

Oak tree epidemic spreading in northern California

It first appeared on tanoak in Mill Valley, CA, in 1995, but since then, Sudden Oak Death has been reported from Mendocino to Santa Barbara counties, with Marin, Santa Cruz and Monterey counties showing epidemic levels.

So far, the primary cause of Sudden Oak Death, which has affected tanoaks (*Lithocarpus densiflorus*), coast live oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) and may be spreading to black oaks (*Quercus kelloggii*), is still unknown. Symptoms include drooping shoots in tanoaks, and bleeding in coast live oaks, black oaks and tanoaks.

Treating Sudden Oak Death is difficult

without knowing the primary cause, but the Marin County University of California Cooperative Extension has created a Web site with tips on how to maintain and in-

crease tree health. The site also has the latest information on Sudden Oak Death.

Log on at <http://cemarin.ucdavis.edu/index2.html>

Info Center

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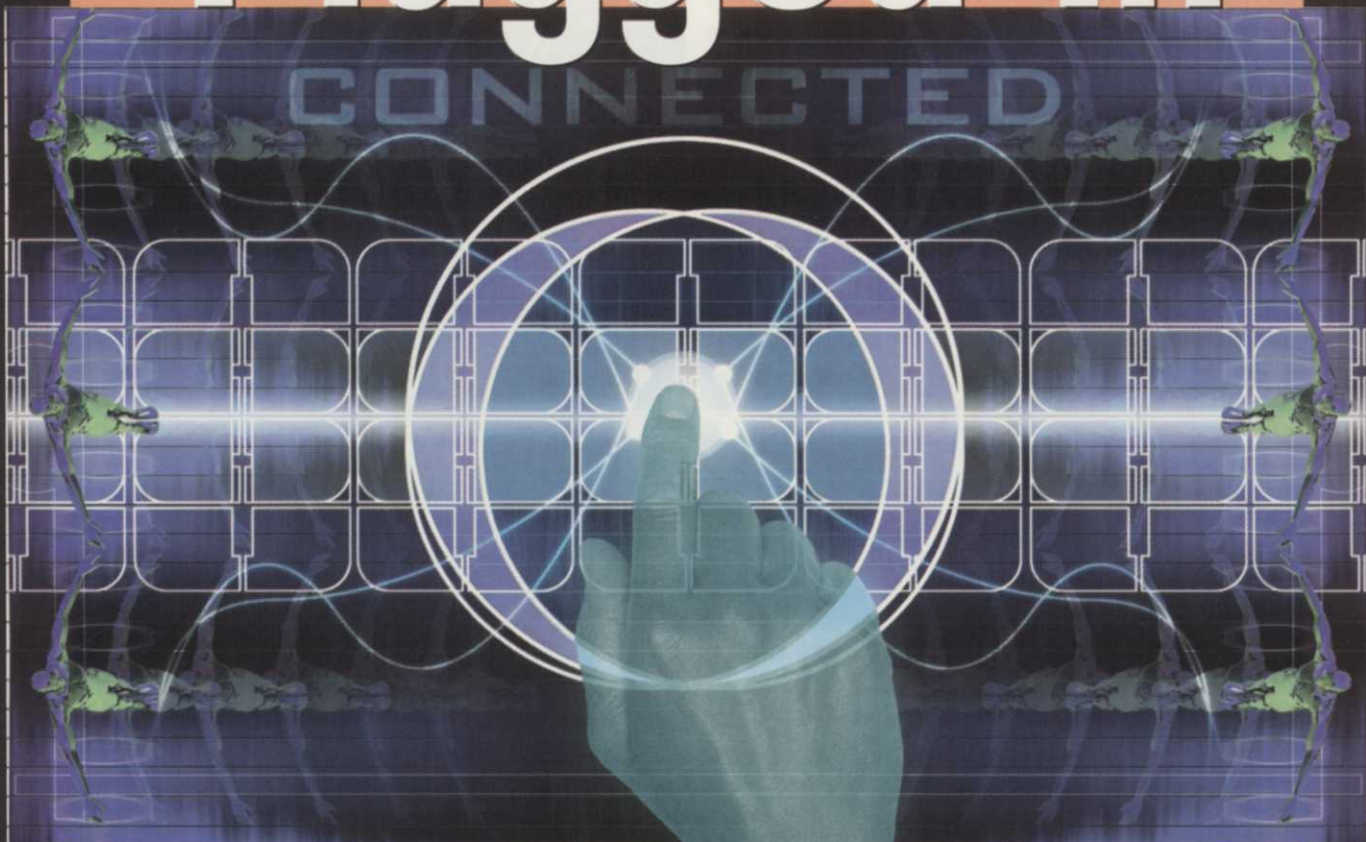


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Plugged In

CONNECTED



E-commerce provides green industry with a new way of doing business

By David Weinstock

Harry Albert is one of a new cadre of green industry business people who are tearing down the old way of doing business and establishing a new order with help from the Internet.

In January, Raleigh, N.C.-based Albert, who worked in marketing and sales for Rhone-Poulenc and Union Carbide for 24 years, shed the traditional business model of product distribution for the new world of electronic commerce. Last winter, Albert went to work for XS Inc., which operates a neutral Web-based agricultural product and equipment exchange called XSAg.com.

The site's success prompted him to convince XS founder and CEO, Fulton Breen, to launch a second site called XSTurf.com, which will be online early next year.

The fledgling state of Albert's sites typifies nearly all sites in this new industry segment. A veteran operation, such as eGarden.com, has been around for about two years. It was only in the first or second quarters of this year that most firms first sold goods or services.

The Web sites are free-market exchanges where buyers and sellers negotiate prices on a per transaction basis.

"We don't own any of the products that are sold here," Albert says. "We just assure that the products people offer exist and that the buyers have the money

to pay for what they purchase. Then we facilitate the transaction, just like the New York Stock Exchange.”

The difference between Albert's online trading floor and the one on Wall Street is that his is a Web site. Businessmen like Albert who were the first in the green industry to take advantage of the Web have discovered that e-commerce is a more efficient way to connect with customers and close a sale than advertising to an audience and using the telephone or even making personal contact.

Going golf

Golf course maintenance distributors are making the same discovery about the Internet as landscapers. Sites like San Diego-based GolfSat.com are creating marketplaces, consulting services and virtual communities for superintendents in which to exchange management information, and buy equipment and supplies.

GolfSat.com offers an electronic catalogue that features a more than 100,000-product equipment catalogue; localized weather service; online technical references on turfgrass insects, plant diseases, weeds and species; and a golf industry application service provider (ASP), or a company that buys software packages and puts those programs on a server (a large computer with techno-gurus managing it) located on the Internet. The site goes live in January. CEO Mike Scott says that 200 courses from North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Arizona and California have been involved in a beta test since April.

When the company learned that many superintendents don't have on-the-job access to computers or the Internet, it developed a low-cost program for them. For \$29.95 a month, users can sign up for GolfSat.com's hardware package, which includes a personal computer, software and Internet access.

GolfSat.com's technical reference is a gigantic database with articles on current university research.

“Let's say a superintendent wants to know about dollar spot,” Scott says. “He can access the reference to look at research information and, with another click, look at product information on how to control it.”

The company recently completed work on the global information system component of an ASP program to enable superintendents to call up planned views of their courses, set the rate of fertilization, compute how much will be used, hit the execute button, deduct how much

will be pulled from inventory and trigger an order.

GolfSat.com is also creating an ASP offering for distributors. “They'll be able to establish golf course product discount centers that will contain all the products in their inventories, the products' technical specifications, and pricing information skews and discounts,” Scott says.

What it takes

Choosing an Internet Service Provider (ISP) is an important step toward getting involved in e-commerce. You should know that more popular services like AOL have Internet interfaces with quirks that prevent them from properly displaying some Web pages.

In addition, access for some ISPs can be difficult to secure in areas where subscriber demand outstrips the number of open lines. The service provides easy setup for Web pages, but the pages are very basic and nothing like what a decent Internet site designer and ISP could do.

You should pay no more than \$25 a month for dial-up access. Don't bother with firms that don't offer unlimited access for their monthly fees.

Now's a great time to buy a computer because there are many inexpensive models available. However, beware of discount deals offered by computer hardware manufacturers, many of whom trade discounts for several year commitments to ISPs. These may not be as desirable as they appear because some services are not suited

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“Use the knowledge of your
web developer—use him
or her as a consultant.”

—Melanie McGee,
president,
ImageNation

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for commercial access.

There are several access options: dial-up connection, Digital Subscriber Line (DSL), Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), cable modem and T1.

Dialup connection is the slowest of the four options. It comes standard with PCs and is accomplished through a phone modem over normal telephone wires. The fastest speed with this device is 56.6 kilobits per second (KBS).

A more speedy option, available over standard telephone lines, is DSL. Several DSL varieties are available from regional phone companies or broadband communication providers such as Rhythms Net-Connections in Englewood, Colo.

"DSL offers speeds varying from 7.1 megabits per second to 144 kilobits per second, depending on how far your business is from your community's central telephone system switch," says Chris Hardman, Rhythms' director of public relations.

Another option, ISDN, is less cost-effective than DSL, and its speed increase over DSL is negligible.

Another access option is a cable modem. Because it comes through the cable system, it doesn't tie up a telephone line. It costs an additional \$40 to \$70 per month and provides access speeds from 500 kilobits to 1.5 million bits per second. However, speed diminishes by the number of subscribers connected to each access cable.

A T1 connection is the next best thing to direct feed from the Internet backbone. At 1.5 million bits

per second, downloading 100-megabyte files will go as quickly as cutting dry grass in the late summer.

E-commerce options

Getting to the Web is easy as long as you have a Universal Resource Locator (URL) or Internet address.

Typically, a customer or broker goes to a site, registers as a user and provides contact and credit information to create an account. Then the person is free to log on and purchase or sell goods.

Buyer registration is usually free, but not always. For

example, *Golfsat.com* will charge a \$19.95 monthly membership fee and 6 percent transaction fee on sales. Commissions on most green industry e-commerce sites vary from 2 percent to 6 percent.

Most firms assure the existence of sellers' goods and buyers' credit. Money moves from an escrow account once the product arrives. Delivery can be coordinated through the dot.com.

Options available to buyers and sellers vary greatly. Some offer auctions, fixed price or name-your-price transactions. *eGreenBiz.com* of Boulder, Colo., offers online auctions and direct sales and also recently premiered a request for a bids system for plants and equipment.

PlantFind.com, a Boynton Beach, Fla.-based service that finds both common and rare plants, features separate chat rooms for agriculture and horticulture operators. It also helps sellers market goods through Web pages it designs and creates free of charge.

Michael Ferraro, president of *PlantFind.com*, has negotiated a deal with Plant and Supply Locator where users can look up materials in its directory and discover if they are available at *PlantFind.com*.

The Internet's advantage, he says, is that it pulls together a fragmented market and allows for buying hard-to-find products quickly and inexpensively.

Other firms, like *eGarden.com*, which has an interactive calendar of lawn and garden industry events, draw users in with content.

"We have a news area and regional reporters who feed us news items," says Linda Watson, *eGarden.com's* president. "We also have a stock listing for the top 25 lawn and garden companies."

Green2go.com hired Kris Sweet, editor of *Ornamental Outlook*, to generate copy for the news, weather and industry information section of its Web site. The site also has a staff entomologist, Suzanne Wainright, who answers pest-related questions.

In the golf industry, one new e-commerce venture is the tee time reservation network, where courses enter into contractual agreements with services to allow golfers to book tee times on their courses.

Book4Golf.com of Scottsdale, Ariz., which launched its site in January, lists all courses in North America on its site and has 1,000 of those courses under contract. Around 300 of those courses were "bookable" as of mid-July, says Marney Edwards, senior vice president of *Book4Golf Vacations*.

Book4Golf.com takes a 3.5 percent to 5 percent commission of the total round price. In one week in June, the firm booked more than 2,100 rounds of golf online.

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Here are some of the many green industry Web sites that you'll find useful:

gcsaa.org
turftech.com
usga.org/green
ngf.org
bidmgr.com
wunderground.com
turfnet.com
ntep.org
golfsat.com
greentrac.com
e-greenbiz.com
igreens.com
precisionusa.com
golfbusiness.com
pestfacts.org
lawnsite.com
horticopia.com
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floraplex.com
growit.com
growzone.com
greenbuyer.com
weedalert.com
turfco.com
green2go.com
perma green
greensuccess.com

"It's made things simple. Once someone puts in an RFP, we respond to it, and we get the business or not. The convenience is great."

—Matt Bunch
Operations Manager
Carolina Eastern-Maloney
Ravenel, SC

"For us, I really believe the big benefit is the auction site. It's a good way to get movement on products you don't need anymore."

—Frank Onesty
Contract Manager
York Distributors
Linthicum Heights, MD

"We're in Missouri, and we bid on some things in South Carolina that we would never have known about otherwise. Greentrac has taken us from being a localized business to being more nationwide."

—Bill Kendrick
PTS Turf Products
Independence, MO

"Greentrac brings business from all over to your doorstep. It's like having a solid salesman on the road, only with no gas expenses."

—Bennett Denemark
Sales Executive
Sumter Small Engine
Sumter, SC

who says greentrac.com works?

"We needed flags with logos for the golf course we're opening. I attached files of logos to my RFP and got responses within a day or two. It was that simple. I got exactly what I wanted, as quickly as I needed it."

—Randy Miller
Superintendent
Golf Club at Westcott Plantation
North Charleston, SC

"We'll get twice as much for used equipment if we auction it on Greentrac."

—Steve Minor
Superintendent
Creek View Country Club
Crandall, TX

"It's made it easier and faster to purchase equipment. I just purchased long core aerifier. I put down what I wanted, got competitive bids back, and took the one I wanted. It's definitely a timesaver."

—Mark Colombo
President
Mark Colombo
Leonard, MI

"It's a big help for me. I can quickly print off an attractive bid proposal with multiple bids to show my client."

—Scott Pierce
Project Manager
First Golf Corporation
Tempe, AZ

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What is your time worth?

Plugged In

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Build your own?

The secret to Web commerce is to bring traffic through a site. Without visitors, a Web site has just as much value as a bad catalogue or billboard.

First, those who wish to have their own Web sites should ask themselves what their goals are. Then they should hire professional Web site developers to turn their visions into reality.

Melanie McGee, president of Cleveland-based ImageNation, designs and implements Web sites.

"I would like customers to have ideas of how their sites should look and function, but not concrete demands," she says. "Many people forget that form should follow function."

While she says logos, promotional materials and other advertising materials help sites, she cautions against imitation. "When a client demands that its site look exactly like joe-bob.com's site, [the client] may be selling itself short."

Decide what the site should do for the businesses.

"I don't think that many people understand the capabilities of good Web developers," McGee says. "They

"The 18,000 buyers that represent those co-ops will come to us when they are looking to purchase lawn and garden and outdoor living products online."

— David Harper, CEO, eGarden.com

can put more than an advertising-type of site online. If you can dream it up, it can probably be done. Use the knowledge of your Web developer. [Those people] are excellent sounding boards for ideas."

Of course, being ready to built your site makes life easier. It's also a good idea to have everything on disc in digital form. Electronic data (brochures, databases, letters, etc.) is easier to work with than paper-based data.

Big bucks

If you're thinking about creating a site for a wholesale or distributing business, be assured that this enterprise is more expensive than a promotional site.

"There is a tremendous up-front cost, in the neighborhood of several hundred thousand dollars," says eGarden.com's Harper.

John Cochran, president of eGreenbiz.com, says his firm's startup,

Survey Says

We surveyed landscape contractors, lawn care operators and grounds managers to discover their e-business tendencies. We found:

- ▶ **One in five** have their own Web-sites (21 percent).
- ▶ **More than half** (53 percent) use the Internet for business-related purposes (71 percent of grounds managers, 55 percent of landscape contractors and 46 percent of lawn care companies managers said they use the Web for business).
- ▶ **50 percent** use the Internet to find product information.
- ▶ **47 percent** use it for weather news.
- ▶ **45 percent** participate in e-mail or bulletin boards online.
- ▶ **28 percent** find association information online.
- ▶ Searching for general information is the most popular use for **89.5 percent**.
- ▶ Searching for industry information is second most popular for **82.9 percent**.
- ▶ **35.5 percent** said they make purchases on the Internet.
- ▶ **Mean hours** spent online are 4.18 a week

We asked 100 Golfdom readers: How often do you use the Internet in your work? They responded:



which launched April 1, had software costs of \$2 million.

Once a site is built, the next task for a site owner is to generate traffic through promotion and advertising. Albert's XSAg.com site was recently recognized by *Farm Journal's* AG Web Service as having the second best recognized commercial agricultural site on the Web, behind John Deere & Co. Albert says his site's monthly transactions are in the millions of dollars and that there are 50,000 registered users.

When it comes to traffic, *eGarden.com's* Watson, *Green2go.com's* Gardner and *Plantfind.com's* Ferraro talk about building a critical mass, which means a large number of buyers and vendors.

Launched as a retail site in December 1997, *eGarden.com* currently has 150 vendors and projects it will have 500 by January. Eighteen months after founding the site, Watson sold it to U.S. Home and Garden. Last November, *eGarden.com* went wholesale and launched an auction site. In July, it opened a virtual store that offers 26 categories of goods in lawn and garden and outdoor living products.

The operation sells goods to both consumers and retailers. In fact, the latest feather in its cap is signing a long-term agreement with the nation's three largest hardware cooperatives — Ace, Tru-Serv and Do-it-Best — to be their exclusive online sales outlet.

Partners and alliances are the building blocks of these businesses. *Plantfind.com's* Ferraro has cut a deal with the Plant & Supply Locator directory. In return for becoming that publication's exclusive online agent, Plantfind.com will help find it new growers' markets.

What's the fate of offline wholesalers?

When asked whether online distribution foreshadows an end to real-time

businesses such as brokers and distributors, online business people take a deep breath and say, "No."

Right now, e-commerce sites need vendors as much as they need buyers. Harper and Watson both say that buyers and sellers at their site switch hats all the time. They may come in to sell equipment but, while they're on the

site, they might see some fertilizer available at a price from which they can make a profit.

Like so many others, green industry professionals have to get used to the idea of engaging in commerce on the Web. With online transaction sales percentages increasing every year, they can't afford not to. ■



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Computers and E-Maintenance: Fad, Folly or the Future?

have you succumbed to the computer age? Do you surf the 'Net? Do you Yahoo? What is your computer IQ rating — two tin cans and a string, or a Pentium 5? And what does any of this have to do with growing grass?

While computers have made a huge impact on our culture, remember that they are only a tool — not a silver bullet to help repair your every woe. The time savings and efficiency that computers provide are directly proportional to how well you understand how to use them. For example, many superintendents over 50 don't care much about computers, and those in their 40s find computers challenging. But superintendents in their 30s understand random access memory and megahertz, and those in their 20s wonder why their entire courses can't be mowed robotically from their offices.

We need to remind ourselves that even in this electronic age there are still many courses with manual irrigation systems and six-man crews. To this legion of superintendents, computers will remain *Star Wars* toys of the future. But there's no discounting computers' increasing influence — they've even changed the way *I* do business.

I've been the editor of *The Florida Green* magazine for the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association for 10 years. Over that decade, computer and software improvements have allowed my publisher and I to graduate from faxes to e-mails and from hour-long file downloading sessions to pdf formatted files which take minutes to send and receive. I can view the entire magazine design on my monitor and make any necessary changes *before* it goes to press — a vast improvement over the pile of faxes on the floor.

But what about computers and e-maintenance? There's a tremendous buzz at industry events about online purchasing, GPS mapping and operational tracking. But what does it all mean for the superintendent on a daily basis? If the response to my poll is any indicator, I'd say the pace of computerization of golf course maintenance is slow. I sent out a simple questionnaire to 99 Florida superintendents via my e-mail network and asked them how they used computers at work and only 10 responded.

But for those who use computers, the advantages will put them light years ahead of their competition. Data manipulation helps superintendents prepare budget reports with phenomenal speed, and rapid communication by e-mail has virtually eliminated the phone tag game. And let's not forget the No. 1 computer use in golf course maintenance — irrigation management.

As for online purchasing, it's a feature that's hyped a lot but used sparingly — for the moment. Superintendents are a conservative group who don't like to be treated as guinea pigs. But this will change as a new generation of workers whose lives are shaped by the Internet join our ranks.

There's no doubt that a computer can be a powerful tool on the administrative side of the job. Now sign off from the GCSAA Web site and go check on the crew. There are some things a computer can't do — yet. ■



Joel Jackson, the author of this column, retired from Disney's golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association.



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Questions Abound

Where do distributors fit in the e-commerce equation?

By Peter L. McCormick

The dawning of e-commerce in the green industry brings more questions than answers in these early stages, particularly concerning the impact it will have on the front-line customer service provided by local distributors — not to mention the effect on the distributors themselves. Will the convenience of 24-hour-a-day ordering override the consultative selling skills of local salespeople? Will the promise of discount pricing lure a buyer away from his long-time local supplier? Will overnight shipping be fast enough when products or supplies are needed *now*?

Ask a golf course superintendent or sports field manager and you'll get a different answer to these questions than you will from a lawn care operator or landscape contractor. Even though these businesses share a common thread in the green industry, they are

different and are often served by different suppliers.

Since superintendents and sports field managers are stationary and have predictable budgets and buying patterns, they are easily serviced by local or regional distributors and their field salespeople. Being only one step removed from the manufacturer, these field salespeople tend to be well-trained and offer agronomic consultation and extended product demonstrations as part of their service. Equipment setup, warranty service, delivery and credit are also offered by the local distributors.

Lawn care operators, on the other hand, are usually on the move, preferring to order from their local suppliers by calling them on their cell phones or stopping by on the fly. They tend to be serviced by local two-step dealers who purchase from regional distributors rather than directly from the manufac-

turer and have limited field sales staffs, if any. Landscape contractors rely less on their local dealers for consultation, equipment setup, delivery and even credit. As entrepreneurs with profit motives, they also tend to be more price sensitive than at least the private club sector of the golf industry, which tends to let quality and service override price concerns.

The great unknown is how e-commerce fits into this scheme of things. One who can temper conjecture with experience is George Kinkead, president of Minneapolis-based Turfco, a manufacturer of specialty turf equipment for the golf, sports turf and landscape segments of the green industry. Turfco took the e-commerce plunge in late 1999 with the Turfco Direct e-commerce initiative, and it has been a revelation, according to Kinkead.

"We have two distinct markets and distribution systems for our products," Kinkead says. "Our topdressers, material handlers and overseeders are targeted at the golf and sports turf markets, and have always been represented and serviced well by our traditional distributors.

"On the other hand, our lawn care products — the sod cutters, edgers and aerators — had historically been handled by a two-step dealer network. With specialty products like ours, the dealers were too far removed from us to achieve the expertise needed to properly sell and service our products," Kinkead adds.

Turfco launched Turfco Direct "as a way to reach those end users of our lawn care products who were dissatisfied with their local service, as well as open up new markets where we had no representation at all," Kinkead says. "Now those landscape contractors and lawn care people are dealing directly with us and are pleased because they're getting much better service."

By eliminating one step in the supply chain, Turfco reduced its pricing on its lawn care products to the market level, Kinkead notes.

"We wanted to establish one price for our products that was fair and competitive," he adds. "The net result was that pricing dropped slightly in some areas and dramatically in others, depending upon how much some dealers were marking up our products."

Turfco will be adding more lawn care products as well as a range of service parts to Turfco Direct in the near future, but has no inten-

tion of marketing its golf and sports turf products via e-commerce. "The needs of the lawn care and fine turf markets are very different," Kinkead says.

On the turf supply side of the industry, Bob Lippman Sr. has concerns about the emergence of e-commerce. Lippman, a former superintendent and manufacturer's representative, founded Westchester Turf Supply in Lincoldale, N.Y., in 1976. He and his son, Bob Jr.,

Will the convenience of 24-hour-a-day ordering override the consultative selling skills of local salespeople?

sell fertilizers, seed, chemicals and other supplies to 150 golf courses in the metropolitan New York area.

"I just don't see how these e-commerce companies are going to fit into the picture," Lippman says. "The competition between local distributors of turf supplies is strong, not to mention the national companies like Lesco and UHS. Particularly with pre-season programs on pesticides, we're operating on very low — often single digit — profit margins. It's to the point where we're almost cutting each other's throats, profitwise. There's little for an e-commerce middleman to share."

Lippman also questions how well the e-commerce companies will service the needs of his accounts in the traditional sense.

"We have been contacted by several dot-com companies to entice us to participate with them, and I have asked them pointblank whether anyone in their company knows anything about growing fine turf," he says. "They admitted they don't. They're just going at it as a buy-and-sell commodity type of thing when this industry demands more."

Local distributors provide other services like warehousing, staggered delivery schedules and emergency deliveries when needed, Lippman notes.

"Many superintendents don't like to inven-

Continued on page 14e

Questions Abound

Continued from page 13e

tory large quantities of pesticides or fertilizers for insurance reasons," he adds. "Plus, if a guy calls and needs a case of Daconil in a hurry, we'll have it to him in an hour in most cases. He's not going to get that service over the Internet — at any price."

Some shipping companies refuse to handle restricted-

Will the promise of discount pricing lure a buyer away from his long-time local supplier?

use or other hazardous materials, and there are licensing issues as well, Lippman says.

"New York state, for instance, requires a pesticide dealer to have a dealer's license," he explains. "We go through the same testing as the end users do, and at least one person in the firm has to be a licensed pesticide applicator."

Further confusing the issue are the recent agency pric-

ing programs implemented by some chemical manufacturers, and the contracted areas of distribution established and enforced by most manufacturers. With agency pricing, the manufacturer sets a firm retail price and holds title to the product, even while it's in the distributor's warehouse. The distributor can't adjust the price up or down, and is paid a commission or agency fee by the manufacturer for selling and handling the product.

"Agency pricing is a disincentive to shop around," Lippman says, "because you're going to get the same price from everyone."

Greg Nicoll, superintendent at Maplewood (N.J.) CC, doesn't mince words when discussing his needs and the future impact of e-commerce on the green industry.

"As a young superintendent, I attribute a great deal of my success so far to my local suppliers," he says. "If I come in at 6 a.m. and find I need of a case of fungicide, I can make a call and it will be here by 7:30. That's very important to me. I'm much more concerned with the consistent health and playability of my golf course than saving a few bucks here and there."

Kinkead likens the dawning of e-commerce to the advent of the adjustable wrench.

"E-commerce is going to be a tool in the toolbox, but not the only tool," he says. "Many people think when one thing evolves, another dies. That isn't really the case."

Certain products will be supported more by e-commerce than others, Kinkead says. "The commodity products — seed, fertilizer, tee and green supplies, hand tools — will be the first to take off, particularly in areas where service isn't up to snuff," he adds.

Manufacturers and front-line distributors must continue to justify premium prices and products with premium service and support in the Internet age, Kinkead stresses.

"Everyone who touches or handles a product has to add value to it," he says. "The guy who thinks, 'I have this territory, these are my customers and they will do business with me,' is a dying breed."

Turfco is planning to use the Internet to help its distributors add value and improve customer service. Its Turfco Direct service center offers charts of the most common service problems with any machines and how to fix them. Solutions are easily available to salespeople and end users.

"If our salespeople can answer customers' questions — or the customers can access the information themselves — the customers will feel better about our products and be more likely to purchase them again," Kinkead says. ■

Peter L. McCormick is president of Skillman, N.J.-based TurfNet Associates, a provider of print and online information services for the golf course industry.

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Tips: Buying Online

By Russell Shaw

From bunker rakes to mulching equipment, it's becoming easier to buy green industry-related supplies online.

The benefits of ordering supplies and services over the Internet are numerous. You can visit any number of sites and get instant pricing information, as well as technical specifications. Since they can be updated in a few minutes, Web sites will likely have more current prices than that product brochure a turf equipment salesperson dropped off in April.

The best e-commerce sites have other useful features, such as frequently asked questions lists about the products they offer; geographically searchable lists of service technicians and contractors authorized to handle products; pages with e-mail, phone and fax numbers of the company representatives in your area; and e-mail links to vendors themselves.

Green industry e-commerce is, of course, only a small example of the worldwide procurement revolution that the Internet is sparking. The worldwide B2B market is forecast to grow from \$145 billion in 1999 to \$7.29 trillion in 2004, according to Stamford, Conn.-based Internet commerce analysis firm Gartner Group. By 2004, B2B e-commerce will represent 7 percent of the forecasted \$105 trillion total global sales transactions.

"The B2B explosion is imminent, fueled by a combustible mixture of investment financing, IT spending and opportunistic euphoria that is being funneled into startups and brick and mor-

tars' e-commerce initiatives," said Leah Knight, principal analyst for Gartner Group's e-Business Intelligence Services.

Most e-commerce experts break e-commerce into four distinct sectors:

- Companies that sell goods or services directly on their own sites.

- Independent "trading exchanges" operated by third parties specific to an industry or group of industries, where merchandise or services are offered for sale from various and sometimes competing vendors. Examples include Golf-sat (www.golfsat.com) and Greentrac.com (www.greentrac.com).

- Auction sites that take competitive bids via e-mail and then verify the transaction after the expiration of the auction period. One example is Auction Equipment.com, which has a section for landscaping supplies.

- Industrywide e-marketplaces, administered by a consortium of companies in a given industry or by a trade association. Although turf management e-commerce has yet to appear in this arena in any meaningful fashion, this is the hottest sector, one which Gartner predicts will be responsible for 37 percent of all B2B online transactional revenue within three years.

How to find supplies

Your most effective strategy to finding supplies online is to use an Internet index or search engine. Indexes, such as Yahoo! (www.yahoo.com), list groupings of Web sites by category. Search engines such as Google (www.google.com) go through much of the Web every few weeks and construct giant indexes of

Web pages. By entering two search terms, say "sod" and "buy online," you'll see a specially created search results page with listings of, and links to, sod vendors that let you buy over their sites.

Is ordering safe?

Despite the sensational headlines that erupt when sites are "hacked," most online ordering is safe. Most sites that take credit card numbers are encrypted, which means the information you type into an order form is given a unique code by your browser that only the merchant's or site's e-commerce processing software can decipher.

Just as your bull detector goes off when you meet a bunk-artist salesperson in the real world, there are standards you can use to verify if a Web site you're thinking about buying from is legit. After all, in the real world, a face-to-face meeting, a handshake, a hand-signed contract all help foster trust. Yet in e-commerce, you don't get to see your seller's face — just its Web site.

Just in case you have even a little doubt, the Better Business Bureau suggests you avoid doing business with sites that can't be checked. "If a site will not divulge a street address and telephone number, something fishy is probably going on," the BBB says.

Fortunately, these incidents are rare. If they weren't, businesses wouldn't be flocking to Web-based purchasing. ■

Russell Shaw, a Portland, Ore.-based free-lance writer, covers e-commerce issues for various publications and Web sites.

Take Advantage of the Web

back in 1998, I was one of the first landscape professionals to realize the value of the Internet. Since then, I've never looked back.

As a 23-year-old owner of my own lawn care company, Lawnicure, I could already feel my knees and back giving out. So I decided to work smarter, not harder. With an initial investment of \$300, I created a Web page that described my company and the services I offered, and put my Web domain name (www.lawnicure.com) on my business cards. I also put that domain name in with my Yellow Pages advertisements to stretch my advertising dollars.

A month later, I added a lawn care message forum to my Web page so that landscape professionals who visited the site could say hello or ask me a question. This forum became popular, so in January 1999 I registered the domain www.lawnsite.com, sold my lawn care company and started selling advertising space on the site.

As hundreds of thousands of lawn care company owners started visiting my site monthly, manufacturers saw the value of sponsoring LawnSite.com with a banner (a small rectangle with the sponsor's company advertisement in it). Some people who see a certain product advertised might have something negative to say about it in the public discussion forum, but others with different experiences will talk highly about it. The great thing is that the manufacturer can jump into the discussion as well.

Today, LawnSite.com is the most popular lawn care message forum on the Internet with more than 600,000 monthly page views, 20,000 different discussions on commercial lawn care and 1,100 registered lawn care company owners.

Forum participants enjoy the interaction with their peers. Ed Wagner of www.turfquip.com sums it up nicely: "Lawn care operators nationwide share a common set of industry specific problems — poor public perception, lack of profitability, availability of labor and changing technology, to name a few. By sharing common concerns, LawnSite members are able to reach common solutions by saving time, money and shortening the learning curve."

Moving forward, I've invested \$10,000 additional dollars in hiring a software programming company to add a lawn care company directory and online marketplace to my site. I'm also creating LawnSites.com, which will offer web page design services to lawn care companies.

All landscape professionals will eventually use e-commerce to benefit themselves and their companies. Watch out, local parts dealers, because you can't compete with the low overhead the Internet offers — LCOs will buy directly from wholesale outlets for big savings and the product will be delivered to their doorsteps. LCOs will also be able to research before they buy by talking to thousands of their peers across the country, not to mention getting industry news and events in minutes. Manufacturers will be able to reach a new market and get insight from LCOs on what they're looking for in equipment. Consumers will be able to find lawn companies and receive bids in minutes.

If your company is not using the Internet, your competition is. You're missing out on a vast amount of knowledge and giving extra money to your local parts dealer to cover his overhead. If you're looking for an excuse to buy a new computer, the Internet is one you should take advantage of. ■



Chuck Keough
Owner,
LawnSite.com

Will Surf for Work

The Web's a great place to go job hunting.

Here's a primer for the golf and landscape industries

BY JOE DYSART

There may have been a time in America when it was easier to get a job, but if someone remembers, please let us know. With the unemployment rate regularly dipping below 4 percent, it's a stupendous time to go job surfing. And as luck would have it, the Web offers tools aplenty for the employment-seeking opportunist.

But before you hit the job boards, a stop by www.job-huntersbible.com would be beneficial. Maintained by Dick Belles, author of *What Color Is Your Parachute?*, the site is full of insights and tools for job searching on the Web. Another great source is *The Guide to Internet Job Searching*, by Margaret R. Dikel, France Roehm and Steve Oserman.

As you might expect, green industry-specific job boards are great for quickly honing your search. But these boards do not offer many frills. If you're looking for in-depth research, job-seeking advice and a high volume of offerings, you'll also want to check out the general interest boards.

As with most things on the Internet, the opportunities for finding a green job through the Web are growing exponentially as its user base continues to grow. Job seekers have literally thousands of general interest job boards from which to choose — and dozens of boards devoted exclusively to green jobs.

Indeed, by January 1998, 17 percent of *Fortune* Global 500 companies were cruising the Net for employees, according to iLogos.com (www.ilogos.com), a market research firm. Last year, the figured jumped to 45 percent. Over-

all, high-tech market research firm Forrester Research projects that businesses will be spending \$1.7 billion by 2003 to snap up new employees via the Web.

Either way, boards that show up first in popular search engine returns to keywords like "golf jobs" or "landscaping jobs" should be among the first ones to try. Job boards that send e-mail alerts are also handy.

Other features to consider with a job board: How easy is it for employers to post a new job offering, and what's the overall feel of the site? If the site feels friendly, professional and first-rate, there's a better chance the employer behind the board is offering the same kind of position.

Green-specific job boards

Green industry-specific job boards generally aren't as sophisticated as the general interest boards. But given that the boards are essentially in the backwoods of the Web, chances

Finding work

Check out these green industry sites if you want to go job hunting or look for capable workers:

greenindustryjobs.com
getajob.com
nurseryman.com
landscapejobs.com
gcsaa.org
turfnet.com
earthworks-jobs.com
greensearch.com
amigos-inc.com
brickmangroup.com
florapersonnel.com

Continued on page 18e

Will Surf for Work

Continued from page 17e

are greater that you'll come across a new opening no one else has seen.

A good place to start in this category is www.greenindustryjobs.com, where you can scan for job offers in four categories — irrigation, landscaping, tree care and nursery. You can search for jobs by date posted, state, territory, province, region or zip code.

www.nurseryman.com offers an informal jobs and resume-posting bulletin board, and www.landscapeworks.com appeals to an extremely narrow niche. For the scientifically inclined, www.earthworks-jobs.com is a source of job openings for plant, forestry and soil scientists.

More than a few golf and landscaping industry types are attracted to the industry by a desire to do something good for the earth. There are no shortage of boards that specialize in jobs that emphasize a healthy respect for the environment. Among these are www.ecbonline.com (Environmental Careers Bulletin Online), www.environmentnetwork.com, www.ejobs.com and www.ahs.org/horttops.html (Hort Opportunities).

General interest job boards

Not surprisingly, general interest job Web sites offer a more sophisticated site design, more job and career help tools — and many more green jobs. Of course, the downside is that these boards are so popular, you're chance of seeing a new job first is slim at best.

All of the boards below placed among the top 10 most-trafficked job boards in 1999, according to Media Metrix, an Internet media market research firm. All placed among the top links recommended by Top 10 Links, a Web-site review firm that rates sites based on traffic, usability and best overall performance. They are:

www.monster.com: For many analysts, Monster is essentially the benchmark by which all other job boards are measured. Sporting an extremely slick interface, Monster allows employers to post jobs in real time and gives them access to more than one million résumés. Loaded with columns and articles on job hunting, Monster also offers detailed online ad-

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Tree Care Jobs www.treecarejobs.com	Nursery Jobs www.nurseryjobs.com

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Landscapejobs.com appeals to an extremely narrow niche.

visories for those thinking of switching careers, transferring military skills to the private sector and other special-case scenarios. You'll also find chat rooms to swap job search war stories, and you can research company profiles.

www.careerpath.com: Offering a simple, inviting, uncluttered home page, CareerPath also automatically imports ads from employer sites twice a week — so you know the listings are current. Green job hunters here can also search ads posted on the Web or by nearly 90 affiliated newspapers. The chat rooms, bulletin boards, articles and other features you'd expect at a top board are here. As a bonus, there are live, scheduled chats with leading recruiters and career counselors.

www.careermosaic.com: If you're a recent college grad looking for a green job, this should be one of your first stops. The entire site emphasizes help for the recent grad, including a résumé writing help center. For the especially adventurous, there's also a special domain devoted to employers outside the United States who are seeking job candidates.

www.hotjobs.com: In addition to the standard services found at other top sites, HotJobs enables you to control which companies see your résumé online. It has an easy-to-use tracking service that will inform you how often your résumé has come up in a search, and how many times it has been viewed. Another perk: HotJobs offers a free e-mail account to any and all takers. Plus, a number of employers have links here that lead back to their company home pages.

www.job-search-engine.com: Strictly a meta-search engine and not a job board, the site queries hundreds of job boards for a specified green job and returns links to all job boards offering such posts. Essentially, it's the place to go for a quick down-and-dirty look on what green jobs are available and nothing more. ■

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Joe Dysart, an Internet business consultant based in Thousand Oaks, Calif., can be reached at joedysart@digitalubiquity.com.

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Defining E-Commerce

Address verification — Process used by a credit card processor or other party to verify that a customer's ordering address matches its records.

Authorization — Process of making sure you have enough money in your bank account or line of credit to afford the item you want to buy. If all goes well, an authorization code is created and the money is deducted from your account/line of credit.

Back end/Office — The secret password-protected part of an e-commerce site where the merchant does the dirty work of managing the site, counting the money, and adding and/or deleting pages. It's similar to the back room of a regular store — except nobody (hopefully) comes out to say, "If it's not on the shelves, we don't have it"

Banner — An often-annoying interactive advertisement on a Web site that will pop up by just brushing it with a cursor at the most inopportune time.

Card not present merchant account — Account allowing merchants to process credit cards without the cardholder actually being there. Internet merchants need Card not present merchant accounts

to conduct business online.

Certificate authority — Third party which verifies the identity of merchants and their sites.

Check-out stand — Shipping and payment-processing area of an e-commerce site. Contains bill-to and ship-to information, along with payment method.

Commerce server — Server that manages and maintains transactions and back-end data for an e-commerce Web site.

CyberCash — Secure gateway for authorization and capture of credit-card funds.

Cyberpunks — Knowledgeable computer buffs with attitude.

Delayed settlement processing

— Once a transaction has been authorized, the merchant must ship goods before transaction can be settled. Delayed settlements are stored online until the merchant selects the transactions for settlement.

Digital or electronic cash — Also called e-cash, it is making payments by transmitting a number from one computer to another. The numbers, just like those on a dollar bill, are issued by a bank and represent specified sums of real money. Digital cash is anonymous and reusable, like real cash.

Digital certificate — Issued by a certificate authority, it verifies to the shopper that the virtual store is asso-

ciated with a physical address and phone number, which can increase the shopper's confidence in the merchant.

Digital signature — Digital code attached to an electronically transmitted message that identifies the sender. It's like a written signature, and is important for electronic commerce and a key factor in most authentication methods.

Digital wallet — Encryption software that's used like a real wallet during e-commerce transactions. It holds a user's payment information, a digital certificate to identify the user and shipping information to speed transactions. The "wallet" is also encrypted against fraud.

Disintermediation — Cutting out the middleman, such as when Internet-based companies bypass traditional retail channels to sell directly to customers.

Electronic check — Takes money from users' checking accounts to pay bills.

Electronic wallet — Stores your credit card numbers on your hard drive in an encrypted form.

Cookie

Message given to Web browser by Web server. The browser stores the message in a text file called `cookie.txt`. The message is then sent back to the server each time the browser requests a page from the server. The purpose is to identify users and possibly prepare customized Web pages for them. When you enter a Web site using cookies, you may be asked to fill out a form providing such information as your name and interests. This information is packaged into a cookie and sent to your Web browser, which stores it for later use.

SSL

The SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) Protocol was developed by Netscape Communications, which provides secure communications between the server and client, preventing others from capturing or viewing the data being exchanged.

Encryption — Process of creating secret codes to protect stuff flying through cyberspace.

Extranet — Extension of corporate intranet that connects the internal network of one company with the intranets of its customers and suppliers. Makes it possible to create e-commerce applications that link all aspects of business relationship, from ordering to payment.

Hypertext — Text that contains links to other Internet sites and documents.

Interchange — The exchange of information, transaction data and money among banks. Interchange systems are managed by Visa and MasterCard associations and are standardized so banks and merchants worldwide can use them.

Micropayments — Transactions in amounts between 25 cents and \$10.

Order confirmation — E-mail message notifying you that an order has been received and will be processed and immediately sent.

Portal — Aims to be the first place people see when entering Internet, especially within an industry category; has links galore, perhaps a search engine, to encourage its popularity as a "port of entry."

Shareware — Software that can be used on a trial basis for free. Payment is expected if used after trial period.

Real-time credit card processing — Credit card purchase is authorized while a shopper is still online. If credit is denied, the shopper has opportunity to fumble around for another credit card to try.

The screenshot shows the infoplease.com website interface. At the top, there's a search bar with the text 'All Business'. Below it, the 'Computer Glossary' section is visible. The first entry is 'ASCII', defined as an American Standard Code for Information Interchange, an encoding system for converting keyboard characters and instructions into the language of a computer. Other entries include 'bandwidth', 'binary code', 'bit', 'boot', 'browser', 'bug', 'type', 'CD-ROM', and 'clip', each with a brief definition.

www.infoplease.com

If you've ever wondered what terms like ASCII, megahertz and URL mean, the computer glossary at www.infoplease.com will provide you with detailed definitions of those terms and more.

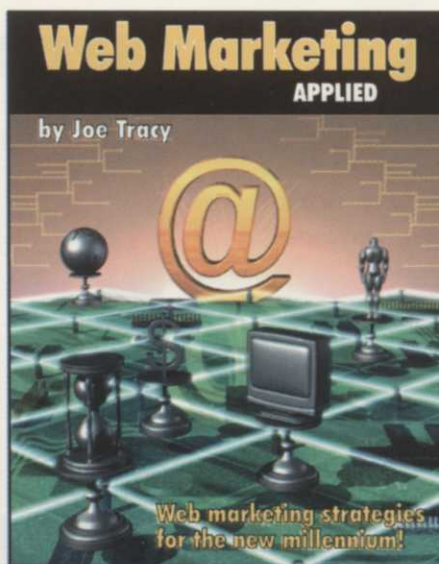
User ID — Unique identifier selected by a person opening an account on an e-commerce site.

Weight threshold/Price threshold — Method of charging for shipping. Merchant defines various price ranges and assigns a dollar amount for shipping charges to each range. ■

Ad Index

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e-Greenbiz	www.e-greenbiz.com info@e-greenbiz.com	877-485-7100	9e	166
Griffin LLC	www.griffinllc.com	800-237-1854	11e	162
Perma-Green	www.ride-onspreader.com	800-346-2001	14e	165
BidMgr.com	www.bidmgr.com	678-624-0877	19e	163
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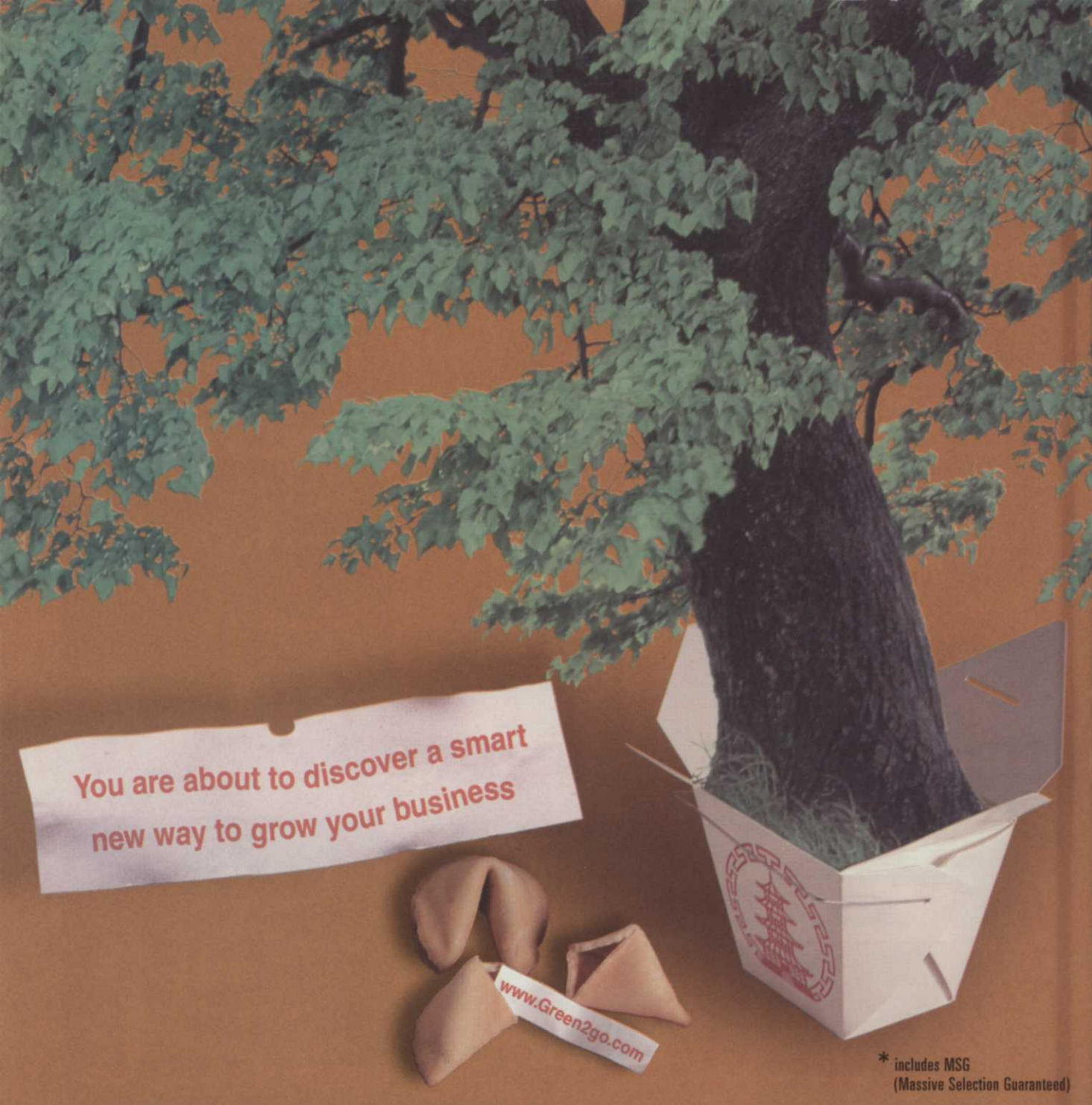
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The Hispanic

Our industry's appetite for landscape laborers from south of the border just keeps growing and growing

BY RON HALL / SENIOR EDITOR

The green mountains of central Mexico, once the source of most of the world's silver, are giving up yet another precious commodity — workers.

U.S. industry is tapping rural Mexico for able-bodied laborers with the same desperate eagerness that the Spaniards of the 17th century sought precious metals. This time the Mexicans, many of whom are grossly under-employed, eagerly oblige.

In fact, they're so willing to work that they often go to incredible lengths — and often at great danger to themselves — to do so. As many as 50,000 migrants sneak across the border illegally each month, say authorities.

Most are seeking employment. Many intend to stay in the United States.

A smaller number of alien workers enter the payrolls of U.S. firms through sanctioned programs. The most popular with landscapers is H-2B, an alien worker program that allows seasonal employment of unskilled workers when domestic labor is unavailable.

Labor-starved landscapers snatch up both sources of labor. But the firms

that want to make sure their foreign-born workers will be around the entire season are increasingly using H-2B.

H-2B, born during an overhaul of U.S. immigration laws in 1986, has a quota of 66,000 workers annually. About 93% of H-2B certified workers come from Mexico, says C. Scott Evans, operator of the labor solutions firm SILC-H2B, Bay City, TX.

The rules for U.S. businesses wanting to participate in the program are relatively simple, but most landscapers discover that completing its many requirements are tedious and that rounding up the workers can be daunting, particularly the first year they need H-2B workers.

The program, in addition to giving landscapers a source of labor, has spawned a handful of "labor solutions" entrepreneurs.

For a price, these labor specialists will find

the alien workers and wade through the documentation that qualifies them for U.S. employment.

The price of labor

How much does it cost to obtain H-2B certified workers? The price varies depending on which of the several labor contractors you deal with. Generally, the more workers you need, the lower the price of each one. But at least one labor contractor charges a flat fee no matter how many.

If your landscape firm requires 100 or more workers, you may pay as little as \$325 annually per worker, says Robert Wingfield,



RANDY LYHUS

Partnership

who's been finding Mexican labor for landscapers for more than a decade at Amigos Labor Solutions, Dallas. But if you only need a few laborers, you could pay as much as \$650 per employee, he says.

But Scott Evans, SILC-H2B, says: "I've never quite figured out how to charge per worker." He charges a flat fee no matter how many workers a company needs. He says the amount of legwork needed to gain H-2B certification for 10 workers is essentially the same as it is for 1,000.

Even so, somebody still has to recruit and make sure the workers have the necessary paperwork in Latin America.

The take home message: Check out the qualifications of the labor contracting firm. Ask for the names of clients.

Putting a price tag on human labor seems like a cold-blooded way to calculate the worth of fellow humans. But don't forget that H-2B workers base their actions on dollar signs, too.

Labor in Mexico is abundant and cheap. The average salary for an auto worker at a Mexican assembly plant is \$.90 an hour compared to U.S. workers, who makes over \$20 an hour for essentially the same

work. And when H-2B workers arrive in the U.S., they expect to work at least 50 hours a week at fair laborers' wages. Most send a portion of their earnings back to Mexico to support families, and many return to their homes in November or December with \$4,000 or \$5,000 in their pockets.

Most companies that already have H-2B workers have little difficulty keeping them (at

least the ones they want) or adding to their numbers. That is, if they treat them fairly and with proper respect.

There's the story of the landscaper in southeastern Michigan who grew complacent with his Mexican construction crew and was lax about getting everyone back. After struggling through the first two months of the following season with labor he had managed (with great difficulty) to recruit locally, the business owner literally

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Robert Wingfield

Seasonal labor users join forces

U.S. companies using the H-2B seasonal alien worker program are banding together. About 180 individuals and companies have already joined the fledgling National H2B Users Association (NHUA), reports C. Scott Evans, Bay City, TX, who is heading the group.

Individuals and companies that are dependent on the continued availability of seasonal labor from outside U.S. borders make up the majority of NHUA's membership. These include landscape, construction and hospitality firms, among others. The group also includes companies that recruit and place H-2B workers, says Evans, president of one such firm, SILC-H2B.

Evans says that he will be at the Green Industry Expo, Indianapolis, IN, Nov. 5-7, to promote the NHUA.

Labor specialists

Mid-Atlantic Resources Association

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214/634-0500
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GTO International L.L.C.

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SILC-H2B

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www.silc-h2b.com

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greeted the return of his seasonal foreign employees with hugs. Not only that, but he began treating them with newfound respect.

"The best recruiting opportunities come when a company can recruit within itself or within its community," says Evans. "You'll get good workers by asking your existing foreign workers if they have rela-

tives or friends who would like to work for your company.

"This solves a lot of problems. The new worker will already have a friend when he arrives, he will likely have a place to live and he will have a ride to and from work."

Get a move on it

You may or may not be in a similar situa-

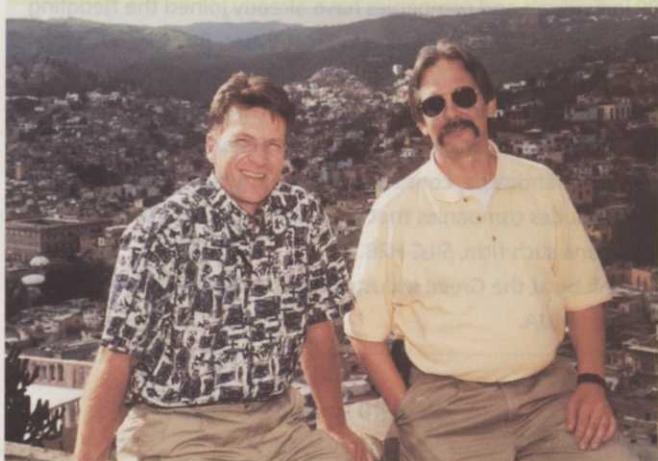
tion, but if you're considering employing legal Hispanic labor in your landscape operation for next season, begin the process now. It's going to take you about 120 days to meet the requirements.

To qualify for seasonal workers through H-2B, you must convince authorities that you can't find a sufficient number of local or domestic workers. This isn't a difficult

More value from trained workers

Several years ago, Jeff West, who runs the labor recruiting company GTO International LLC, Rochester, MI, traveled to Mexico. His goal was to establish a week-long program to train Mexican workers for seasonal employment in the U.S. Green Industry.

He felt, and continues to feel, that a trained worker — any trained worker — is more valuable to the U.S. Green Industry than an untrained worker.



Jeff West, left, and Douglas "Buck" Buchanan operate GTO International out of offices in Rochester, MI, and Guanajuato, Mexico.

West's goal was to train Mexicans how to operate mowers and other landscape maintenance and construction equipment. But he also thought they should be advised on more practical matters, such as simple English language instruction.

"We wanted to give the people in the program an idea of what to expect when they arrived on the job in the United States," says West. "We wanted to let them know that the

streets aren't paved with gold and the work will be hard. We wanted to get them off to a good start because we knew that the first year on the job is the hardest."

At the time, West was director of golf at a championship caliber golf course in southeastern Michigan that needed seasonal workers.

Also, he was just beginning his own company to access and deliver Mexican workers to U.S. companies who needed seasonal help.

Mexican officials liked West's idea. They whisked him to 10 different locations within the country in as many days, seeking a suitable site for the training program.

West selected Guanajuato, a quaint jewel of a colonial city with about 100,000 residents. It's set in a narrow mountain valley in central Mexico, easily accessible because of good roads in all directions and an international airport at nearby Leon, a city of about 1 million people.

That first program turned out to be both a success and a failure, says West.

"We lost money," he explains. "Obviously, we couldn't charge the workers money to participate, and when we asked landscapers if they would pay more for a trained worker, they said no."

On the plus side, almost all of the 20 workers who completed the program turned out to be excellent employees, returning to work for the same employer each spring. In fact, several now speak English and perform skilled tasks.

West continues to travel to Mexico to re-establish a training program for Mexicans seeking seasonal employment in the U.S. landscape industry.

He also remains convinced that, in the long run, U.S. firms will see the value in hiring better-trained workers.

"The best recruiting opportunities come when a company can recruit within itself or within its community." — C. Scott Evans, SILC-H2B

task. In most parts of the country, there is a shortage of local applicants to work for the wages you pay laborers. Even so, most landscapers seem more inclined to pay labor contractors (see our list) to recruit foreign workers than wade through the paperwork themselves.

Wingfield, of Amigos, says that every year, U.S. businesses get closer to filling the H-2B quota of 66,000 workers, so companies planning to use H-2B should get a move on it.

"The landscape industry isn't the only industry that needs and wants these workers," says Wingfield. "Anybody who has a seasonal need can get them."

Well, almost anybody. Landscape com-

panies in the states of Arizona and California have difficulty convincing authorities that their labor needs are seasonal.

In other states (or particular regions within a state), a complicated set of federal regulations has set the wages for laborers so high that contractors can't afford to meet them. The H-2B program mandates that alien seasonal workers be paid the prevailing wage for labor in the area the company operates in. In Long Island, NY, for instance, this wage approaches \$13 an hour, too high a figure for most contractors there.

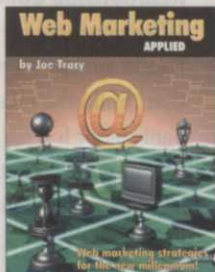
"I think the U.S. Department of Labor

and the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) are trying to tweak these programs," says Wingfield. "I don't think they expected the response from all of the industries."

For example, authorities in some states are demanding to see some landscape company payroll records to make sure their Hispanic workers are truly seasonal.

Even so, H-2B remains the most popular and surest route to gaining landscape labor. That's not likely to change in the short term, insists Wingfield.

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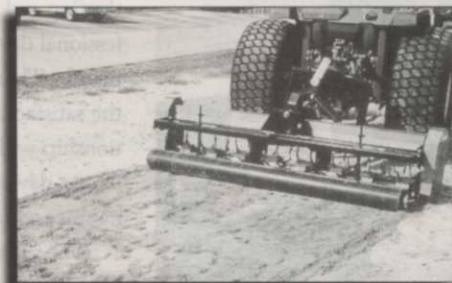
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How to build the Hispanic relationship

Doing a few little things for your Hispanic workers will keep them happy...and coming back

BY GEORGE WITTERSCHEIN



Jacobsen Landscape Design & Construction draws much of its Hispanic workforce from communities surrounding its Midland Park, NJ, headquarters.

A number of forward-looking companies are building on the fact that Hispanics come from another culture and have different motivations. The business rewards are many: less turnover, more motivation and productivity, and upward professional development of talented Hispanic people. There's also the human reward like the satisfaction of being in a personal relationship with your workforce, plus the day-to-day satisfaction of working with a happier group of employees.

One such company is Jacobsen Landscape Design & Construction in Midland Park, NJ. The 22-year old firm employs 50 to 60 employees in peak season. About 80% of their field workforce comes from nearby Hispanic communities — the people are either citizens, green-carded or temporary.

"If I didn't have these guys, I wouldn't be in business," says president Glenn Jacobsen. "There is no local Anglo labor force here. I realized that pretty early on, and I established a relationship with some Mexicans. That was the beginning.

"I help people," Jacobsen continues. "That's my philosophy. If they're going to work for me and be committed, we'll help

them as much as we can. Like anyone else, they appreciate that kind of treatment. And if they can help me, it's a two-way win."

Apparently, that's just what has happened. The early core group of Mexican workers has, in turn, greatly assisted his business. Many of them are still with the firm — in any given year, nearly all of his Hispanic labor force comes back after the winter lay-off — and they've brought their relatives and friends to apply for positions as well.

Relationship builders

What accounts for their loyalty? Jacobsen Landscape does a number of specific things that "build the relationship" with the Hispanic labor force.

Fairness. "Whether you're Hispanic or any other nationality, the key is treating people fairly to get their respect," Jacobsen says. "If you're fair to people, they're fair to you. And if you take advantage of people, they're going to take advantage of you. Fairness doesn't apply just to your Hispanic workers — it's a whole philosophy of business. I deal with my clients and my other employees that way."

Respect their family orientation. "This is something you do on a personal level every day — asking about their families and so on. The family unit is very important in Hispanic cultures. I learned that early on with the Mexicans, but I also know that it holds true with most of the South Ameri-

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can countries. I have a lot of respect for that," he adds. "In turn, they helped me with hiring because they felt that this was a good place for their friends and relatives to work. Some were not treated fairly working elsewhere in the industry, and being treated well here impressed them."

Recognize the nationality. "We've found that it makes sense to keep people from the same country within a crew," Jacobsen notes. "They do have different cultures and different ways of doing things, so if you keep them together, they seem to develop better rapport."

Career and personal enrichment. "I have quite a few foremen who have come from this group — it's something that happens naturally. If they're here long enough, and if I see that they have skills and the desire to stay, I encourage them to move up. A lot are bilingual," he adds. "We're hooked in with a private language company that teaches them English, so I'm subsidizing their development." It's another example of the company's "Benefit them, benefits us" philosophy. The four-month language program includes a code of conduct covering attendance, completion of homework and passing grades. Students who keep to the code receive a bonus.

Sessions with a consultant. "The idea to help with their immigration paperwork was something that Angelo Miño pointed out to us," Jacobsen reports. "Angelo is a consultant who helps Green Industry companies with their Hispanic work forces. I met him at a trade show and we hit it off immediately because we think along pretty similar lines about the value of helping people. We brought him in to communicate with our people last December, and we're going to have him back at least once or twice this year." (See sidebar.)

Personal assistance. Jacobsen helps its immigrant laborers with the kinds of bureaucracy they often find daunting: immigration paperwork, drivers' licenses, car loans, mortgages and others. Office Manager Donna DeLuccia draws a lot of that responsibility.

Cultural exchange. The company has now sponsored two annual exchanges of culture based around Thanksgiving Day. "It wasn't my idea — it came from one of the guys," admits Jacobsen. "I wanted to have a celebration at Thanksgiving, instead of at Christmas, because by then many people are back home already. But one of my Hispanic people said, 'Can we add a Mexican feast?' I agreed. They prepared the Mexican feast, and I reimbursed them and gave them time off to do it. We did an American Thanksgiving (meaning turkey and mashed potatoes), and they prepared a Mexican feast based on roasted sheep and rice. The whole production force was there. It was a pretty successful event — the people really do like that form of acknowledgement."

Holidays. "We are aware of Mexican and other holidays, and we observe them," Jacobsen explains. "That's showing respect for their heritage. We don't give days off — it's really just a matter of posting it on the bulletin board. They want the acknowledgement and want to see that you understand when their important times are. Our American holidays don't mean too much to them, other than a day off. When we offer recognition of their own holidays, it goes a long way."

How Jacobsen wins

Has the company's philosophy solved its hiring problems in a painfully tight labor market? Yes, but not entirely. Jacobsen still has labor and hiring issues. "I don't know if I will ever get to the point where I

Latin American holidays
 observed at Jacobsen Landscape:
 Mexican Independence, September 15
 Ecuadorian Independence, August 10
 Peruvian Independence Day, January 18
 (Mexico) la Virgen de Guadalupe, December 12
 (Ecuador) Batalla de Pichincha, May 24

won't," he says. Most of his pain comes from success — because the company is growing so rapidly.

"We had over 20% growth last year. With that, you need to have a good supply of people. We're at a pretty strong hiring level, and every year we seem to get better. But the company's growing so rapidly, it's tough to have the people ready for the positions. If we weren't good with our people, we'd never be able to support that kind of growth. For example, 95% of the people we laid off for the winter last year came back in the spring. I think that's a pretty good ratio, and a good indicator that things are working. We're proud of it."

What about other sources of labor?
 The company may eventually have to turn to the Federal H2B program for more workers, despite the well-known hassle factor. And Jacobsen has recently developed a rapport with the local Ecuadorian community in New Jersey — again, the fruit of the fairness policy.

They had an Ecuadorian group come in last year for the first time. "I asked them to bring more guys in this year, and they have," says the company president. "Once you're fair, they usually bring in friends and relatives!"

— The author is a contributing editor based in Mendham, NJ.