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Circle No. 113 on Reader Inquiry Card

# WHERE IS THE NEXT CUSTOMER?

In your own backyard. Using word-of-mouth advertising combined with a frontal assault on neighbors usually means new business.

by Rudd McGary, Ph.D.

**N**o matter what the business, the constant question of owners is, "Where is the next customer?"

In landscaping, this is also a constant. Perhaps this question, more than any other, worries most companies. Owners understand how to do the work, but often don't understand how to get the work. Here are some ideas about where the next landscaping customer can come from.

## Next door!

The best place to find a customer is next door to someone who has purchased your work in the past year.

The buying patterns in landscaping follow what is known as "two-step diffusion." This means that when someone wants to find a landscaper, they seldom ask a landscaper. Instead, they ask someone who is in the same basic age and income range and who might have a recommendation. The most logical person to ask is often a next-door neighbor, particularly if they have seen you doing work on their neighbor's property.

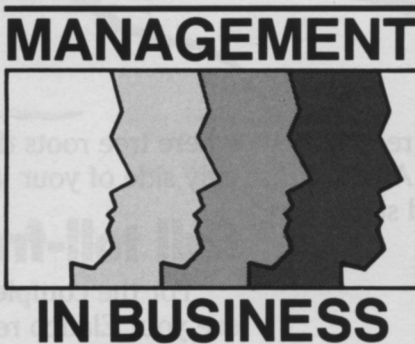
Two-step diffusion simply means that we look for someone who is very much like us and who we feel can render an objective opinion. If you have a group of satisfied customers, then you have a group of next-door neighbors, too.

We need to find ways to get this group to buy what we have. If we can reach them, we should have fairly good success. This holds true whether we are looking at commercial or residential work.

## Getting the referral

Most of your customers will give you a referral. They will give you a letter of recommendation if you want one. However, in order to simplify the process of getting such a letter, you should offer to type one out and then have the customer sign it.

Please note that I'm not suggesting that you send them a letter asking for referrals. This is done from time to



time, usually in a panic when enough work isn't booked for next month. The response to these letters is usually underwhelming: almost none at all.

If, on the other hand, you have a recommendation letter, you can be more aggressive.

## Choose the area

Ask your client if you can take a picture of the work you've done to show other people. Most people are proud to show off their landscaping, and they'll almost always let you take as many photos as you need. That way, you can have both letters of referral and pictures of the type of work you do on file. Both are handy tools that can be used later.

Certain parts of the town or city are better for you. Customers have bought from you in these areas and you have also done some installations. These are the areas in which you are going to look for the next-door neighbor who can be your next client.

## Potential customers

People in the three houses across and the two houses next door to your current customer are the most likely to buy your services. (You can find their names in a telephone criss-cross directory.) You need to mail them a brochure showing the sort of work you do. Let them know at the same time that you worked for their neighbor.

Often, blueprints and plans for installations make good backgrounds for bro-

chures. You should put together a short, full-color, no-photo brochure—one that has line drawings instead of photos. People are attracted to good line drawings. If you can't draw, find someone at the local college to help you. Usually, the art professor will know someone he or she can recommend.

In the brochure, explain that you have worked with people living close to your prospects. Then you need to let them know, as simply as possible, the types of services you provide. Finally, let them know how to reach you, and you've included all the necessary information. Don't write too much: the prospect will get bored. If the artwork is nice, you'll be fine with very few words.

## When they call

If you've done all of the above things, maybe one of these people will call you. When they do, set your appointment and gather up all your different tools, particularly the referral letter and the photographs.

When you make your presentation (or at least at the opening of your call), make sure that your letter of referral and photographs are seen by the prospect. Remember: you can talk a great deal, but it makes a difference if someone to whom the prospect can relate has already actually bought your services. Let the pictures do the talking; if they're good, they'll help do the selling for you.

## Finishing up

When you begin this new job, make sure you snap photos on the day you begin and on the day you end. If you are doing major work, there should be dramatic photographs showing the changes.

Once again, the person living next to this one will be the best next customer, and by saving evidence of how you did with your current customer, you can make a much stronger impression on the next one. **LM**

Rudd McGary, Ph.D., is a senior consultant with All-Green Management Associates, Columbus, Ohio.



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Applications of lime which amount to less than 50 lbs. per 1000 sq.ft. will disappear from the homeowner's view after one or two rains.

## LIME: SIMPLE AND CHEAP, BUT SO EFFECTIVE

Nitrogen fertilization should be countered occasionally by lime, which safely and effectively reduces soil acidity.

by Stephen J. Donohue, VPI-SU

In order to establish and maintain a high quality turf, additions of fertilizer and lime by the lawn care/landscape supervisor are sometimes needed.

While close attention is often paid to fertilization programs, the same is not normally true for lime. However, lime is a very simple material to apply, it is inexpensive compared to other materials and it is extremely effective in promoting good quality turf.

### Determining needs

It is quite simple to determine if lime need be applied to turf by testing the soil. Most soils in Virginia are natu-

rally acid and require limestone to neutralize this acidity. Also, as most nitrogen fertilizers used on turf make soil more acid, this should be countered by periodic lime additions. Since too much lime can be as harmful as too little, it is essential that the soil be tested beforehand.

In Virginia (and most other states), information on how to have soil tested may be obtained directly through the local cooperative extension office. These offices provide information on how to collect a sample as well as soil sample boxes and lawn information questionnaires. Most land grant universities have soil testing and plant analysis laboratories that offer testing services and information on amounts and types of fertilizer and lime to use.

### The application

Limestone is simple to apply, either with a drop spreader or a spinner (centrifugal) spreader. Uniform coverage

of the lawn is important. Overlaps and skipped areas should be avoided. For best results, one-half of the lime should be applied in one direction, and the remainder applied in a perpendicular (crisscross pattern) direction.

If using ground lime, it is simple to determine if coverage is uniform because of the visible white color of the material. More care should be taken if pelletized lime is used.

Lime can be applied at any time. It is recommended that lime be applied in the fall to enable the material to break down over the winter for the next season's growth. But if the soil is tested in the spring and lime is needed, it should be applied at that time. Lime will begin to react immediately upon application and will reduce acidity and improve turf growth through the summer and fall.

Lime is safe to use. The common

This text is adapted from a speech given at the Virginia Turfgrass Conference by Dr. Stephen J. Donohue, professor of agronomy and extension specialist in the Department of Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences at Virginia Polytech Institute and State University.





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forms of lime applied to turf—ag lime, calcitic lime and dolomitic lime—are non-toxic to humans and grass, and will not cause pollution problems.

If the proper amount of lime is applied to bring the soil pH to 6.5, the application should last four to six

years for it to react adequately with the soil.

When compared with other materials applied to turf, lime is very inexpensive. Lime costs are but  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{10}$  the cost of fertilizer. Lime is a real bargain at those prices.

turf growth.

Limestone also increases the plant availability of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium in an acid soil. All three nutrients undergo reactions in the soil when lime is applied to increase their availability to the plant. It should be noted that, when fertilizer is applied to a very acid soil, an appreciable portion will undergo chemical reactions that reduce its availability. By liming a soil, the efficiency of fertilizer use is increased.



Lime is a critical factor in keeping soil pH around 6.5 for good turf growing conditions on most athletic fields.

years.

If applying lime to established turf and the recommendation calls for more than 50 lbs. per 1000 sq.ft., the lime application should be split with no more than 50 lbs. per 1000 sq.ft. being applied at any one time. Additional applications, when needed, should be applied three to six months after the first application. The reason for split application in these situations is aesthetic. Lime is white and while applications of less than 50 lbs. per 1000 sq.ft. will disappear from the surface after one or two rains, larger amounts will remain visible for a longer period of time, which is undesirable from a homeowner's point of view.

Lime is even simple to produce. The lime material used on turf is nothing more than crushed lime bedrock.

### Collecting lime

At a lime quarry, topsoil is removed with a bulldozer, exposing the limestone bedrock. The bedrock is loosened using dynamite charges and the broken-up material is then transferred, usually by conveyor, to a crusher or pulverizer where it is ground to the proper fineness. It is necessary to grind limestone to a very small particle size since it is very insoluble and the surface area of the material must be increased

### Lime's effects

Lime is effective in so many ways. Its main benefit is neutralizing soil acidity.

There are two forms of acidity in soil, active and reserve. Active acidity refers to the actual concentration of hydrogen ions in the soil solution.

### Uniform coverage of the lawn is important.

This is the acidity that is measured in a soil pH test. This form of acidity amounts to only a small portion of the total acidity in the soil; it could be neutralized by applying merely a couple of teaspoons of lime per 1000 sq.ft.

Most of the acidity in soil is in the reserve form. It consists of aluminum and hydrogen held loosely on the edges of clay particles.

### Other benefits

In addition to neutralizing acidity, limestone supplies calcium and sometimes magnesium for plant growth. Common aglime supplies abundant amounts of calcium. The same is true for calcitic lime. Dolomitic lime, on the other hand, supplies both calcium and magnesium. These two essential plant nutrients are required for good

### Boosting pH levels

In addition to increasing availability of major plant nutrients, limestone reduces the availability of aluminum and manganese, the two elements primarily responsible for poor growth at low soil pH levels. Application of lime with resultant rise in pH causes aluminum and manganese to undergo reactions which render them unavailable. These elements exist in very unavailable forms at neutral soil pH levels.

Another benefit of lime is that it improves soil structure. This is due to the "bridging" effect of calcium (as well as magnesium) between clay particles and also because of an increase in microbial activity. Soil microorganisms help break down organic material in soil, and the resultant "glue" that is produced helps bind soil particles together.

While not present to any great extent in Virginia, soils that are high in sodium (which causes dispersion and breakdown in soil structure) are aided by limestone in that the calcium displaces sodium which is then leached out of the soil.

### Counteracting acidity

Another beneficial effect of lime, particularly important in turf production, is that it counteracts acidity caused by certain nitrogen fertilizers.

Ammonium nitrate and urea, two commonly-used nitrogen fertilizers, break down in the soil to produce nitric acid. Approximately  $1\frac{3}{4}$  lbs. of pure lime is needed to neutralize the acidity caused by 1 lb. of nitrogen from each of these fertilizers. In a yearly fertilization program where a total of 4 lbs. of nitrogen is applied per 1000 sq.ft., approximately  $7\frac{1}{4}$  lbs. of pure lime is needed to neutralize the acidity the nitrogen fertilizer produces.

These then are the benefits of using limestone on turf. Limestone is a simple material; simple to determine if needed, simple to apply, simple from the standpoint of its longevity and infrequent application need—yet a real bargain in terms of cost and benefit to the turf. **LM**





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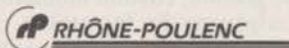
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## Computer images: landscape selling tools?

A new computer imaging service allows landscapers and architects to show their customers what their properties will look like at maturity.

The graphic service is offered by LandScopes, Inc., a Virginia-based computer imaging service that helps designers sell customers imagined landscape plans for home or commercial properties.

The company merges a photograph of the site with digitized images of real botanical specimens and garden elements, and the designer receives a full-color computer printout of the site at plant maturity.

The service spares the landscaper the costly investment of purchasing computer-aided equipment or the expense of employing a graphic artist. Also, the realistic pictures significantly help the customer understand traditional overhead plot plans or architectural line drawings. The net result is improved customer understanding and reduced costs due to design changes, according to the company.

### A truer image

"Traditional plot plans, line drawings, or even watercolor sketches leave a lot of room for mismatched visions between designers and customers," says Sheila D. McKisic, LandScopes' president. "Even CAD drawings can be visually misconstrued by clients, and making changes can cause lengthy delays resulting in missed sales opportunities."

With the LandScopes process, however, once the photograph of the site has been processed by the computer, any number of designs can be merged with the image as necessity, time and budget permit, she adds.

The landscaper provides to the company a standard plot plan, a list of plants and landscape elements to be incorporated and two 35 mm photographs of the desired "view." One of the photos is to include markers for accurate plant placement. A standard LandScopes package costs approximately \$200 and includes one view of the site and up to 15 different landscape elements.

"The simplicity of the process makes it possible for the landscaper to use the same plant in several locations without additional cost," says McKisic. The company charges a nominal fee if more than 15 plants or garden elements are used. The de-



The landscaper provides \$200, two photos of the property and a list of the desired landscape elements...



...and the LandScopes package creates the desired landscape using as many as 15 plants or garden elements.

signer receives a full-color, 8- by 10-inch printout of the property.

"The great flexibility of the process allows for a myriad of customized

printouts are available for framing," she adds.

### More than plants

The LandScopes library of images incorporates the new American Association of Nurserymen coding standard. It includes images of non-botanical elements such as fences, walls, fountains, bridges, patios, etc. Even the image of the house can be changed to accurately show its color or orientation.

"Landscaping professionals know that many of their customers would prefer to look at a realistic picture rather than a line drawing," says McKisic. "Experience shows that it's easier to gain agreement and reach closure on a sale when the designer and client share the same vision of what the finished product will look like." **LM**

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*It's easier to sell when the designer and client know what the finished project looks like.*

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plans. Unwanted existing plants and elements can be removed; plants can be pruned or relocated, the grounds can be graded; custom elements such as sculptures or fountains can be added; panoramic views up to 360 degrees can be processed; and large



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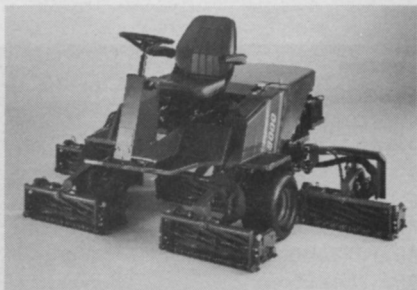


# PRODUCTS

## Fairway mower designed for a wider cut

Ransomes, Inc. has introduced a new "state-of-the-art" mower designed for top quality golf course fairway mowing. The Fairway 5000 provides the fine cutting quality of a greens mower, but has a speed of 6 mph and a wider cutting swath of 106 inches.

Ransomes says the Fairway 5000 was engineered for long hours of daily use. It has added special features for more operator comfort, such as a high-



back suspension seat with arm rests, and four-inch fore and aft adjustment; power steering and tilt steering wheel, readable gauges and well-positioned controls; and all-hydraulic design for raising and lowering cutting units.

Circle No. 191 on Reader Inquiry Card

## Versatile backhoe adapts to new trencher line

The T906 Bobcat backhoe is a handy complement to Melroe's new Bobcat 3020 Series trencher line. The T906 digs to depths of up to six feet depths. A 180-degree boom swing makes it a versatile tool for digging access holes



ground boring as well as removing rocks, or digging to gas or water mains. It uses two control levers, one for boom and swing, the other for dipperstick and bucket operation. A third lever controls the 69-inch wide back-fill blade, which acts as a stabilizer. The operator is situated high for ex-

cellent visibility. Four different bucket sizes are available for a variety of digging conditions.

Circle No. 192 on Reader Inquiry Card.

## Backhoe now attaches to skid steer loader

Du-Al Manufacturing Co. has adapted its Model 1015 backhoe to skid steer loaders and three-point hitch tractors. Quick detach linkage locks the backhoe to the body of the skid steer, removing digging forces from the loader's bucket cylinders. Designed to fit in close to the skid steer, these units may be mounted or dismantled in five minutes or less.

The Model 1015 has a digging depth of 7½ inches. It fits skid steer units with lift capacities of 800 to 1200 lbs. Du-Al says the 900 lb. working weight of the backhoe makes it an ideal companion for the small skid steer loaders for light commercial applications.



Circle No. 193 on Reader Inquiry Card

## New lawn tractor line designed for efficiency

The new Lawn Tractor LT series from Simplicity—the 12.5 LTH and 16 LTH units—can groom rough, hilly terrain and increase mowing efficiency. Simplicity says the tractors have the tightest turning radius (16 inches) of any lawn tractor in its class. New quick-hitch mowing decks can be removed within 30 seconds, in order to attach snowthrowers and other attachments.



Both tractors are powered by Briggs & Stratton Vanguard engines.

The 12.5 LTH unit accommodates a unique 38-inch two-blade mower. The 16 LTH has a 44-inch, three-blade deck.

Circle No. 194 on Reader Inquiry Card

## Low maintenance, positive drive in new hydro-gear

The latest addition to the Dixon line of Zero Turning Radius mowers is the new ZTR 503 HG, a 50-inch cut commercial-grade mower with hydrostatic gear drive. The ZTR 503 HG has



a true zero radius turn and simple hand lever controls that eliminate all footwork.

Dixon says that the drive system is the first such system on a Dixon mower, and is "technologically steps ahead of competitive comparables." Chief engineer Clair Splittstoesser says the Hydro-Gear drive delivers a more positive, responsive drive action, while the self-lubricating hydrostatic gear drive has no chains, sprockets or shafts, reducing maintenance or possible downtime.

Circle No. 195 on Reader Inquiry Card

## Sickle bar mower allows better contour mowing

The Troy-Bilt Trail Blazer sickle bar mower enables the mower to follow ground contours independent of wheels and chassis to eliminate "scalping" or hang-ups on uneven terrain. The mower is now manufactured in the U.S. and has a full six-year warranty.

The unit also has an exclusive, tangle-free blade that can mow 1,500 square feet of overgrown brush in just five minutes. Also included are 19 induction-hardened steel knives that stay sharp through many hours of use

*continued on page 102*