin evaluating which autonomous mower best fits its operation and offers the strongest ROI,” Gray says.

From there, he says contractors can reach out to their dealers to discuss autonomous demo opportunities.

During the selection process, landscape pros should also consider how much training and technical support is offered by the manufacturer; whether the app and user interface are intuitive and reliable; and the mower’s ease of serviceability, Goff says.

Zimmerman says landscapers also need to consider the types of properties they serve.

Finally, landscape companies should put processes in place so that team members feel equipped to operate the mower, manage autonomous workflows, interpret data and troubleshoot in the field.

“Integrating change is about two things: the people and the process,” Otteman says. “You need to make sure the people on your team understand why the change is being made, and you need to provide ongoing training to current employees and educate new employees on the technologies.”

WHAT’S NEXT

Moving forward, experts believe the technology will only continue to improve.

“Autonomous performance will continue to increase, and the mowers will be able to see and respond to different kinds of obstacles quickly,” Otteman says. “That also means fewer times that the crew has to interact with the mower.”

VanderHeyden adds that autonomous mower technology will transform how the landscape industry operates overall.

“Landscapers who embrace this change early will not only streamline operations but also unlock new opportunities to elevate service quality, reallocate labor to higher-value tasks and stay competitive in a rapidly evolving market,” VanderHeyden says. 📱

Webb is a freelance writer based in Cleveland and the former managing editor of *Landscape Management*.

SAFETY FIRST

In addition to improved performance and efficiency, large autonomous mowers now include additional safety features beyond the standard lift-and-tilt sensors that stop the blades when the mower is lifted, says Sunseeker’s David Goff.

These include:

- **360-degree obstacle detection.** A full suite of sensors monitor surroundings to avoid both stationary and moving hazards.
- **Virtual bumper technology.** Rather than colliding with objects, the mower slows down or reroutes when something is detected in its path.
- **PIN codes and geofencing.** Mowers are secured against unauthorized use and will automatically shut down if they are moved beyond their designated virtual work zone.
- **Industry certification.** Leading manufacturers ensure their machines meet rigorous international safety standards.



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HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

A historic renovation

BY NATHAN MADER
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LOCATION Fredericksburg, Texas

COMPANY Twistleaf

DETAILS Staying at this historic district estate in one of its many rental units won't look like a typical Airbnb or Vrbo vacation.

That's because for Twistleaf and the client, this three-property site was renovated to be more than just a place to stay for the night — it's a "boutique lodging experience" that allows visitors to see all that Fredericksburg has to offer.

And it's a tough task turning a previous bed-and-breakfast into an "experience," but Twistleaf knew a hardscape renovation was at the core of this old-school glow up.

"We were tasked with evaluating and assessing the landscape as a whole on all three properties and then evaluating what is the hardscape that can remain," said Sarah Yant, principal and lead designer at Twistleaf. "Guests who will be staying there for one, two or three nights, typically, how do they experience the property in a really pleasant way?"

The answer was a variety of new fencing and pathways around the properties that could help guests better move through the site's many features and could highlight the three distinct eras of architecture located on each property.

Yant says Twistleaf also had to get creative with durable, climate-resistant plantings, resulting in a silver award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' 2024 Awards of Excellence program. 🏆



Captions | 1. The central courtyard, made of decomposed granite, was created to provide an additional shared space with shade-tolerant plantings of dwarf palmetto palm, inland sea oats and fall aster. 2. Across from the flagship mansion are three cottage-style bungalows built in the 1930s, which Yant says created the interesting challenge of blending the different eras of architecture into one cohesive design. 3. The landmark Queen Anne Victorian-style mansion, built in the early 1900s, was surrounded by a new white picket fence to add to the historic feel of the property. 4. During the renovations, the city of Fredericksburg implemented strict watering requirements, forcing Twistleaf to pivot from expansive zoysia lawn areas and add lawn replacements like Texas sedge.

RECOMMENDER

What piece of **safety equipment** do you rely on most on the jobsite to give you peace of mind and help you get the job done?



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COLO.

"It's hard to get past normal PPE (personal protective equipment) for me. That's where most incidents happen when that is ignored. If I had to pick one, it would be eye protection. Whether you're cutting, chiseling, trimming, cracking, hammering, etc., just wear it ... no excuses. You can't replace your eyes."



GREG WITCOMB
BRANCH MANAGER,
GOLD COAST
LANDSCAPE SERVICES
LAKE WORTH, FLA.

"At Gold Coast Landscaping Services, Kask arborist helmets are a non-negotiable for our tree crews. We are located in South Florida, where annual palm and hardwood pruning keeps us climbing and working overhead year-round, so they're the first thing that goes on when arriving on-site — and the reason everyone goes home safe at the end of the day."



GREG COLE
PRESIDENT, COLE
LANDSCAPING
ROWLEY, MASS.

"It might sound simple, but for me, it's our pre-trip inspection process. Before any of our trucks roll out, our team goes through a full inspection — checking tarps, equipment and everything on the truck before it leaves our gates each morning. This gives our employees a sense of security that we truly care about their safety and helps identify issues before they become problems. It also sets the tone for the day — when our crews leave safely and intentionally in the morning, that mindset carries onto the jobsite."



NOEL LOARCA
FOUNDER/OWNER,
AVANZA LANDSCAPING
& MAINTENANCE
ARLINGTON, VA.

"Safety glasses. It's absolutely the most critical part for the kind of work that we do. I see guys all the time who like to work without safety glasses, and it doesn't make sense to me. The smallest piece of debris can affect how a person sees for the rest of their life, and we can help prevent that just by wearing glasses."

If you want to attend but haven't registered, make sure to do so by Dec. 7 to secure regular pricing. On-site registration is available from Dec. 8-11 for an increased rate.

IRRIGATION SHOW PREVIEW

Flow and behold in New Orleans

The Irrigation Show returns with new features and classic hits

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The staple of everything water-related in the landscaping industry, the Irrigation Show and Education Week is once again making an appearance this winter, bringing back fan-favorite events, education and the latest technology.

After the success of the 2024 show in Long Beach, Calif., the Irrigation Association (IA) is keeping the party rolling, hosting the 2025 edition in New Orleans, La., from Dec. 8-11. The trade show floor will be open from Dec. 10-11.

"The show really is a super unique forum because—from the contractors, manufacturers, distributors, growers, end users—everyone in the irrigation industry shows up for this," says Rachael Lindsay, marketing manager for the IA. "It's just a way for the entire industry to come together and really share ideas—see what's coming next in the industry."

A FRESH EXPERIENCE

As the largest exhibition dedicated to the irrigation industry, the show will



grow even more this year thanks to its co-location with the National Ground Water Association (NGWA) and its show, Groundwater Week.

"So, basically twice the exhibits and double the connections," says Brittany Tyrrell, IA senior meetings and events manager. "Registration to their show gets access to our show. Our show flows to their show."

Tyrrell says other changes that are

coming to the show are the IA's hands-on CAD Landscape Learning Labs, which are making a return for the first time since 2023, and the amount of Industry Insights sessions has doubled.

With these additions, plus the staple of IA University to provide technical and business classes for all levels, the IA is once again aiming to be the go-to event for networking and education opportunities.

"This year, we've actually doubled our (Industry Insights) sessions to bring attendees even more opportunities to learn, and it's also baked into registration," Tyrrell says. "The sessions are going to be on the floor in the Insights Theater, and then we will also have sessions in a classroom setting. So, two locations, all-inclusive in registration."

"(CAD Landscape Learning Labs are) returning this year, and they do offer CEUs, and they're basically a

LATEST AND GREATEST
The Irrigation Show is a perfect opportunity to see the latest products and newest innovations.

CAN YOU FEEL IT?
Hands-on learning will be a large part of this year's education options.



hands-on design training for landscape professionals. So, super excited about having those return.”

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

When the trade show floor opens on Dec. 10, that also provides a whole new level of opportunity for attendees. The opportunity to network, meet top manufacturers and suppliers and see the latest innovations can help pros stay ahead of the curve for the upcoming year.

Richard Restuccia, senior vice president, Husqvarna, says one of the most important parts of the show is being able to discuss the biggest hurdles facing the industry. Aligning contractors, manufacturers, distributors and public agencies together in one place can help everyone stay on the same page with the most pressing topics.

“It’s nice that the show happens at the end of the year because it really helps you focus on, ‘OK, how do we be better next year? How do we support our customers better? How do we solve the problems that the water agencies are facing with critical water shortages?’” Restuccia says.

This year, Restuccia says there are many discussion topics that will be a top priority at the show, including labor shortages, water conservation, installation efficiency and more. On the business side of things, Tyrrell says marketing, leveraging AI and smart controllers will also take center stage.

As for special events and other show staples, Lindsay recommends attendees check out the New Product Contest Plaza to see the latest and greatest innovations from manufacturers, the Insights Theater to find education sessions without leaving the trade show floor and the many networking opportunities.

“We kick off this year with the Bayou Bash Welcome event, and we’re super excited. This one’s happening at the House of Blues in the French Quarter, so that’ll be just a really fun New Orleans-approved way to kick off the week and get some excitement going,” Lindsay says. “We have the Newcomers

Roundtable every year, so anyone who hasn’t attended the show can show up to this event; they’ll meet other peers who are also newcomers, and they’ll also be able to connect with veterans who have been to the show before, can give them tips, and then they even get a behind-the-scenes tour of the show floor before it opens.”

To close out the show, Lindsay suggests attending the Big Easy Brewfest — now in collaboration with Groundwater Week’s closing reception — to further celebrate the industry coming together. Plus, the IA is returning its Community Give Back event by partnering with the Edible Schoolyard New Orleans nonprofit.

“We’re putting together take-home garden kits. So, we’re partnering with Edible Schoolyard New Orleans, and they’re a nonprofit that integrates hands-on organic gardening into the school curriculum,” Lindsay says. “It’s just a really great way to get our attendees to give back to the host city and also elevate the industry through philanthropy and community.”

A HELPING HAND

Restuccia, who has attended the show for almost 30 years now, says having those face-to-face interactions between manufacturer and customer is crucial, and the Irrigation Show is the perfect

SAVE THE DATE!

Can’t attend this year? Make sure to plan your stay in Sin City for the Irrigation Show’s Las Vegas landing in 2026. Dates are Dec 7-10, with the trade show opening on Dec. 9.

time to make those connections and learn from each other. He says knowing what projects and problems are happening on both fronts is huge for mutual understanding and growth.

Plus, it allows manufacturers and distributors to offer solutions to attendees’ most pressing issues and roadblocks. For Husqvarna and Restuccia, he says water scarcity, labor shortages, smart controller usage and new regulations are all topics he’s prepared to address and work through with attendees.

“Faster installs, push fit fittings are going to be important, cleaner wiring, 60-minute retrofit kits. This is all really important and is going to be big this year,” he says. “Water is tight, and labor is tight. Our job is to help professional landscapers deliver verified savings with simpler installs and then to back that up with training and service they can trust.”

ONE FOR ALL
Meeting with customers, local agencies and manufacturers allows everyone to learn from each other and plan for the next year.



IRRIGATION TECH

Critical cold care

Irrigation pros share critical winterization best practices for pumps, cast iron components, filters and valves — even in mild climates

BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR

When winterizing an irrigation system at season's end, it's critical not to overlook the pump and zone valves. Neglecting these components is one of the most common causes of costly cold-weather damage.

This oversight is common, especially for landscape and irrigation pros serving milder geographic zones where a deep, hard winter isn't the norm, says Kurt Thompson, owner of K. Thompson and Associates, an irrigation troubleshooting, evaluation and planning company, and a partner and instructor at Irri-Tech Training.



Kurt Thompson

"If you're any place that has one or two days where the temperature doesn't get above freezing, then you need to pay attention to pumps and valves," Thompson says.

FORCE THE AIR

The blowout is the industry standard for irrigation winterization. It involves a compressor to force air through each station sequentially until moisture is evacuated from the system.

Beyond this basic blowout, contractors must focus on protecting the system's more expensive components, such as booster pumps and filters, says Chris Rigby, senior contractor account manager for Rain Bird.

"The first priority is to ensure the ability to completely shut off the water

supply, eliminating any standing water in the primary lines," he says. Cast-iron pumps are highly susceptible to freezing damage, and Rigby strongly advises removing the existing drain plugs to thoroughly remove all water.

"Water trapped inside the cast iron housing, particularly around the impeller and its casing, will freeze, expand and exert immense pressure, causing catastrophic damage," Rigby says.

In addition, irrigation pros caution contractors to avoid excessive pressure during the blowout. Matt Bruns, Toro's district manager for the Midwest, suggests keeping it at around 50 psi for 10 seconds, as excessive air pressure can overheat and melt internal plastic components. Instead, prioritize air volume over pressure.

"While air can be compressed, water cannot," Bruns says. "Therefore, the goal is not to use high pressure, but high air volume (cubic feet per minute) to push the water out of the system."

If a contractor is unable to perform a complete blowout, then the only alternative is to open the system's drain valves and ball valves, particularly in the manifold where the zone valves are located, to allow residual water to percolate out naturally.

LOOK AT OVERLOOKED AREAS

Thompson stresses the need to drain the above-ground portion of the pump's discharge line to prevent freeze damage. This line, which moves pressurized water from the pump and into the main pipes, is as critical to drain as the rest of the mainline.

Thompson adds that the suction or intake line is often overlooked. Since the line usually comes entirely out of the ground and into the pump, it must be drained. He warns, however, that the draining process can be complicated by a check valve or foot valve, which is designed to hold water in the suction line to prevent the pump from losing its prime.

"If this water-holding mechanism is in place, the water will be trapped in the line and can freeze, often splitting the pipe near the water level," he says.

Rigby says filters, often made from plastic, must be emptied. He advises removing the bottom cap, often resembling an upside-down soda bottle, to drain the water. Additionally, removing the internal filter element is a good preventive measure, as residual moisture within the material can freeze and expand.

NECESSARY PRECAUTIONS

Regions that do not experience sustained, hard freezes should still employ a winterization strategy for pumps and valves. For above-ground metal elements, Rigby advises contractors to use pipe insulation wrapped and taped securely around the equipment to create a protective "pillow." This provides just enough thermal barrier to prevent freezing during cold snaps.

Rigby notes that this insulation is beneficial year-round. It acts as a shield, preventing the sun's intense heat from bearing down on plastic components, accelerating their breakdown and failure.

"While the insulation may make routine maintenance, like pressure checks, slightly more cumbersome, its value in protecting the system from both extreme cold and extreme heat makes it a worthwhile, year-round practice," he says. 

Zawacki is a Cleveland-based journalist and frequent contributor who has covered various aspects of the green, horticultural, sports turf and irrigation industries for the last 20 years.

FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Sam Rankin

PRESIDENT

**ETCH OUTDOOR LIVING
HUXLEY, IOWA**

1 Tell me about Etch Outdoor Living, and how did you get into the business?

We're a full-service design/build company, and we do snow removal as well. We're a little bit heavier on the recurring services, but we also do pools, patios, putting greens, plants, pergolas — anything with a P in it, it seems we take care of. I was like every kid that started a mowing business when I mowed the neighbor's lawn — but I was dumb enough to stick with it. One thing led to another, and when I finished college, I decided I wanted to pursue a career as a professional hockey referee. This business afforded me the opportunity to pursue that dream. Over time, it switched places, what I really love to do. The business became a little bit more fun each day.

2 Do you still referee hockey? What is it like getting booed by everyone?

I referee collegiate hockey now. I did break my leg and partially tore my meniscus last fall, which made me ask if it's really worth it, but I want to get back out there. I'll be on the ice in Omaha soon. And we get booed, a lot of times, before the game even begins. It's great when both coaches are yelling because then you know you're doing it right. I tell the coaches, "My goal is to be consistent. It could be consistently bad or consistently great, but at least you know what you're getting."

3 Any trends you're noticing with your clients?

From a commercial maintenance standpoint, price continues to be the driving factor. Property managers and management companies are being praised for reducing budgets and increasing the ROI of a property. We have to flip the script on that and let them know we can hit your budget, but that budget doesn't align with the expectations that ownership or senior management is going to have when they come to town. A lot of education is required to make sure we're both on the same path together.

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

Our Turfco spreaders. We've got the T3100s. I love their simplicity. As we're trying to scale a business, we want some things that are simple, with less parts, that work. There's not much that can go wrong with them. And when something does go wrong, we stock the five or 10 most common parts, and we don't have to wait for them. And the really nice thing, Turfco is based in Minneapolis. If it's a part we don't have and we call by 2 p.m., it's at our door before I get to the shop the next morning. We have a great time with them. They allow us to scale. Their spreader fits through gates. They do all the little things. They've been a great partner for us.

5 Tell me about your family, and what do you all do for fun?

My wife Haley, she's fantastic. We have a 3-month-old daughter, Ruby. She is a light. It's so much fun to be a dad. I don't think you're ever great at being a dad, but it is something I want to be excellent at. Haley and I like to play golf. She mostly likes to ride around in the cart, but the thing is, she's a really good golfer, so it makes it a lot of fun. And we go for a lot of walks with the dogs and our daughter. I have a lot of fun hanging out with the family. In my opinion, there's never too much time you can spend just hanging out with those you're closest to. 🐾



LEVELING UP SERVICES

#115

Making client budget worksheets a priority allowed Level Green Landscaping to increase revenue and plan ahead **BY LAUREN H. DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR**

Growth came from a combination of proactively selling landscape enhancement services and also an increase in winter weather, says Doug Delano, managing member of Level Green Landscaping in Upper Marlboro, Md. The company currently has six branches and will be opening another in January.

Level Green provides commercial landscape maintenance, design/build for current customers, irrigation, snow removal and tree care services. With a 29-percent increase year-over-year, Level Green came in at No. 115 on *Landscape Management's* 2025 LM150 listing of the industry's top revenue-generating firms.

PLANNING AHEAD

Delano says Level Green attributes that growth to their landscape management/enhancement services and snow removal, which had some natural help from an increase in wintry weather. Their snow removal services went from \$570,000 in revenue in 2023 to more than \$5 million in 2024. On the maintenance side, the company increased base maintenance sales a little more than \$3 million, or 20 percent, which flows through to its other divisions.

During that time, Level Green also renewed 95 percent of its work, so any new maintenance went straight to its growth. To continue improving, the company worked on their penetration rate of enhancements on existing landscape management work, Delano says.

"It is an ongoing project, as while some account managers are very successful at selling enhancements, others just don't get the idea that you must propose work both asked for and work needed to sell for," he says.

Level Green has also made client budget worksheets a priority for its account managers. The worksheets help property manager clients proactively budget for their property needs for the next year and allow the Level Green team to work a year ahead to ensure clients are budgeting for enhancements and getting those approved. The company can then use that as a leading indicator for their enhancement sales.

FOUNDATION OF TRUST

Finding the right people for the company continues to be one of their largest obstacles for growth, Delano says. Level Green has a recruiter in-house who actively works to fill vacant positions, and it also has a robust intern program that exposes those team members to the entire operation.

"The recruitment process continues to be always looking and occasionally bringing in employees for growth positions before actually having those positions available," he says.

In addition, the company has a manager associate program where it recruits recent or upcoming college graduates and places them in a management position to learn the company's culture, expectations and systems, without having the full responsibilities of an operations or account manager. Those employees typically get promoted from the program to an account or operations manager within three to 12 months.

But no matter the position Level Green is looking to fill, it's important that it hires team members who can be trusted, Delano says.

"As an owner, I learned a long time ago that I am not the best person to do many of the tasks within our organization," he says. "Our key to growth has been to hire great people, train them, let them make a few mistakes, back them up and help them grow. That is what has made us successful."

As Delano and his business partner, Bill Hardy, get older, they're preparing to turn leadership at Level Green over to the next generation. Delano says getting their team ready and coaching them will be the most important task during the next few years.

Something both Delano and Hardy strive to follow and teach with all of their employees is the Golden Rule. For example, if there's an issue, they don't argue with the customer and simply work toward a solution.

"Keep your promises, whether they be to employees, customers or vendors," he says. "I believe this has helped us be successful." 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.



Doug Delano





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.

Building value before you sell

If someone offered to buy your business tomorrow, would you be proud of the price?

We analyzed which of our peer group members recently sold to private equity for top dollar; they were all companies we directly coached. That was a proud moment, and it raised a powerful question — What were the areas we focused on during coaching?

It came down to a mix of short- and long-term strategies. The truth is the same things that make your company attractive to a buyer also make it more sustainable, scalable and less stressful to run today.

Don't wait until you're ready to sell. Start thinking about the following now.

1 RECURRING REVENUE: LOWERS STRESS AND EVENS THE BUMPS

When I first started coaching Planted Earth Landscaping in Maryland and Drost in Michigan, both were dependent on design-build. They did great work, but every year started at zero.

I would always implore them to grow their maintenance division. Over time, they both expanded maintenance, grew enhancements

and added new service lines like tree care. When they eventually sold, both enjoyed a strong exit with a stronger self-running company.

To build that recurring revenue, start here:

- Grow full-service maintenance contracts rather than one-off services.
- Develop account managers who relish proactively selling enhancements and upgrades to existing clients.
- Add seasonal programs like snow, irrigation or holiday decor that keep clients engaged year-round — then turn those into their own divisions.
- Make maintenance a core pillar, not an afterthought.

And, for a pro tip, aim for at least 55-percent recurring revenue so you can handle economic bumps. Then, push toward 75 percent or more for real value creation.

2 PROFIT IMPROVEMENT: THE CORE DRIVER OF VALUE

Profitability is the engine of business value. If your business delivers strong, above-average margins, you'll command a higher multiple and keep more of what you earn.

There's a lot you can do here, but let's break it into two main levels. First, drive your team to achieve and beat your budgets. Use profit sharing, lean thinking and ongoing variance discussions in every department to uncover profit opportunities.

Second, benchmark your firm against others — and against the best — in the industry so you can uncover blind spots and opportunities for brand-new approaches.

With Drost, we focused on both areas, holding every team accountable to budget and comparing their results against top performers, which ultimately grew their gross profit, net profit and revenue.

3 ORGANIZING LEADERSHIP FOR GROWTH

If your business depends on you (the owner) for sales, client relationships or daily operations, it has less transferable value — and keeps you stuck in the weeds.

The goal is to build a leadership team that can think, decide and execute without constant oversight. Hire or develop leaders smarter than you in their disciplines. Train your middle managers to lead, not just supervise. And if you've got "problem leaders" who hold the team back, address it quickly; a company can't easily rise above its weakest link.

When you build a leadership team that runs the business day-to-day, you free yourself to focus on vision, strategy and growth. That's how both financial value and freedom are created.

CULTURE MATTERS

But it is still your culture that becomes the glue that holds it all together.

A motivated team of engaged employees gives your future buyer the confidence that your company will continue thriving after you exit. It also makes it more enjoyable for you as owner.

Invest in developing a team of leaders who think and act with an ownership mentality, and your company will prosper with and without you. For help on this journey, visit us at JeffreyScott.biz.





BY BRYAN CHRISTIANSEN

The author is the CEO of Mariani Premier Group, the largest premium residential landscape firm in the U.S. Reach him at BryanC@marianipremiergroup.com.

Innovating from the inside out

As we close out another successful year at Mariani Premier Group, I'm reminded of a quote often attributed to Peter Drucker: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." Strategy matters, of course. However, it's been my experience that what sustains growth, fosters innovation and builds resilience is the performance of the people who execute your strategy every single day.

That's why an intentional focus on celebrating employee excellence and innovation is such an important topic. In an evolving industry, the one constant that drives our success is people. The question is, how do you intentionally build a culture that recognizes employee excellence and sparks innovation at every level?

In exploring this question, I believe it comes down to three simple factors — acknowledgement, creativity and empowerment. Focusing on these can improve employee retention and increase job satisfaction.

Recently, at the Mariani Premier Group, we celebrated an employee who's been working with one of our companies for 50 years. Not only that, but this employee also has a son and grandson who work for us. We also have numerous associates who have been with us for over 30 years. That type of employee retention contributes to your organization's success monumentally.

STEP 1: ACKNOWLEDGMENT

At its core, acknowledgment is about visibility. We all want to know that our work really matters, not just in terms of the bottom line, but in how our work helps advance the mission. Too frequently, we save employee recognition for the "big wins." But it's

often more meaningful to practice small, consistent acknowledgements to create a culture of excellence.

Ask yourself:

- How often am I spotlighting people doing things right?
- Am I recognizing individuals in ways that feel authentic to them?
- Do my acknowledgments connect back to our values and long-term vision?

Acknowledgment is more than saying "good job." It's telling a foreman, "Your focus on safety last week ensured that everyone returned to their families safe and sound ... plus you saved us hours of rework. Thank you!" Or telling a landscape designer, "That fresh take on the planting plan gave us a competitive edge. You are making our client's vision a reality. Thank you!" Recognition tied to impact reinforces excellence.

STEP 2: CREATIVITY

Our industry thrives on creativity through new practices and innovations. But creativity needs intentional space.

Here's where leaders must shift from a mindset of control to one of curiosity. For example, instead of asking, "Did this project succeed or fail?" ask, "Is there something we should have done differently?"

Creating opportunities for creative collaboration is so important. Whether it's a weekly huddle, an annual retreat away from the day-to-day tasks or a quick "what-if" session with our teams, any place we can encourage employees to contribute ideas without fear should be encouraged.

STEP 3: EMPOWERMENT

Acknowledgment fuels motivation. Creativity sparks ideas. Empowerment

is what transforms both into sustainable innovation. Empowerment means giving people ownership of outcomes and trusting them to solve problems, try new methods and even fail along the way.

This approach requires clear roles and guardrails. To be clear, empowerment is not an "anything-goes" culture. Instead, it's about providing autonomy within a structure. As leaders, we must ask:

- Do employees know which decisions they can make on their own?
- Are we equipping them with data, tools and training to succeed?
- Do we treat missteps as learning moments instead of setbacks?

When employees feel empowered, a virtuous circle is created, and innovation becomes a part of our culture.

WHY THIS MATTERS

In a market where talent is scarce and client expectations are high, celebrating excellence and innovation is a competitive advantage. In my experience, if we have a culture that recognizes achievement and nurtures great ideas, we will outperform our competition.

At the Mariani Premier Group, we've seen firsthand how employees at every level contribute to innovation in the right environment. From redesigning workflows to rethinking client engagement, the best ideas come from the ground up. Our job as leaders is to make sure those ideas are seen, celebrated and scaled.

Excellence, after all, isn't something you simply recognize. It's something we need to build into the DNA of our organizations and nurture through acknowledgment, creativity and empowerment. 



BY BEN GANDY

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

Making sense of organizational structure

As leaders, we know how quickly things change as a company grows. One day, you're a scrappy start-up where everyone pitches in on everything. Next, you're trying to figure out who should be in charge of what and how to keep people from stepping on each other's toes.

Let's walk through how organizational structure typically evolves — and how you can navigate it.

FROM START-UP TO SOMETHING BIGGER

In the early days, one person, often the founder, does it all — spotting opportunities, selling the work, managing the job and handling the finances. That works for a while, but it's exhausting and doesn't scale.

The first smart step? Delegate administrative and financial tasks. These are easier to outsource or hire part-time support for, which frees up leadership to focus on what truly drives company growth — selling and production.

Next comes production. Many leaders love being out in the field, but staying there forever will limit growth. By delegating production, the business can take on more projects and grow. Eventually, a production manager will be needed to keep crews on track.

Once there are multiple crews and a manager, a beast is created that needs to be fed. It eats work, and you'll need more sales help at some point.

THE SHIFT TOWARD SPECIALIZATION

As soon as multiple crews and managers are in place, the company enters a new phase. Now, roles need to be clearly defined.

Specialization matters because if everyone tries to do everything,

accountability gets fuzzy, and team members become confused about who to follow. Employees need a single, clear boss, and customers need one go-to point of contact. A "team approach" sounds nice, but from a customer's perspective, knowing exactly who to call builds trust.

This is where lanes — such as sales, production and administration — are essential.

As the company grows, functions like HR, finance and technical specialties also come into play. This is where financial literacy becomes crucial. Understanding budgets and financial reports enables you to make informed staffing decisions with confidence. You can have some peace of mind knowing the financial impact, and you can bake the potential benefits into your strategy, as reflected in your budgets.

LEARNING FROM THE BIG PLAYERS

Eventually, you may grow to a point where you begin to ask how to scale your business indefinitely.

Think about giants like Starbucks or Home Depot. Their growth model is based on repeatable "units" — each store runs as a self-contained business with its own profit-and-loss responsibility. This approach works because each store has the proper structure in place: They know the space, the roles and the resources required to succeed.

For our industry, creating branches as small businesses paves the way to scaling indefinitely.

MULTI-BRANCH OPERATIONS: STAYING CLOSE TO THE ACTION

When an organization expands into multiple branches, the structure gets more complex. A branch manager might oversee:

- Two to four account managers
- Two to four production managers
- A salesperson
- An administrative lead
- Possibly an enhancement manager

This setup keeps the decision-makers close to both customers and workers.

As branches grow, there's a temptation to add more layers — senior account managers, senior production managers and so on. While hierarchy can facilitate coordination, it can also slow down decision-making and put the branch manager in a position where they need to make critical decisions. The person who makes financial decisions on behalf of customers and laborers needs to be removed enough to be objective, but close enough to be impactful.

Not everything needs to live at the branch level, though. Corporate functions — such as IT, HR, finance, fleet management and estimating — can be centralized to reduce duplication. However, when it comes to sales and production, accountability works best at the branch level. Centralized "shared services" can get lost without clear accountability.

WHERE ARE YOU?

Where are you in structure dynamics?

In the early stages, what worked yesterday may not work tomorrow. Embrace specialization, learn to think financially and delegate strategically.

Later, standardization is essential, but complex, multi-layered hierarchies will diminish nimble decision making. Create a simple, reproducible model and grow like crazy. 🚀



BY GREG HERRING

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

Delegating to go from good to great

Doing it yourself is a necessity for owners when they are starting a company. They must be good at everything — marketing, sales, account management, financial matters including pricing and reporting, office tasks, technology, equipment decisions and purchasing, routing and scheduling and quality, just to name a few.

If the owner is reasonably good at everything, the company grows.

At this stage, the owner performs many tasks and fills many roles.

Approving payroll, signing checks and

creating estimates are tasks. Creating and executing the marketing and sales plans, being the financial leader (pricing model, reporting, profit margin optimization) and creating and executing the crew recruiting strategy are examples of roles. Tasks are well-defined; roles usually require analysis, creativity, planning and leadership.

As leadership expert John C. Maxwell put it, “If you want to do a few small things right, do them yourself. If you want to do great things and make a big impact, learn to delegate.”

Delegating tasks is an important

first step. However, the real value in delegating comes from delegating roles. When delegating a task, an owner is free from doing. When delegating a role, an owner is free from both thinking and doing because the person in the delegated role determines the tasks that need to be done to achieve a desired result.

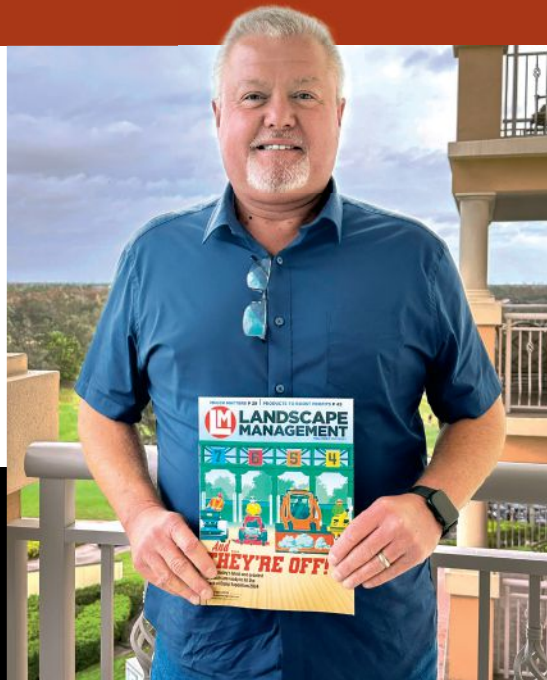
DELEGATING IN FIVE STEPS

Here are five practical steps to help make this transition, based on lessons I learned in the school of hard knocks that I hope will make

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your life easier and your leadership more effective:

1 **Inventory your tasks and roles.**

Determining tasks is easy — create a list as you perform them. For roles, you might want to think about executives and managers who work at a \$50 million landscape company. It is easy to see those roles by reviewing a company's website or looking on LinkedIn. Small companies have the same roles; the difference is that people, including the owner, are attempting to fill multiple roles.

2 Begin to delegate. Determine tasks and roles to delegate to existing employees.

3 **Focus on high-value activities.**

Determine what you enjoy and where you excel, areas that have the biggest impact on growth or profit. Prioritize those roles and let go of

the rest. You can also think five years ahead. How do you want to spend your time? That envisioned future helps identify what to delegate.

4 Your next hire. Determine what role(s) you would like the next management level hire to fill.

5 Outsource strategically. Determine what roles can be outsourced to a specialized firm or a freelancer (contractor).

OUTSOURCING

Peter Drucker put it simply: "Do what you do best and outsource the rest." That statement is true at the personal level as well as for the company.

When outsourcing roles, you will want to find people who are masters of their craft. Many owners have decided to outsource marketing and IT services. Clients of The Herring

Group decided to outsource portions of their financial leadership (pricing, business strategy, etc.). The key to the successful outsourcing of roles is to make sure responsibilities and expected results are communicated clearly. When done well, the return on investment will be significant.

Marketplaces such as Upwork provide opportunities to find freelancers for virtually any type of task and even some roles. Just post your project, review freelancer proposals and choose the best fit based on profiles and ratings. Collaborate and pay securely through the platform by the hour or by the project. At The Herring Group, we have used many freelancers with great success. By leveraging freelance platforms, even a small company can tap into a vast network of professionals. 📧

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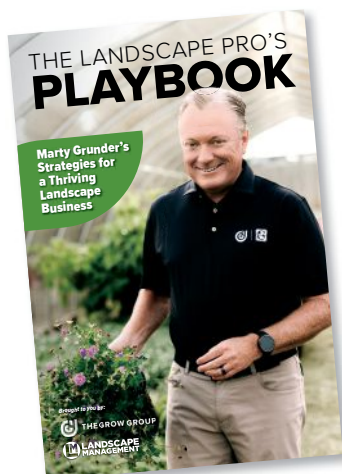
The author is the CEO of Grunder Landscaping Co. and The Grow Group, based in Dayton, Ohio. Reach him at marty@growgroupinc.com.



A “Playbook” for business success

Included in this month’s issue of *Landscape Management* is a special publication — “The Landscape Pro’s Playbook” — that my team and I, along with the *LM* staff, have worked hard to bring to you. It started as an idea I got from a monthly newsletter I received in the mail in the early days of running Grunder Landscaping Co. This newsletter spelled out exactly what landscaping business owners should be doing and focusing on during that month. It really helped me to stay focused as I was learning the ins and outs.

“We wanted to package our best tips for the year all in one reference book that you could hang on to and refer back to throughout the year.”



I’ve long wanted to do something similar for the industry, and it’s partially what inspired the weekly “Great Idea” email we send out at The Grow Group and these monthly columns in *LM*. But we wanted to package our best tips for the year all in one reference book that you could hang on to and refer back to throughout the year.

I hope you like what we’ve put together and find it useful for your business. It covers all the topics and organizes them under the Four Pillar framework that we use at The Grow Group to organize our content and teach — Platform, People, Process and Profits. Here’s what I hope you do with this piece.

READ THROUGH IT

Each entry is 400 words or less, making it a fast read. Flip to the section that’s most relevant right now and save the others for other times of the year if you need to. Whether you’re an owner or a leader at a landscaping company, there’s information in there that can help you.

SUPPORT OUR SPONSORS

We had strong support from industry suppliers, which made this publication possible, and all the sponsors are companies that I know, work with and whose services, equipment or materials we use at Grunder Landscaping Co. They’re great brands with great offerings that can help your business be more efficient. Evaluate if their offerings are a fit for you when you look at your plans for 2026.

SAVE AND REFERENCE THE CALENDAR

We’ve included a calendar that you can tear out of the Playbook that can be your chronological guide to what content to focus on and when. Listen, I have ADD myself, and I know that it can be an entrepreneur’s superpower as much as their downfall. The calendar makes this more digestible to those of us who like to move quickly. Flip directly to the pages that correspond to the month you’re in and work on those things now. It’ll help you prioritize what’s most important throughout the year.

KEEP IN MIND: WE HAD A PAGE LIMIT

One of the hardest steps in writing this piece was cutting down the topics we would cover to our final list. This Playbook is a starting point: If we covered *everything* you need to know to run your business, it would’ve been the size of a textbook.

Supplement what’s in this Playbook by continuing to read *LM* monthly, by signing up for The Grow Group’s weekly “Great Idea” email and by engaging with your colleagues in the industry. There’s so much great information out there that can help your business now; use every advantage you can.

A lot of thought, energy and effort goes into running a landscaping business. I’m no stranger to that myself. As we near the end of 2025, it’s time to reload, plan ahead and set ourselves up for success in 2026. I hope “The Landscape Pro’s Playbook” is one tool in your arsenal as you approach the year ahead. 📅

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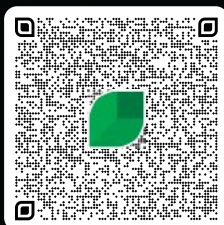
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– Greg Cole, President | Cole Landscaping



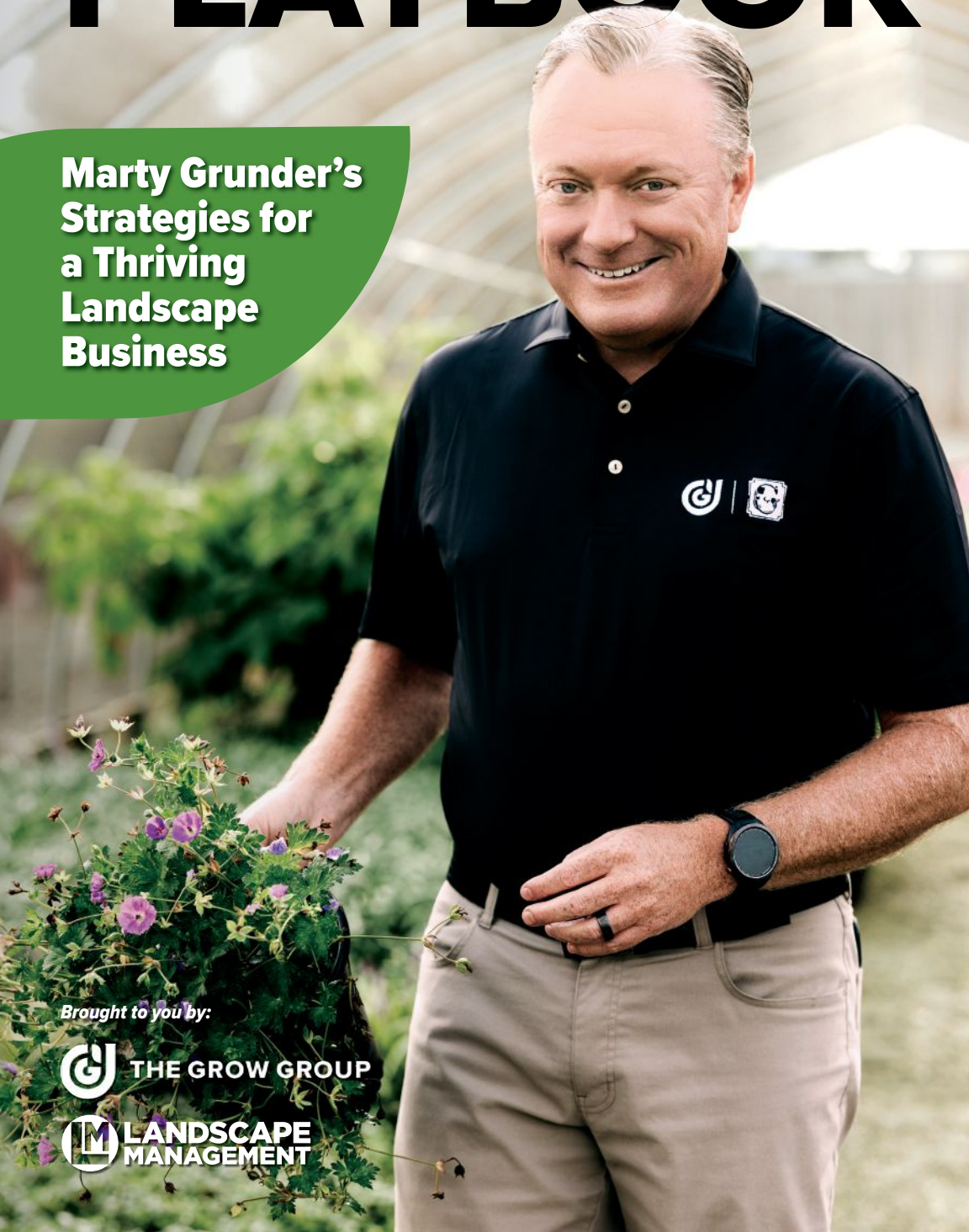
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THE LANDSCAPE PRO'S **PLAYBOOK**

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WELCOME TO THE LANDSCAPE PRO'S PLAYBOOK!

When I first started Grunder Landscaping Co. (GLC) in 1984, I was just a kid looking to earn some extra spending

money and maybe save up for college. With lots of hard work, I was able to pay for my entire education at the University of Dayton in cash payments that came from doing landscaping work when I wasn't in class. By the time I graduated, I was hooked. I had found a way to get paid for doing what I loved — working with plants.

In those early years of the business, there was a monthly newsletter that I signed up to receive in the mail — yes, this was in the days before the internet — that would spell out what landscaping business owners should be doing and focusing on. I used to check the mailbox obsessively to see if the next issue had arrived because it was such a lifeline for my business. It guided me and helped me focus on what was important and was instrumental to the success I had in those early days.

As my business became more established, I started to share a lot of the ideas, thoughts and tips that I wished had been readily available to me when I was younger through my other company, The Grow Group. Through that company, we provide events for landscape pros, peer groups and resources to help companies grow and succeed. The gist of what we do is this: I've done a lot wrong and a lot right in

my 40-plus years in business, and my goal is for you to find success faster than I did.

Creating a printed piece like the one that drove my success in those early years has long

been something I've wanted to do, and I'm grateful for the support of *Landscape Management* and our sponsors for making this possible. In the coming pages, you'll find my best tips for landscaping companies in one easy-to-reference booklet, accompanied by a calendar that spells out what you should be thinking about and when. We've organized the content using the four-pillar framework we use to teach at The Grow Group, where we believe successful companies focus on strengthening their

“

I've done a lot wrong and a lot right in my 40-plus years in business, and my goal is for you to find success faster than I did.”

Platform, People, Process and Profits.

I hope this playbook can serve as your guide throughout the year. If you enjoy this piece and want to dive deeper into these topics, scan the QR code to visit The Grow Group's website, where we have additional resources being added all the time.

Let's GROW!

MARTY GRUNDER

CEO of Grunder Landscaping Co. and The Grow Group



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Jason Cromley with a tour group at GROW! 2025.

This booklet is organized into what we've identified as the four pillars to a landscaping company's success. Our first pillar is platform, which encompasses who you are as a company and what your value proposition is to both your clients and your team members.

To be a "leader in platform" means being clear about who your company is and who it is not. You have a well-defined ideal client, a unique value proposition, and a company culture. Here are quick definitions for each:

- An **ideal client** is a client who is profitable, enjoyable and sustainable (will lead to more business) for you to work with.
- Your **unique value proposition** is what you do better than any other option in your marketplace.
- Your **company culture** is the sum of who your company is (see the next article for the pieces that should be present).

When these pieces are aligned, the result is usually a company with a great reputation. There are many companies across the country that I would consider "leaders in platform," but one I want to highlight as an example is Hidden Creek Landscaping in Columbus, Ohio. They have a strong brand, a clear value proposition for their clients, beautiful and strategic marketing pieces, and a sales team that expertly delights clients. They were also the host of our GROW! Annual Conference in 2025, welcoming 1,000-plus landscape pros to their facility to see how they operate.

What can we learn from them? That consistency and cohesion enhance a brand's standing in the marketplace, that knowing your ideal client and saying "no" to work can get us further than taking on every project that comes our way, and that a commitment to constantly improving and watching trends pays off in big wins.

BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPES, *FROM DAY TO NIGHT*



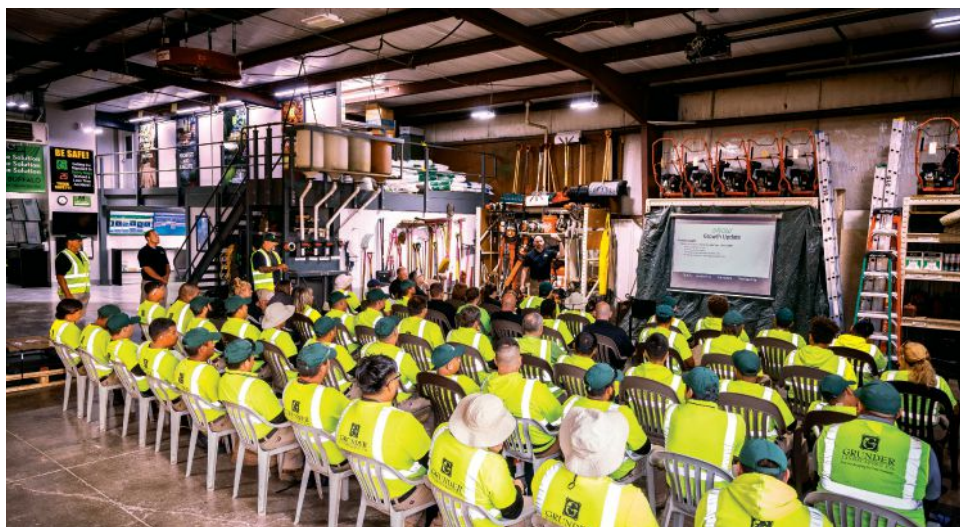
Whether you use Hunter irrigation, FX Luminaire lighting, or both, you can count on us to deliver the most cutting-edge solutions in the industry. As your partners in innovation, we're proud to help you grow vibrant landscapes during the day and bring them to life at night.



Hunter®

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VISION, MISSION AND CORE VALUES



The monthly all team meeting at Grunder Landscaping Co.

The first step to a strong platform is having a clearly defined vision, mission and core values. Here's what they are and how you do it, along with examples from my company, Grunder Landscaping Co.

Vision

This is where we're going. At Grunder Landscaping, our vision is to be recognized as leaders and as a growing company that provides opportunities for our team.

We always start with vision. Your vision should be clear, and it should be a goal that the whole company can rally behind.

Mission

This is what we're going to do to get there. At Grunder Landscaping, we create opportunities for our team to grow and succeed by enhancing the beauty and value of every client's property while exceeding their expectations every step of the way.

The mission of your company should clearly define what you're going to do to make

your vision a reality. In our case, we're going to take care of our clients because it will allow us to create opportunities for our team. The mission statement is a promise you make to your team, customers and community.

Core Values

This is how we're going to behave along the way. For Grunder Landscaping, that means quality, leadership, teamwork and profitability.

Core values are the behaviors and attitudes we expect of our team members to work at our company. Ideally, these should be traits that your company is living, but it's OK if your core values are aspirational when you first introduce them.

We hire to our core values, and we fire to our core values; that's what makes them successful. Our team *must* live by these four values in order to work at Grunder Landscaping, and we have more detailed descriptions of each core value and examples of the behaviors that go along with them that we share internally.

THE POWER OF A STRONG BRAND



A Grunder Landscaping crew loads their truck in the morning.

A strong brand identity can fuel growth for landscaping companies. When you do great work and take care of your clients, more business usually follows. But the community must recognize your company and brand to connect the dots that it's your team delivering the exceptional results.

For Complete Landsculpture in Dallas, Texas, their brand identity is built on full-service excellence and a polished, professional image. Their work often speaks for itself.

Their identity took shape through decades of consistently delivering on their promise — to provide a complete outdoor experience, from design and construction to maintenance and enhancements. That approach is part of what sets them apart in the high-end Dallas market, and it shows in everything they do.

So how do you create that kind of brand identity? First, brand your trucks. This is the No. 1 thing that drives new call-ins to our team at Grunder Landscaping Co., and I know the same is true for Complete Landsculpture. Your trucks being in a neighborhood gives you credibility. Now the neighbors know that you're trusted with the property and see you work in real time.

I cringe when I see a landscaping company out working, and doing good work, but without branded trucks. This is an expense you can't afford to skip, in my opinion, but it's OK if

the branding starts small. A simple decal or even a magnetic sign is a great starting point. You don't need a full truck wrap to have great branding. In fact, most of our trucks at Grunder Landscaping today are not wrapped.

Second, outfit your team in appropriate uniforms. Similar to branding our trucks, we want people to see our team out working and realize it's our company. Most companies are using

high-visibility uniforms now for safety. For the team at Complete Landsculpture, the uniform is a high-visibility shirt with navy pants. For my team, it's the same but with khaki pants.

Third, focus on your online presence. Carry the style of your branding through on everything you do. The colors you use in your logo, on your website, on your social media channels and even in your trucks and uniforms should all be consistent and complementary. Anywhere someone may interact with your company, it should look and feel like it's all one brand.

Each of these things costs money, but they also all help you make money. In my opinion, they're expenses you can't afford to skip if you want to grow. Consistency can give a small company the look and feel of a big company and often levels the playing field for companies.



A Grunder Landscaping Co. truck used for installation work.



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MARKETING

BEST TACTICS FOR RESIDENTIAL WORK



Emily Lindley

Hi, it's Emily Lindley here. I'm Content and Events Manager at The Grow Group and Marketing Manager at Grunder Landscaping Co (GLC). In my role at GLC, I oversee all of our marketing efforts, and if you're doing residential work, I'm here

to spill the secrets of what's working for us.

Postcards

Postcards are what we turn to whenever we need more residential design-build leads. They perform well in our area when we use great photography and have a clear message and call-to-action. The bulk of our marketing budget each year goes to postcards, and we focus most of our budget on the spring months to nudge leads along. The vast majority of our postcards are for design-build work, but we do also send mailers for lawn care applications.

E-blasts

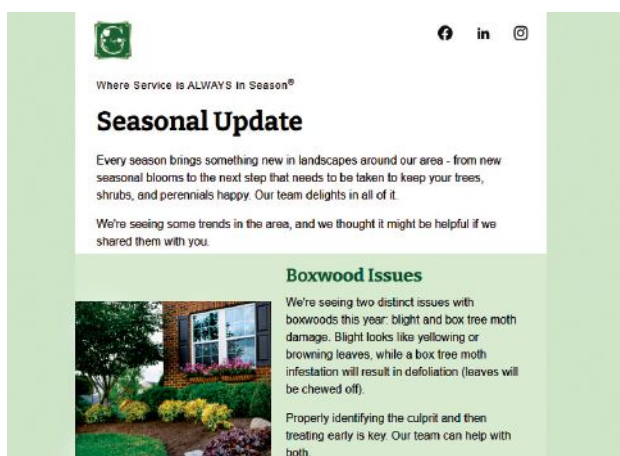
Email campaigns to our list of existing clients and past prospects have been surprisingly effective for us in 2025. We send out emails with suggestions for property improvements, simple enhancement recommendations for maintenance clients, add-on services for our lawn care clients, and weather or horticulturally specific alerts and reminders. We've seen great engagement and open rates from our clients, and they've been driving conversations for our sales team.

Social Media Ads

This is in the top 3 sources for web traffic to **grunderlandscaping.com**, and we're devoting more of our marketing budget to digital ads like these each year. My biggest reminder: If you're going to do digital ads, please, please, please adjust the settings so that you're only targeting your geographic area. The ads typically default to targeting the entire United States, so you could be wasting money outside your service area if you aren't careful.

We do a lot of marketing beyond these tactics, including door hangers, tradeshow, community sponsorships, and more, but these are the top 3 that we're seeing success with right now for residential work.

GLC is a full-service landscaping company, and we serve commercial properties too, but the tactics that work for marketing to those clients look different and are much more business development focused. Skip ahead to page 16 to read more on that.



An e-blast that Grunder Landscaping sent out in 2025.

SALES, PART ONE

SOFT SKILLS

In the past few years, many landscaping companies have been able to get by with their salespeople functioning more as “order takers.” Clients came to us with ideas, and we brought them to life. But as the economy shifts and competition increases, sales teams need to prepare to actually sell.

That means focusing on the soft skills that some people have naturally but others need to learn. Here’s what we’ve been teaching our team at Grunder Landscaping Co.

Master the basics

We practice the fundamentals that make a huge difference in how prospects perceive us. Our team learns to step back from the door after they knock or ring the bell (nobody likes someone standing too close), to greet prospects on the phone by saying, “Hello, thank you for calling Grunder Landscaping, this is Marty,” and how to screen prospects without sounding pushy.

We also teach proper follow-up skills. How you stay in touch with clients between meetings can make or break a sale. These might seem like small details, but they add up to create a professional impression.

Practice real-world scenarios

We set up role-playing scenarios with our team to practice situations they’ll actually encounter. We practice mitigating common objections together and work through challenging client conversations.

Here’s what we’ve found: Even experienced salespeople benefit from practicing these skills. The more you practice handling objections professionally, the more natural it becomes when you’re face-to-face with a prospect. Typically, we set up these scenarios with our more experienced salespeople playing the role of “client,” but we all learn from observing how the “salesperson” handles the interaction.

Handle disagreements like a pro

We look at what (not who) is to blame, take accountability for mistakes and are part of the solution when something goes wrong. This makes our team more efficient. We spend less time refereeing disagreements and more time working toward solutions.

Build trust through small actions

We teach trust — trust that your team member wants to do the right thing and trust that you’re doing the same for them. Give the benefit of the doubt when issues come up internally, and hope that our clients will extend us this same grace when something goes wrong externally.

We recently had a client who was upset with the way the landscaping we installed looked a few months later; she didn’t think the plants looked healthy. I went out to meet with her personally to look at the plants and was able to show her how to cut back the astilbe we planted so it would look neater until frost. As I was walking the property with her, I explained what she could expect from the plants seasonally and also let her know that while we replace any plants that don’t survive within the year they were planted, I didn’t think that would fix this issue. The plants need time to root in; we don’t want to restart that clock.

Meeting face-to-face and taking the time to educate our clients on why we do or don’t recommend something can be intimidating. It’s always tempting to find a quicker fix and move on with our day, but the right way builds trust and cements loyalty. Technology makes a lot of things easier, but nothing can replace the power of genuine connections.

Having great soft skills sometimes means taking the long way. We need to take a breath, control our own emotions and spend the time it takes to practice, be professional and build trust.



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SALES, PART TWO

BEST PRACTICES FOR COMMERCIAL WORK

Grunder Landscaping Co. has grown rapidly in recent years, from \$5 million in annual revenue in 2020 to \$18 million in 2025. Nearly all this growth has been organic, and we can attribute most of it to going after and successfully winning commercial work.

What's the secret?

Know your numbers first

When we implemented Aspire Software in 2020, we got a clearer picture of our financial performance than we'd ever had before. We could clearly see which services were most profitable and optimize our routes to reduce costs. This allowed us to bring our pricing in line with the market.

I know what you're thinking: "That's great, Marty, but software is expensive." Here's what I'd say: You can't win commercial work if you're guessing at your prices. The software pays for itself when you can price competitively and actually win. Good managers make good decisions with good information. We have confidence in our bid when we know our data is right.

Get systematic about finding prospects

We weren't always good at this. For years, we relied on referrals and hoped for the best. But when you're trying to grow, you need a system.

Here's how we do it: We equip our sales team with targeted marketing materials ready for calling on new commercial prospects. Our salespeople organize property walkthroughs, so they get eyes on every managed property several times each year.

During these visits, they look for four key things — safety hazards, efficiency improvements, recurring damage issues and opportunities to "wow." Commercial properties set

their budgets in summer, making this the most important time to look for enhancements.

In addition to finding work within our existing list of clients, we also know that we can find prospects by:

1 Relying on relationships. The right relationships have led to tremendous work for us. When we take over one apartment complex and prove ourselves, often the property manager has other nearby complexes they're willing to let us handle, too. The same is true for architects who recommend us after successful installs. Remember: People do business with people they know, like and trust. Do the right things, and the right things will happen to you. A job well done is still our best form of marketing, and this is even more true in commercial work.

2 Asking for the referral. At the end of a job, ask your client if they manage any other properties that you could put together a quote for?

3 Being on the hunt. Our sales team is constantly attending local networking events, and we've divided up coverage for local chambers of commerce and other groups so that we can have a presence in all the organizations we feel are worthwhile. We've found that some events and some groups are more open to newcomers and networking than others, so we have prioritized organizations where we feel we're making progress. Good places to start are with chambers of commerce, building owners and managers associations and organizations aligned with your team's individual passions.

If you find a source of prospects that works, stick with it. We've found that one thing is true above all else in this industry — people do business with people they know, like and trust. The first step is simply getting to know people.

Let no weed past the first punch.

Callbacks can be the greatest challenge for any lawn care business, requiring you to use extra product, time and fuel. Unless of course, you're fighting with Nufarm premium herbicides. Get quality results with every round – as tough weeds tap out, and customers enjoy the victory.



Learn more about our premium herbicide solutions at [NUFARM.COM/USTURF/DEFEATWEEDS](https://www.nufarm.com/usturf/defeatweeds)



Grunder Landscaping team members arrive to work for the day.

Leadership in our second pillar of success, people, is often the most critical for a company's success. Companies that attract, train and retain great people are the ones who make *Landscape Management's* annual LM150 list, host our Annual GROW! conference, win awards and impress their peers in the industry.

But what does leadership look like? One of the simplest ways I can describe it is that leadership in people looks like great internal customer service. I always remind my fellow landscape pros that your external customer service will never exceed your internal customer service. You must take care of your people if you want them to take care of your clients.

“Your external customer service will never exceed your internal customer service.”

In the next several pages, I'll talk about the pieces that are vital to taking care of your people and being a leader in this pillar. As you read them, I want you to use this question as your litmus test:

“Would you want to work for you?”

If the answer is “yes,” that's great. You're a leader in people, and leaders know that good is the enemy of great. Keep on working to improve and never give up.

If the answer is “no,” I'm proud of your honesty! The first step in fixing a problem is realizing it's there. I hope the coming pages can help you put some things in place to turn that into a “yes” by this time next year. Your success begins and ends with your people, so leadership is one of the most critical skills to be constantly developing.

2026 ACTION PLAN

PLAYBOOK CALENDAR

DEC 2025	Invest in Training for Your Sales Team: The Grow Group's Virtual Sales Bootcamps are available and a great option
JAN	Look Ahead: Have a Recruiting Plan (page 28)
FEB	Join Marty at GROW! 2026 on February 10-12, 2026 in Dallas, TX
MAR	Hold a Team Spring Kickoff
APR	Schedule Soft Skills Training with Your Team (page 13)
MAY	Do the \$1 Exercise with Your Team (page 43) 
JUN	Equipment Purchase Planning (page 48) Look Ahead: Equipment Purchase Planning
JUL	Evaluate Software System Changes or Improvements (page 36)
AUG	Focus on Winning Commercial Maintenance Accounts (page 16)
SEP	Set Your Budgets for 2027 www.growgroupinc.com/the-landscape-pros-playbook-online-resources
OCT	Evaluate and Update your Vision, Mission and Core Values (page 8)
NOV	Greenius/Training Program Setup (page 25, 37) Set up a Training Program
DEC	Create a Marketing Plan for 2027 (page 12, 16)

Sponsored by:



Would You Want to Work for You? (page 29): Look for Professional Development Opportunities for Yourself in 2026

Look Ahead: When can you get away from work this year for a family vacation?

Ramp Up Spring Recruiting (page 28)

Launch Residential Marketing Efforts (page 12)

Get in the Run: Stay Focused During the 100 Days of Victory

It's the Busy Season: Stay Positive and Focus on Your Team!

Look Ahead: Often this is when companies realize they don't have the sales they need for fall. Don't let it catch you off guard.

July 4: You Made It! The 100 Days of Victory are behind us, but let's finish the year strong.



Create a Plan for Outside Learning: Get Your Team to Events to Expand Your Knowledge

Assess your Progress: Do you need to adjust your plan for 2026 based on where you are now?

Strengthen your Branding (page 9)

Do You Know Your Costs? (page 42)



Invest in Training Your Sales Team

We've set up a month-by-month guide to what you and your team should be focusing on and when, because just like there's a wrong time to prune *Hydrangea macrophylla*, there's also a wrong time to look at purchasing equipment or set a strategic planning meeting. Use this as your guide throughout the year — it'll set you up for success in 2026 and beyond!

Look Ahead: Set up quarterly strategic planning meetings for 2026

Look at The Previous Year: What Should You Start, Stop, and Keep Doing in 2026?

Prepare Training for your Team (page 24, 25, 37)

Look Ahead: Begin Planning for 2027

Plan Photos: Make a list of properties to photograph for marketing or awards



Schedule Property Visits with Maintenance Clients

Photograph Properties

Award Submissions Typically Start Being Due

Attend a Grunder Landscaping Co. Field Trip
August 12-13, 2026
September 9-10, 2026
October 14-15, 2026
December 9-10, 2026



Place Your Order through SiteOne's Early Order Program

Walk Around: Does anything in your shop need repainted, deep cleaned, or reorganized? Do you have fleet repairs and updates scheduled?

HORTICULTURAL

WHAT CREWS ARE DOING

	Snow Removal	Dormant Pruning	Dormant Oil Treatment	Spring Clean-Ups	Mowing	Drainage	Hardscaping	Landscaping Installations	Aeration and Overseeding
JAN	x	x	x						
FEB	x	x							
MAR		x			x				
APR		x	x		x			x	
MAY			x	x	x			x	
JUN			x	x	x		x	x	
JUL				x	x	x	x	x	
AUG					x	x	x	x	x
SEP					x	x	x	Best Time	x
OCT					x	x	x	Best Time	x
NOV	x				x	x	x	Best Time	
DEC	x					x	x	x	

Exact start and end months will vary by your growing zone and the weather each year.

ACE

PEER GROUPS

***Find your peer
board of advisors
and change your
business for the
better***



**Join us at our next
Discovery event!**

SAY-IT-OUT-LOUD CONSULTING

Vince Torchia here. I am vice president of The Grow Group and, in my role, lead our team as we create events and also serve as an executive coach for our peer group program. I also work for Grunder Landscaping Co. as director of strategy.

In my time on the road working with our peer group members and doing some one-on-one coaching, I've often joked with Marty that we should rename our company "Say-it-Out-Loud Consulting." This is because, usually, as soon as we say something out loud, I see the light bulbs go on with our clients. Sometimes it just takes hearing it.

This is something that the Grunder Landscaping team practices, and one team leader in particular is very skilled at this. Sometimes when teaching new skills, the best thing we can do is just say out loud what we're doing.

Mike, who has 30-plus years of horticulture experience under his belt, is great at training the other members of his

crew. Often, being on Mike's crew means you'll be leading your own crew soon enough. If you were to watch him work, I think you'd see why. As he's doing his work, he'll simply narrate what he's doing, why he's doing it and will talk about the plant. He's a skilled maintenance team member, and he also has a passion for plants that he loves to share with other members of the team. He's bilingual and switches between English and Spanish depending on what his crew is more comfortable with.

But Mike is one of many team leaders on our crews, and our other team leaders need to teach their teams, too. To replicate what comes naturally to him, we teach our team leaders to follow this formula:

- **Show one.** Show the team member how to do the task. This is where narrating what you're doing and why is super helpful.

- **Do one:** Have the team member do the task with supervision.

- **Teach one:** Have the team member teach someone else to do the task.

This formula helps team members learn the skill deeply, and when they can teach someone else the task, we know that they have a good handle on it.



Vince Torchia



Our Loveland branch team after morning stretching and safety training.

TRAINING

HAVE A PLAN

At the start of the year, you should have a plan in place for training. This helps tremendously when the season gets busy because the training is already set and not one more thing to worry about. Here's how we do it.

We look at past issues

We review the issues our team encountered during the year? When did they see them? Did we see a client complaint repeatedly? Can we solve it with training? What pain points could we avoid if we were proactive? And we ask if any team member injuries or workers comp claims can be avoided next year.

We plot out the calendar

We plan out week by week when the right time to do each training is. For example, we do our training on how to do a spring clean-up every year before we start doing clean-ups.



Grunder Landscaping Co.'s President and COO Seth Pflum holds floral container training for the sales team.

We train on snow removal best practices in late fall before the first snowfall.

We also plot out training for seasonal issues like heat exposure, poison ivy identification and more.

We stay flexible

There are some topics we know we need to cover each year with our team, but we are also flexible and will add training to our calendar if we see an issue that we need to address with the team.

For example, earlier this year, we noticed on spot checks that our mowers weren't being strapped in correctly, running the straps through the eyelet. So, we scheduled a training, complete with a game with prizes, for our team to ensure everyone knew the proper way to strap down mowers.

Our team is using Greenius to supplement our in-person training program and have loved how user-friendly the platform is and how easy it is to offer more programming in Spanish. Greenius is especially helpful for safety and compliance training. The crews can complete training from their devices while they wait for it to be safe to work again when we have a rain delay, making what would otherwise be unproductive indirect time an opportunity for professional development. It's been a win-win so far.

Work on creating a training program that's specific to your team and rely on the tools that exist to make this easier, too. A combination of both options will result in training that can set your team apart from the competition but also reduce the workload on your team to get a training program in place.



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Job Cost Overview

REVENUE
\$1501
EST, 1501

35%

PROFIT
15%
EST, 12%

GROSS PROFIT
\$801
EST, 12%

CUSTOMER	ESTIMATED	ACTUAL	REMAINING	EFFICIENCY
Merideth S.	4.52	3.9	0.52	116.00%
Jodi H.	0.97	0.62	0.35	156.00%
Matt R.	0.44	0.72	-0.28	61.00%
Dan L.	0.6	0.58	0.02	103.00%



RECRUITING

FINDING THE TALENT YOU NEED

There's no silver bullet that will solve a labor shortage — something many industry veterans already know. There are, however, things that every company, no matter its size, can do to set itself up for success in finding and retaining team members.

When we're looking for new team members, we take a multipronged approach at Grunder Landscaping Co.

H-2B program

We apply for visas through the H-2B guest-worker program, and we have talented team members who return each season to work with us. The team members we get through this program are hardworking and trainable. The only downside to this program is the unpredictability of visa allocations from year to year. Relying too heavily on this program can bite you if you don't get your visas.

Investing in youth programs

We worked closely with a local high school to develop a program for landscaping jobs that could be offered to students as an elective. We've donated our time and expertise, loaned out our equipment and even arranged for some of our partners to come in and do the same. It's been beneficial for our team, who get a reminder of just how skilled they are when they teach a group with no prior experience.

Our hope is that if these students find a passion for landscaping in the future, they'll come work for us, even if it's just for the summer.

Networking

Never underestimate the power of networking. We've found some great team members by networking and then being there when they look for a new opportunity.



A Grunder Landscaping Co. team member at the GROW! 2025 Annual Conference.

Offering a referral bonus

Being a great place to work, which we'll talk more about on the next page, means that team members want to encourage their friends and family to work with us, too. We offer a referral bonus to team members who recommend our company to someone else, and we pay it out in phases as the team members stay to provide a retention incentive, too.

Wages and benefits

To tell the whole picture of why recruiting is successful for us, it's also important to understand that we're a premium choice in our market and, therefore, we need premium crews to do the work. We pay well and offer great benefits for a company of our size, including paid time off, paid holidays, health, dental, vision, 401(k) with matching and other supplemental insurance options. All of this makes recruiting easier.

Other than those methods, we set weekly goals for the number of interviews we hold and constantly recruit for field team members even if we don't have an immediate opening. If we find great people, we'll hire them and find work for them to do so we don't miss out.

WOULD YOU WANT TO WORK FOR YOU?

Keeping talented team members on your team can be a challenge in and of itself, and the best way to do it is to ensure your company is a great place to work. I always recommend that leaders frequently check in with themselves by asking “Would I want to work for me?”

If the answer is yes, that’s great. If the answer is no, let’s work on making it better!

Above fair

We offer very competitive, above fair compensation for our team relative to the market we work in. Along with that, we have performance bonuses for our operations and administrative teams and uncapped commission plans for our sales team. This approach helps us attract top talent, and it keeps our team from being recruited away from us.

I know what you’re thinking: “That’s great, Marty, but I don’t have deep pockets.” And here’s what I’d say: Look at what turnover is costing you. How much efficiency are you losing having to retrain crews? How many upset clients are stopping service because of quality issues? These are real costs that can be attributed to high turnover at your organization — costs you may not have if you raised wages.

You may need to increase your prices to increase wages. I’ve found that most of our clients understand when we address this with them and explain why.

“We promote from within constantly and have more than a dozen team members who started out on a crew and are now in sales or management.”

Benefits

While the 22-year-old who can stay on his parents’ health insurance isn’t necessarily concerned about benefits, when that same man turns 26 and is thinking about a family, it’ll be important to him. Offering benefits allows us to retain team members because our company can support them in every phase of life.

Career paths and goals

Communicating career paths and setting goals for all members of our team helps us show our team what’s possible if they stick with their role. We promote from within constantly

and have more than a dozen team members who started out on a crew and are now in sales or management.

What’s most important with career paths and goals is following through on promises. We weren’t always good at this, mostly because our company wasn’t growing and so we didn’t have as many opportunities to promote our team. We’ve changed our mindset, and now growth each year is mandatory because it enables us to create opportunities for our team.

Being a company where people want to work always starts with leadership. It starts with doing the right thing, taking care of your team and being someone others want to work with.

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WE GET BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

I have gotten to where I am today because of the fantastic mentors I've had along the way who have been so generous with their time and wisdom. This playbook would be doing the industry a disservice if I didn't recognize them and pass along their wisdom to you.

"Every landscape in America needs a flat of pachysandra."

Frank Mariani, an industry icon and one of my earliest mentors, shares this advice. His lesson is that you can always find an opportunity to propose an enhancement, you just need to get out and walk the property to see what it needs. There's probably a bare spot in some of the mulch beds that you could fill in.

Try a roll-off dumpster

This idea came from Taylor Milliken and his team at Milosi, who hosted GROW! 2022. A roll-off dumpster seems like a silly thing to focus on, but this small change saved us a lot of money in trash disposal fees. We were able to save even more by finding a company that comes out once a week to smash the trash

down — meaning we can pack even more trash into a dumpster before we have to pay to have it taken out.

Just don't suck at the landscaping

If you're in the industry, you've probably heard Bob Grover of Pacific Landscape Management say this. He's so right: If we do great work, often the rest will fall into place.

You need more speakers

This was a comment that Gene Freeman of Complete Landsculpture (our GROW! 2026 host!) made when sitting outside at my home. He recommended speakers on the ground around the patio so we could hear music playing without turning up the volume so loud that it disturbs the neighbors. I thought it was unnecessary, but I tried it, and he was right. Now it's something I keep in mind when we're working on outdoor living spaces for clients.

This industry is great because so many people are willing to share their expertise and help a fellow landscape professional.

Whether it's a big tip or a small one, they're all helpful, and I'm grateful to be constantly meeting pros who are willing to share their knowledge. If you don't already have a network of landscape pros you call friends, I encourage you to get involved and find some! Join us at GROW! 2026, volunteer for a committee with NALP, or look for local events with your state association.



From Left to Right: Marty Grunder, Gene Freeman, Michael Hupf, Taylor Milliken, Jonathan Peterson and Josiah Peterson at GROW! 2025

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**Inova has been an
absolute game changer.**

Marty Grunder



**See how landscapers
like you get results**



The plant holding yard at Grunder Landscaping, where our plants are organized according to a system our managers and crews can all use to find what they need.

Leading in process means you have scalable systems that will support your team as you grow. We like to think about building a ladder when talking about building systems — you need to make sure the rungs are the right distance from each other. If they're too close together or too far apart, the ladder is impossible to climb.

At Grunder Landscaping Co., we admittedly took systems too far. At one point, we had a written SOP with step-by-step instructions on how to load paper towels correctly into the paper towel holder in the bathroom. We were buying C-fold towels, and when you put them in the wrong way, it was impossible to get them out one at a time. Seth Pflum, who is now president and COO of the company, looked at this

“
We like to think about building a ladder when talking about building systems.”

and said, “Why don’t you just buy Z-fold towels, then there’s no wrong way to put them in.”

THAT is the approach you need to take for systems. We want to:

1 Eliminate the possibility of mistakes where we can, even if it means spending a little more money on materials or training upfront.

2 Create systems and SOPs that are easily replicated, so our team is set up for success.

3 Leave some room in our systems for our team to use their brains. We get better with creativity, problem solving and experience.

It’s possible to not have enough systems, and it’s also possible to have too many. We want to be Goldilocks and find the spot that’s *just right*.

BEFORE: hiring CHAOS



AFTER: hiring SYSTEM



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INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC SOFTWARE

An industry-specific software is often the start of a company's systems, and which software you're using will dictate how your systems work. We use Aspire Software at Grunder Landscaping Co., and we implemented it in 2020. To be completely honest, this software saved our posterior when COVID hit. Before we switched to Aspire, we were still doing a lot of things manually, including our schedule, which we set using a magnetic board in our shop. There was no way to update that board remotely, sync it across devices or back it up. If someone was mad at us, they could've come into the office, scrambled our magnetic work tickets, and we would've had to shut down for a day to fix it all.

That used to be the best way to manage a schedule, but with the technology available, there are much better options today.

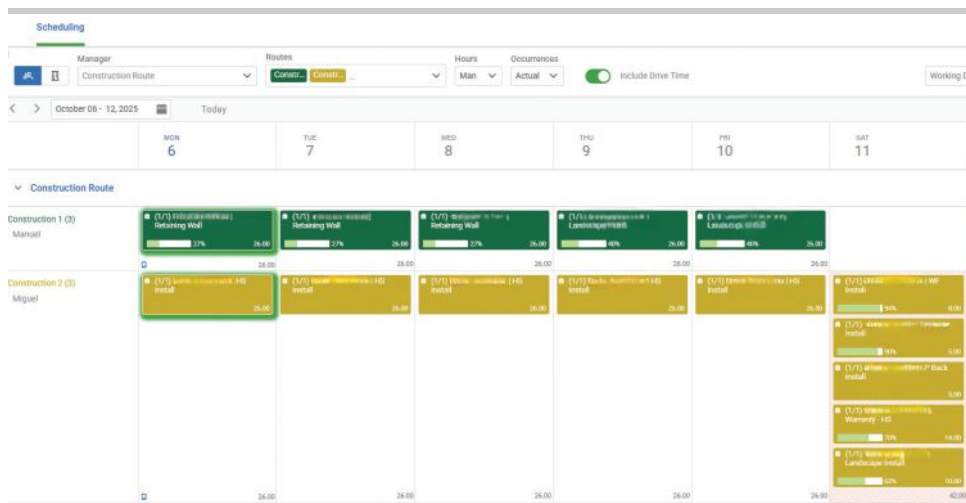
Aspire is a great solution for companies that are doing \$2 million-plus in annual revenue. When I hear from companies who don't want to switch, cost is generally the reason.

Here's what I'll say about that: We were

able to significantly streamline our operations when we implemented Aspire, to the point that our efficiency gains allowed us to absorb inflation and raise wages while keeping prices consistent for our existing clients from 2020-2023. It was well worth what we paid for the system considering the money it saved us.

We have a lot of ACE Peer Group Members who use LMN and are very happy with their system. They have a great tool that landscape professionals can rely on, too. I'd encourage you to look into one of these two companies. I believe so strongly that these specially designed software options make a huge difference, especially if you're running your business using Excel, paper forms or a hodge-podge of apps.

I've said it before in this piece: Good managers make good decisions with good information, and it's difficult to have good information without a software like Aspire or LMN putting important, aggregate data at your fingertips.



A screenshot of two construction crews' schedules in Aspire. Client names are blurred for privacy.

A SYSTEM FOR TRAINING TEAMS

The best landscaping companies in the country set themselves apart from the competition by their people. I often get asked while I'm out on the road, "Where are you finding people capable of leading your crews?"

The answer: We don't find them; we create them with great training programs.

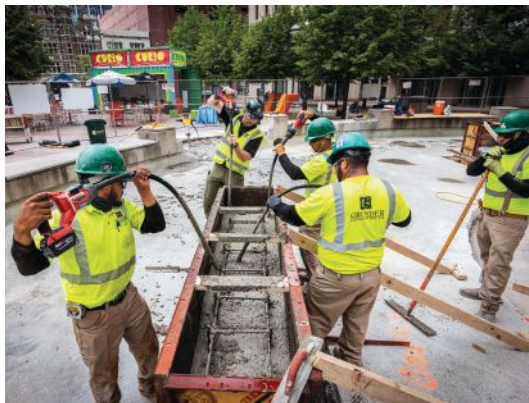
If you looked at our production crews, you'd find that more than half of our Team Leaders have been promoted into that role versus hired into that position. We are constantly teaching our entire production team skills and thinking about the future. We consider everyone to be in a leadership development program no matter their current role. Here's the system we follow to make it happen.

A training schedule

We map out a week-by-week training topic schedule at the beginning of the year based on our experience. We know certain issues present themselves at the same time every year — heat exposure, poison ivy or some pest identification, for example — so we keep those on the schedule ahead of time. Head to page 24-25 to learn more about the way we plan these.

Step-by-step programs

We define the steps and order in which they should be done for our spring clean-ups, for example, because we have details that our clients expect our crews to handle each year. We also know there is a correct order to do these steps in for efficiency, so defining that and teaching it to our team helps create a consistent experience for our clients and improve efficiency.



Grunder Landscaping President and COO Seth Pflum, in the black shirt, shows crews how to vibrate concrete to remove air bubbles on a job site.

Screen shares

We maintain a library of screen-recorded videos created by our leadership, showing click-by-click how to access information or complete online tasks. We rolled out this resource when we implemented Aspire. It's been so helpful to train team members to search the video library first before interrupting someone else's day to ask "How do I..." questions. The videos are great because you can start and stop them as needed and follow along with each step. We have them for everything, from creating a new contact in Aspire to submitting a time-off request.

Back in the day, I used to hear from people in the industry who were worried: "What if I spend all this time and money training my team just for them to leave?"

Here's what I say: What if you don't train them and they stay? Skills and competencies can be learned, and effective systems rely on team members who understand their work. We're doing our companies a disservice if we aren't passing on knowledge to our teams.



In the first year of using Aspire, our revenue from one year to the next increased over 75%. Aspire has been a game changer.

Jared Woodend, COO & Integrator, Decra-Scape

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* Results are illustrative of certain customers' success; your individual results may vary.

SOLVE FOR THE RULE, NOT THE EXCEPTION

The key to creating successful processes is staying focused on the rules. What we mean by this is you need to solve for 80 percent of situations and not worry about a system to account for the other 20 percent.

Here's what I mean: We don't need a process to deal with one-off situations that won't repeat themselves; instead, we need to expect our teams to be thoughtful and solve problems as they happen.

We need processes that are going to work for 80 percent of situations. Here are some to start with.

A review process for sales proposals

Each sales proposal is created by a salesperson, reviewed by a second salesperson and then given a final review from our contract administrator before it's officially won. The two salespeople reviews happen before the contract goes out the door to the client, and our sales team often talks to the operations

managers for advice on installation to make sure we've accounted for all the work required in our proposals.

A handoff system

You must have a clear system for getting materials ordered, jobs scheduled and production notes created once the sale is made. Ideally these systems are as automated as possible. We rely on Aspire to help automate the hand-off process for us. It has greatly streamlined procurement and reduced confusion between our operations and sales teams.

Morning roll-out system(s)

It's hard to contain this process to one single system because so many things happen in a morning roll-out. We recommend a handful of best practices: putting gas into trucks the night before, having a designated person running the loader, creating a system to keep plants and materials organized by job (we use colored tags and labeled rows and columns), and assigning

equipment to reduce confusion on who gets what. A smooth morning roll-out is indicative of a well-run company and the result of departments working well together.

We host Grunder Landscaping Co. Field Trips at our facility each fall to bring landscape professionals on-site and let them see our systems up close. If you want to dive deeper, join us in December 2025 or check out our 2026 dates.



A Grunder Landscaping team member loads plants into their truck during the morning roll-out.

Profits often get a bad reputation. There's this idea that profitability isn't something we should be talking about with our teams. That it's about the owner, or maybe that it's selfish. Here's what I say to that: A company can't stay in business if it isn't profitable. Without profit, you won't have capital to reinvest in your team, equipment or systems. You can't secure loans if you can't prove you'll be able to pay them back.

Being a leader in profitability does not mean the owner has more money so he or she can buy a second home or a new boat. It means the company is able to sustain itself and provide for all the families it supports — all team members included.

In all the work we do with our ACE Peer Groups, one of the best things our member companies get is our benchmarking. We standardize numbers across companies so members can compare where they stand. In our review of data from our nearly 250 members, we can confidently say that a 10 percent profit margin is a good goal for landscaping companies.

Typically, growing companies will be operating at a lower profit margin than companies that are maintaining their size because to grow you need to add overhead before it's fully covered by your revenue. Hiring an additional salesperson, buying a

“
Being a leader in profitability does not mean the owner has more money so he or she can buy a second home or a new boat.”

truck before the route is full or increasing your marketing spend are common reasons we see growing companies dip to or below 10 percent profit.

When I think about leaders in profitability, there are two companies that come to mind. One is Noe Loarca who owns Avanza Landscaping and Maintenance in Arlington, Va. His company runs on exceptionally low overhead. Avanza operates out of a storage container and does \$2 million in annual revenue without a large yard or office space.

Another company that consistently tops our profitability rankings is Summit Landscape and Design in Hondo, Texas. Summit, which hosted our GROW! Annual Conference in 2023, has maintained a high profit margin by staying focused on core competencies and ideal clients.

I'll also level with you here and share that our profit margin at Grunder Landscaping Co. has been below 10 percent multiple times in our company's history. Sometimes you just have a bad year, sometimes you must spend money to set up future plans. The goal of this section is to give you the tools to understand your profitability and control it when you can — not necessarily to get you to hit a specific number.

KNOW YOUR COSTS



Marty Grunder and Seth Pflum, President & COO at Grunder Landscaping review metrics in Aspire.

One of the most common questions we get at The Grow Group is “What numbers should I be looking at?” For years, I thought I knew the answer to that question. I was wrong, and it almost cost us our growth strategy.

Here’s what happened. At Grunder Landscaping Co., we put all our equipment costs into one big bucket and spread them across all our work. Based on those numbers, hardscaping was our most profitable service, and mowing was basically a loss leader we did to keep clients happy.

When we implemented Aspire Software, we finally allocated equipment costs to the departments that actually used the pieces. The results shocked us: Watering was our most profitable service, mowing was a close second and hardscaping wasn’t nearly as good as we thought.

I know what you’re thinking: “How does this help me?” Here’s what I learned.

You can’t manage what you don’t measure

We weren’t always good at tracking our real costs. But once we got serious about it, we discovered a hidden cost killer: indirect labor.

Indirect labor is the money you spend on hourly team members when they’re clocked in but not doing billable work. Think training,

loading trucks, drive time and callbacks. Here’s a simple way to calculate yours:

- **Step 1:** Take your average hourly wage. Let’s say it’s \$18.
- **Step 2:** Add 25 percent for payroll burden. That’s $\$18 + \$4.50 = \$22.50$ per hour.
- **Step 3:** Track weekly nonbillable time per worker. Let’s say 10 hours.
- **Step 4:** Multiply it out. $\$22.50 \times 10 \text{ hours} = \225 per hourly team member per week.

If you have 30 hourly team members, that’s \$6,750 per week, or \$351,500 per year on indirect labor.

Know your profit margin targets

Here’s what you should be hitting for gross profit margins:

- Construction work: 50-55 percent
- Maintenance work: 45-50 percent

To calculate it: total revenue minus cost of goods sold (labor, materials, rentals, sub-contractors only), divided by total revenue.

If you’re above these numbers, great, but make sure you’re paying your team competitively. If you’re below, find labor efficiencies first before raising prices. We went three years without raising maintenance prices by getting more efficient instead.

Watch your cash flow

Cash flow is critical to a company’s success, and slow paying accounts receivable can be costly. There are four steps in cash flow: sell the work, do the work, bill the work, collect the work. The faster you crank through each of those steps, the better your cash flow and the stronger your company will be as a result.

Understanding your true costs isn’t just about tracking numbers. It’s about having the information you need to make decisions with confidence instead of just hoping you’re right.

THE \$1 EXERCISE & OPEN BOOK MANAGEMENT

Earlier this year, as part of our strategy to embrace open book management, we did an exercise with the entire Grunder Landscaping Co. team to talk about profitability and explain where all the money goes in our operation. We've found that sharing this information helps our team better understand our business, instead of them making assumptions about our profitability or assuming that what leaders are doing is easy.

To simplify the conversation and put it into terms that are easy to understand, we used the \$1 method. Here's how it works.

You start out with \$1 and with your company's costs as a percentage expressed in cents. You then demonstrate exactly where each dollar that comes into your business goes.

These aren't our real numbers, but here's an example based on industry standards:

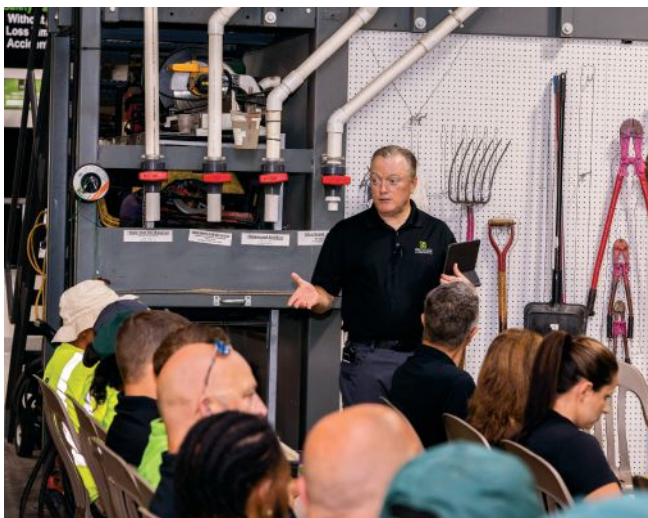
For every \$1 in revenue, we have:

- \$0.46 Cost of Goods Sold
- \$0.47 Expenses (Overhead)
- \$0.03 Company Taxes
- \$0.02 Depreciation

This leaves a total net income of just \$0.02 to be used to reinvest in the company.

We're transparent with our team and believe in open book management. Sharing the numbers this way puts it into terms that everyone on our team can understand. The collective feedback we received: "Wow, I didn't realize our profit margins were that tight."

And when we explain what the profits go for, there's a clear cause and effect relation-



Marty Grunder speaks to the Grunder Landscaping team during a monthly team meeting.

ship that highlights how each team member impacts the company's success or failure in a year. If we have the following, we may not have the funds to do things that we all want to do as a company:

- Equipment or property damages;
- Jobs finishing above bid hours;
- Less sales and revenue than we budgeted for; or
- Clients who don't pay their bills.

It means we may have to say "not this year" to things like:

- Replacing some of our older trucks and equipment;
- Adding new team members;
- Renovating parts of our facility;
- Additional bonuses or raises; or
- Community donations.

This exercise is a great way to help your team understand what's on the line year after year, and get them to buy in. Try it with your own team; I think you'll be pleasantly surprised by their reactions.

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ML80



ML100



ML130



ML150

WHY PROFIT ISN'T A DIRTY WORD

Here's a conversation I have with landscape business owners all the time: "Marty, I feel guilty charging what I need to charge. My clients are good people, and I don't want to take advantage of them."

That mindset will put you out of business. And when you're out of business, you're not helping anyone.

The real enemy is underpricing

The biggest threat to our industry isn't competition from big box stores or economic downturns. It's landscapers who don't charge enough to stay in business. They win jobs with unrealistic prices, deliver poor service because they can't afford to do it right, and then disappear, leaving clients frustrated and skeptical of the entire industry.

When you underprice your services, you're not being generous. You're undermining every professional landscaper who's trying to build a sustainable business that delivers real value.

Profit is your promise

When you include appropriate profit margins in your pricing, you're making a promise to your clients: You'll be there next year. You'll answer the phone when something goes wrong. You'll honor your warranties. You'll invest in training and equipment that delivers consistent results.

Low-profit companies can't make those promises because they're always one equipment breakdown or client dispute away from closing their doors.

“Marty, I feel guilty charging what I need to charge. My clients are good people, and I don't want to take advantage of them.”

What appropriate profit margins look like

We've already covered the target gross margins: 50-55 percent for construction work and 45-50 percent for maintenance. Those numbers give you the financial cushion to invest in your business, support your team and deliver the service your clients expect.

Don't apologize for those margins. Defend them. When a prospect questions your pricing, explain what's included: skilled labor, quality materials, proper insurance, equipment maintenance, ongoing training and the stability that comes from working with a financially healthy company.

The ripple effect

Profitable landscaping companies create ripple effects throughout their communities. They provide stable employment. They invest in better equipment and training. They support local suppliers. They donate their time and resources to their community. They contribute to the professional reputation of the entire industry.

When you charge appropriately and run a profitable business, you're not just helping yourself. You're raising the bar for everyone and proving to clients that landscaping is a profession worth investing in, not just a commodity to be purchased as cheaply as possible.

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REINVESTING IN YOUR COMPANY

I don't think we could publish this playbook without at least one article about equipment, right? Equipment is vital to our work: It makes us more efficient and saves our bodies from some of the harder labor on our to-do lists. I've

included equipment in the profitability section because at the end of the day, our trucks and equipment are tools for our team. They're not museums or collectibles, and we need to be mindful about how they're going to impact our bottom line when evaluating additions to our fleet. Here's what I recommend.

Trucks

We have specific truck setups for each type of work we do, and our trucks are customized to be efficient for that work. This is key to profitability for two reasons:

- 1 They are set up for a typical job or day, meaning our team has what they need with them automatically.

- 2 Our trucks have locking toolboxes on them, so we aren't loading and unloading every tool daily.

Our preferred trucks today are Isuzus customized for mowing, landscape maintenance, landscaping installation, watering and lawn care. For hardscaping or heavy landscape installations, we have Kenworths in our fleet. For more details on our fleet and what goes into these choices, you can check out this episode of my podcast, *The Grow Show* powered by STIHL.

For moving heavy things

I'm a huge fan of the Vermeer mini skid-steer



A Grunder Landscaping hardscaping truck with an Eby truck bed.

for its size, maneuverability and reliability. We own five of them now, and they're truly the Swiss Army knife of our business. They make so many of our common tasks faster: unloading pallets of pavers, moving large trees into place, pulling out large shrubs and more. They also fit into tight spaces that a full-sized machine wouldn't, so they are especially useful for residential work.

We also have John Deere loaders that see action daily, and we use their skid-steers for snow removal in the winter. Our team loves that they're easy to maneuver, and we were able to secure a great deal through their financing options that made these machines a profitability no-brainer.

Evaluating other equipment

We have handheld equipment and other miscellaneous pieces of equipment available for our teams to use, but I think it's important to share the philosophy we use when buying new pieces. First, we ask: Will we use it enough to justify owning it, or should we rent the piece when needed? Second: Will it save our teams time?

Our No. 1 cost is time, so anything that allows us to work faster or more efficiently is going to be something we consider because we may be able to be more profitable as a result.

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THERE'S MORE LIKE IT

Marty Grunder and The Grow Group have additional resources, a slate of 2026 events, and more to help your landscaping operation.

Grunder Landscaping Co.
Field Trips



GROW! Annual Conference



An ACE Peer Group Meeting



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