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Circle No. 116

5 steps to a business plan

1. Allow for a minimum of three consecutive days of intense discussions.
2. Involve everybody who has direct responsibility and accountability for the business's performance.
3. Prepare well. Appoint the appropriate persons to ensure that all of the information required in your business plan, including past company performance, is available prior to the start of the meeting.
4. Evaluate alternatives, discuss new ideas, and get consensus or, more importantly, "buy-in" from everybody.
5. Stress the process's importance. Participants need to be focused, so, except for emergencies, there should be no interruptions, including phone calls.

continued from page 30

mitment by its owner, which may increase a company's employee retention rate and its ability to attract strong leaders.

Here's how you do it

How do you build a business plan?

Select a date and time to talk about it. Allow for a minimum of three consecutive days of intense discussions. Choose a period near the end of your fiscal year when there's not as much going on at your business.

Involve everybody who has direct responsibility and accountability for the business's performance, especially the president/owner whose participation is essential

to showing commitment to the business and the process. It will also allow for final decisions to be made.

Evaluate alternatives, discuss new ideas, and get consensus or, more importantly, "buy-in" from everybody. Because past performance is a key component to the discussion, prepare well. What a waste to have four or five managers sitting in a room watching somebody spend 10 minutes calculating last year's closing rate on quotes; this will de-energize and frustrate the participants. Highlight the information required in your business plan and appoint the appropriate persons to ensure that all of the information is available prior to the start of the meeting.

Stress the process's importance. Participants need to be focused, so, except for emergencies, there should be no interruptions, including phone calls.

A plan to drive your company

One mistake many companies make is to assume their budget is their business plan.

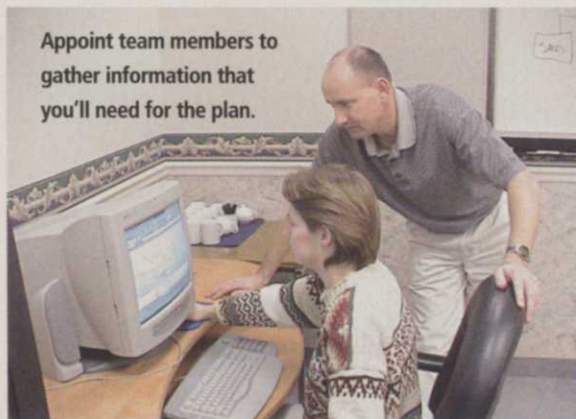
They tend to go through the process to generate numbers, which puts more emphasis on generating numbers as opposed to encouraging discussion, generating ideas and understanding their business. A business plan isn't a budget, but use the business plan to generate a budget to create a solid foundation for your business's financial performance.

Take this example: Some companies project their current year revenue by applying the percent increase of last year's revenue. If a company generated sales of \$500,000, a 15% increase over the previous year, it would assume it would maintain its growth rate and generate sales of \$575,000 the next year. This methodology will do nothing for your business. In fact, it could harm your company. The reason is that objectives in this example are generated from projections based on accounting, not ideas. It's difficult to get employees to buy in to this approach, and the result may be lower moral.

Get a consensus or, more importantly, a buy-in from everybody.

A better way to go about creating a business plan is to use a systematic method, which my company, Weed Man, calls zero base planning. In this example, I'm assuming that your company has already established its target market. Once you identify your target, look at how you generate customers. Examples are renewing existing customers, soliciting old customers and old leads, generating new leads from a direct mail campaign or a telemarketing campaign, and others. Then, look at each category individually and understand how you can affect performance.

Appoint team members to gather information that you'll need for the plan.





Evaluate alternatives and discuss new ideas.

Scrutinize your data

When Weed Man chooses to tap in to its old customer file to generate customers, we look at three indicators: the number of files, contact rate percentage and closing rate percentage. You need to have systems in place to provide historical data of your

year's contact rate 10% lower than the previous year's?" The answer could lead to a plan to increase the old customer file's integrity or to review the sales staff's performance.

After reviewing each indicator and making sure you have a solid execution

company's performance in relation to those indicators.

In your formal business plan, you should keep four years of data. That data will allow you to answer questions like, "Why is last

plan, you can calculate the number of customers that will be generated from tapping old customer files. A company with 2,000 old clients, an 80% contact rate and a 10% closing rate will generate 160 customers.

You also need to discuss your pricing for both basic programs and add-on services. Make sure you understand market pressures and your position within that market in relation to your target market. Once you've established pricing, you can calculate income from sales for each category. This process needs to be applied to every cost category. **LJM**

— The author is chief executive officer of Turf Holdings Inc./Weed Man. He can be reached at 416/269-5754.



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Franchising's revival

Landscape service entrepreneurs find a growing number of franchisers eager to show them how to become a player

BY JAMES E. GUYETTE

In 1962, each U.S. resident ate four lbs. of french fries annually. Today, each of us, on average, eats 33 lbs. of french fries. This is one impact of McFranchising on our McWorld. Several Green Industry companies want to make a similar impact by franchising lawn care/maintenance services.


Franchising's impact on our economy is incredible. The U.S. Small Business Administration says 38% of all 2000 retail sales in the U.S. were generated by franchises — and the numbers keep rising. Some Green

Industry experts suggest that, by 2010, franchising will account for almost half of the lawn care marketplace. That might be a stretch considering there are only less than 10 major franchise firms serving the professional landscape and lawn care management industry today.

Nobody, however, disputes that franchising within the industry will grow.

"Franchising is going to be an important element in the Green Industry as it moves forward," says Jim Miller, director of franchising for Scotts LawnService, Marysville, OH.

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The franchise advantage

Franchising provides a new proprietor or prospective entrepreneur with a bank-friendly business plan, training, proven marketing and horticultural strategies, and a network of professional and personal support. Franchising allows a person to own a growth-oriented business without making mistakes common to most startups. It offers brand-name recognition, a marketplace niche and big-company backing while allowing the franchisee to retain a sense of independence.

Not for everyone

Of course, not everyone can or should become a franchisee. People that like to run their own show or don't like the idea of paying someone a percentage of their revenues for support they don't think they need probably shouldn't hook up with a franchiser.



Phil Catron touts the "natural" program.

"You're not reinventing the wheel," says Janet Keen, co-owner with husband, Bill, of a NaturaLawn lawn care franchise in Providence, RI. "You know what trucks and equipment you need, and they give you a formula that has been successful."

Adds NaturaLawn president Phil Catron, "If an enterprise is well backed, the owner can direct his or her focus toward entrepreneurial pursuits within a given marketplace or an exclusive protected territory.

"We're not selling jobs; we're selling a business concept. The owner isn't working the business; he or she is growing the business," he says.

Each franchiser's emphasis is directed at a specific niche of the landscape services market, yet all say their goal is to build owners/managers, not owners/production workers. While some encourage mom-and-pop operations, others seek to attract more ambitious individuals.



Franchisers help with equipment needs.

"Our franchisees aren't pushing a spreader," says Kenneth L. Hutcheson, general manager and vice president of U.S. Lawns, Orlando, FL. "They're building sustainable businesses." In the U.S. Lawns model, franchisees build operations that produce revenues from \$750,000 to \$1.25 million annually, he says.

Franchise-friendly times

A tight economy and layoffs among individuals with management skills and some savings usually spark a surge in franchising interest, a fact that hasn't gone unnoticed in the Green Industry.

"The times that we had this past year are

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COMPANY	HEADQUARTERS	SERVICES	FRANCHISEES	START-UP COSTS (EST.)	CONTACT
DryJect	Wayside, NJ	injection/aeration	5	\$30,000 to \$60,000	800/270-8873 www.dryject.com
Lawn Doctor Inc.	Holmdel, NJ	lawn care	400	\$20,000 to \$50,000	800/631-5660 www.lawndoctor.com
NaturaLawn of America	Frederick, MD	lawn care	55	minimum net worth of \$250,000, of which \$50,000 is liquid	301/694-5440 www.nl-amer.com
Nutri-Lawn Inc.	Toronto, Ontario	lawn care	4 (in the U.S.)	\$50,000 to \$100,000	416/620-7100 www.nutri-lawn.com
Scotts LawnService	Marysville, OH	lawn care	45	\$75,000 to \$300,000	937/578-5615 www.scottssco.com
Spring-Green	Plainfield, IL	lawn care	72	\$30,000 to \$80,000	800/435-4051 www.spring-green.com
TruGreen-ChemLawn	Memphis, TN	lawn care	67	\$100,000 to \$125,000	901/681-2008 www.trugreenchemlawn.com
U.S. Lawns	Orlando, FL	commercial landscape care	100	Under \$50,000	800/875-2967 www.uslawns.com
Weed Man	Scarborough, Ontario	lawn care	41 (in the U.S.)	\$45,000 to \$70,000	888/321-9333 www.weed-man.com

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**Mike Graham, Vice President
Landscape Concepts, Inc.
Grayslake, Illinois**



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"Trimec Plus gives us excellent and economical control of emerged crabgrass and foxtails in turf," says Mike (left).

"They show up mainly as problems inherited with newly acquired properties." Most often there are other weeds, too – dandelions, clovers, spurge or maybe nutsedge, he adds.

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Scotts LawnCare is penetrating large markets.

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what we call franchise friendly," adds Hutcherson. "We've opened 24 new offices since June of last year ('01)." By mid spring '02 we had 100 franchises in 24 states.

Spring-Green continues to expand, now supporting 100 franchises in 19 states.

"Spring Green's startup costs and income potential fit my plan," says Roger Grose, Marietta, OH, who purchased a franchise after serving in the U.S. Army and holding positions as an air-traffic controller, a sales manager and a purchasing agent.

"I like having control of my future, my income and the hours that I work," says Grose. He says the franchiser provides the support but he supplies the "hard work and aspirations."

The Scotts Company, Marysville, OH, has become one of the more active lawn care franchisers. The number of Scotts LawnService franchises jumped from 25 in March '01 to 45 by mid-March this year. Sixteen were in some of the nation's biggest lawn care markets. The company plans to offer franchises in 200 additional markets within the next five to 10 years.

"Brand recognition is something consumers are looking at," says Scotts' Jim Miller. "The response we get in any market is incredible. We really didn't become aggressive about it until last year."

Branding's the game

All of the major franchisers count on branding and customer recognition to carry

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Circle 120

their message from one market area to another and across geographic boundaries. This is important when dealing with customers with multiple locations. Distinctive uniforms, signage, promotions and marketing literature separate the franchisers, sometimes more than the programs their franchisees offer to customers.

"We're expanding our reach pretty rapidly," says Scott Frith, marketing director of Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, NJ. "We've seen a lot of development in the south and southwest and we want to continue that."

"We have programs tailored to any particular region."

— **Scott Frith,**
Lawn Doctor

Lawn Doctor, like most of the other franchisers, provides ongoing training — both business management and agronomic — to its franchisees. "We have agronomic programs tailored to any particular region," he says. Also, the company hosts an annual meeting and trade show for more than 600 of its people that features Lawn Doctor's approved vendors and custom turf care equipment.

Toronto-based Weed Man has 41 locations in the United States and 131 in Canada. An aging population of homeowners and busier "do-it-for-me" lifestyles bode well for the next 20 years, believes Jennifer Lemcke, director of franchise development. She believes the industry is strong enough to absorb a healthy influx of franchised operations. "There has been a lot of acquisitions in recent years, so there's room enough for all of us," she says.

Choose a good match

Just as all fast food franchises have their own particular menus, so it is within the Green Industry. Pick a franchise that



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Circle 121

matches your personal goals and philosophies, including your horticultural leanings.

For example, Nutri-Lawn, owned by Toronto-based FirstService Corp., seeks

franchisees that like its "natural" approach. That firm recently incorporated a "natural" herbicide into its program produced by Greener Pastures Corp., Minneapolis, MN,

from sugar beet waste and soybean oil (see August '01 LM, page 25).

These services, marketed as more eco-friendly than traditional lawn care, attract customers who would otherwise avoid professional lawn care, say franchise promoters. "There's a whole segment out there that did not buy lawn care because they don't like pesticides," claims Nutri-Lawn president Larry Maydonik.

"We're working with the passion of the owner/operator."

— Ken Hutcheson,
U.S. Lawns

While companies like Nutri-Lawn discourage people seeking a franchise for a retirement occupation or as a mom-and-pop operation, others encourage small-time operators in markets. All franchise operations said they prefer franchisees with an entrepreneurial spirit and some business knowledge because they believe it's easier to teach them agronomic or horticultural skills.

Weed Man is asking for both in its franchisees since it's adding many of its lawn care operations to existing landscape companies, enticing maintenance operations to add lawn and ornamental application services for a full-service sell to their clients. Irrigation and structural pest control companies are



Des Rice's Weed Man sprouts in the U.S.

warming to the concept, too, says Lemcke of Weed Man. "There's quite a bit of cross marketing a company like this can do," she says.



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