




**Eight straight months of hand-weeding  
around the clock can take its toll on  
the average Worker.**

Granular GRASS AND BROADLEAF PREEMERGENT Herbicide

It won't do your bottom line any good, either. Research shows that hand-weeding can knock your profits for a loop in no time. Maybe that's why so many nursery operators and landscapers are choosing the superior control of Snapshot\* specialty herbicide. Snapshot can be used over-the-top of more than 413 field-grown and 235 container-grown ornamentals, for control of 111 broadleaf weeds and annual grasses – for up to eight months. That's more than any other preemergence product on the market. Plus, it's gentle on ornamentals. This year, knock out weeds and grasses – instead of your workers – with the proven performance of Snapshot.

**Day and Night. Month after Month.**

 Dow AgroSciences

**Snapshot<sup>®</sup>**

Specialty Herbicide

\*Trademark of Dow AgroSciences LLC  
Always read and follow label directions.  
www.dowagro.com/turf 1-800-255-3726

continued from page 20  
ties. For instance:

- ▶ The leading commercial landscape contractor
- ▶ The leading residential landscape contractor
- ▶ The leading locally owned lawn care provider
- ▶ The leading multi-family or homeowner association maintenance contractor
- ▶ The leading outdoor lighting contractor
- ▶ The leading irrigation contractor

**Key #7.** Define your leadership niche and build your credentials around it. Use the power of your credibility to increase sales and strengthen your claims regarding product benefits.

**Where quality fits in**

I'm a big proponent of high quality. And I truly hate shabby products and poor service. But when it comes to building your brand, quality alone won't do it. What's needed is the perception of quality. In a ranking of 16 small

cars, the top-quality car was 12th in sales and the second-highest quality ranking came in 9th in sales. There may be objective ways to test the true relative value of two landscape or lawn care firms, but customers don't conduct these tests when making a decision. They go with their perceptions.

Three things create the perception of quality that leads to increased sales:

- ▶ Positioning your company as a specialist organization rather than a do-anything outfit
- ▶ The power and memorability of your name
- ▶ Higher prices

Contracting your vision and your company's scope may fly in the face of what's actually taking place in the Green Industry, but it does help create the perception of being a specialist. And specialists charge more, right?

You should build as much quality into your product or service as you can afford, but don't count on quality alone to build your brand.

**Key #8.** Narrowing your

focus and charging higher prices strengthens and builds your brand.

**Why competition is good**

Many business owners dream of having a huge, unfair advantage in their market. Or, better yet, being the only game in town. But for building your brand, competition's good.

When customers have choices, demand tends to increase. Competition keeps customers from becoming suspicious of price or quality. If there's nothing to check you against, the customer has no yardstick for measuring the value of what you're offering. On the flip side, when there are too many players, customers tend to get confused and demand may drop. But in the Green Industry, this doesn't tend to happen because of the way estimates and proposals are given. Customers may call three contractors for prices, which gives them a manageable selection from which to choose.

If you've used all of the keys

we've provided and built your brand into a high-quality name, you'll tend to come out ahead of the competition anyway.

**Key #9.** Welcome competition. It drives up demand. And maintain and build your leadership position by not just talking up your company and products but promoting the whole category's value, whether it's landscaping, lawn care or maintenance.

**Key #10.** Get help, at least in laying out your blueprint for brand building. You may want to bring someone with publicity and media experience on staff, or hire a freelancer or professional marketing firm to manage part or all of the process. **LJM**

— The author started Focal Point Communications in Cincinnati, OH, in 1987 and opened a LA office in 2001. The Focal Point staff specializes in the creation of company identity, print marketing and public relations programs for Green Industry companies. Contact him at 800/525-6999 or [mshooner@growpro.com](mailto:mshooner@growpro.com).

**MTI** Check Out Our *NEW* WebStore  
You Can't Beat The **\$AVING\$** at **MTI**

**WWW.SPRINKLERS4LESS.COM**

**FREE**  
Shipping




**RAIN BIRD**

PROGRESSIVE ELECTRONICS INC.

**TORO**

IRRITROL SYSTEMS

**Hunter K**

RAIN

**WILKINS**

**800-600-TURF** (8873)  
Call NOW & **SAVE \$\$\$ All Year**  
M-F 7:30-5 Sat 8-1 Pacific Time

**Order by 1 p.m. SHIPS SAME DAY**

Circle 112



# A/W Independent Suspension Constant Tension Drive Select-A-Trac




## Introducing Ground Tamer™ Everything a utility vehicle was meant to be.


This next-generation technology combines performance and comfort features that make it stand head and shoulders above the competition.

**A/W Independent Suspension** – our coil-over-shock design, with its maximum spring and damping rates, gives you unparalleled vehicle handling and driver comfort over any terrain.

**Constant Tension Drive** – provides smooth transfer of power in every gear and optimum acceleration and maneuverability.

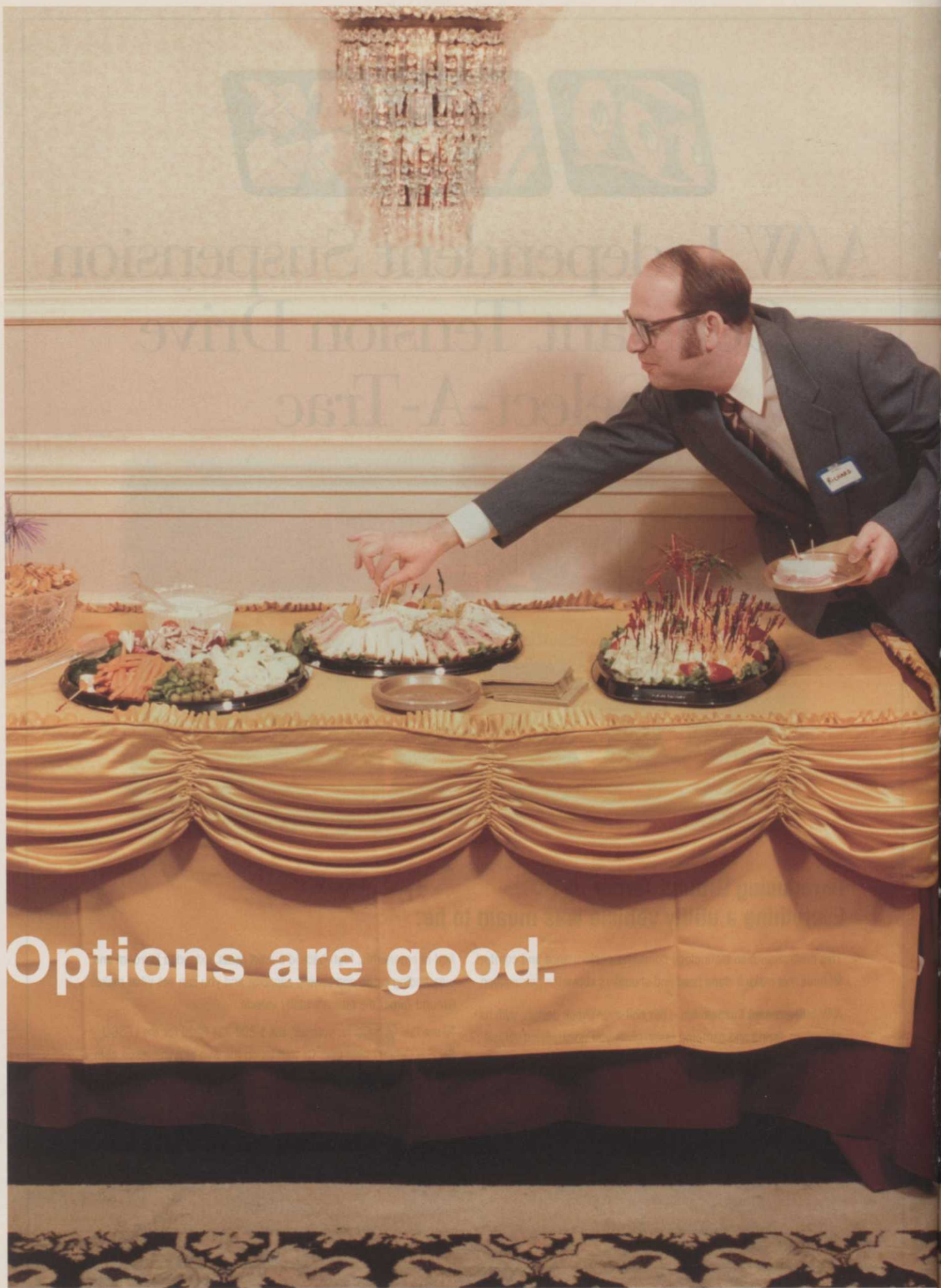
**Select-A-Trac** – go from 2WD to rugged 4WD without a second thought.  tackles off-road travel as easily as level pavement.

Add in ergonomic, high-backed bucket seats, extended legroom and outstanding cargo and towing capacity, and you can see what makes Ground Tamer the ultimate utility vehicle.

To see the  for yourself, call 1-800-321-5325 for the LESCO Service Center® near you. Or visit us on the web at [www.lesco.com](http://www.lesco.com).

# LESCO®

LESCO is a registered trademark, LESCO Service Center is a registered service mark and Ground Tamer and GT642 are trademarks of LESCO Technologies, LLC.



Options are good.



Bayer Environmental Science

**Now you've got Options™. Your custom plan for replacing Dursban® and Diazinon®.**

Have government restrictions left you feeling, well, restricted? Options from Bayer Environmental Science gives you the freedom of seven replacements—all proven in countless trials and in years of use—to deliver consistent results that alleviate the risk of callbacks. Let our experts customize an Options program for you. Because in the quest for lush, green turf, less is not more.

**Options**  
A program of replacing organophosphates

**DeltaGard**

Quick knockdown, broad-spectrum control and good residual—all at an economical price. That's what makes DeltaGard the world's most popular pyrethroid. Controls more than 50 turf and ornamental pests, including ants, chinch bugs, mole crickets and fire ants, at a low use rate.

**MERIT**

The #1 preventive/curative treatment for grubs delivers outstanding broad-spectrum control of turf and ornamental insects at extremely low use rates. Active ingredient provides strong residual activity and superior biological performance.

**DYLOX**

Gain quick control over white grubs, mole crickets, sod webworms, cutworms and more. Dylox penetrates up to 1/2-inch thatch to control grubs within 24 hours.

**Sevin**

Over 35 years strong, Sevin controls more than 130 pests, including billbugs, armyworms, cutworms, sod webworms, June beetles, chinch bugs and white grubs. Good knock-down and excellent residual control.

**TEMPO**

The perfect OP replacement—safe, convenient and economical. Tempo features a low-rate active ingredient that mixes easily with water and/or fertilizer and binds to soil molecules for up to four weeks of control—giving you the most broad-spectrum bang for your buck.

**chipco topchoice™**

Up to 52 weeks of fire ant control and prevention with just a single, low-dose broadcast application. With its outstanding granular formula, nothing streamlines traditional two-step programs like TopChoice.

**chipco firestar™**  
FIRE ANT BAIT

Easy-to-use fire ant control for hard-to-reach areas. Featuring the powerful active ingredient fipronil, FireStar delivers a unique, low-dose, granular bait to landscape beds, sign bases and trees to control fire ants for 12 to 16 weeks. Works great with TopChoice and can be used in areas adjacent to water.

Dursban is a registered trademark of Dow AgroSciences.  
Diazinon is a registered trademark of Syngenta.

©2003 Bayer AG  
95 Chestnut Ridge Road, Monroeville, NJ 07645  
201-307-9700  
www.BayerProCentral.com

DeltaGard, Dylox, Merit, Sevin, Tempo, Chipco TopChoice and Chipco FireStar are trademarks or registered trademarks of Bayer AG. Chipco TopChoice registration is pending in California and Virginia. Always read and follow label directions carefully.

**chipco**  
Professional Products

**E**ven if you've been a lawn care professional for a long time and have spent years streamlining procedures, it seems like you still have to frequently go out

do the same work twice no matter what. Weeds, of course, can be stubborn.

Unfortunately, repeat service calls are part of the business. But there are some simple things you can do to reduce callbacks, which will lessen your labor costs and enhance your bottom line.

#### Communication 101

Callbacks happen when a customer feels that a service provider hasn't done an adequate job. More often than not, the customer's unrealistic expectations due to a lack of knowledge are at the core of the problem.

"The principal cause of callbacks is the difference between perception and reality," says Tom Speirs, President of Agro-Lawn Systems, Inc., Vienna, VA. "You have to understand the process of weed development and weed control throughout the different seasons. The problem is, the customer doesn't understand. He has the perception, 'Hey, I'm paying for weed control...why do I still have weeds?'"

Ideally, both the service provider and the customer would make time to discuss the realities in advance. But it's not always that simple in the real world.

"The key is communication at the point of sale so that customers will start out with more realistic expectations. The better you can explain how the process works, the better your chances are of eliminating a lot of

# Reduce

**Strategies to help you streamline your lawn care operation and keep your customers smiling**

BY MICHAEL RILEY



callbacks," Speirs says. But other factors come into play. For example, during the busy spring months, even a properly trained sales staff is doing all they can to keep up with inquiries. The calls move along more quickly — the staff is overloaded, running down leads, giving estimates, and there's not enough time to offer customers enough education.

"On the other hand, people hear what they want to," Speirs points out. "They just want to know how much it's going to cost and whether you can take care of their problems. So, oftentimes, the reality is that you have to educate as you go."

#### Application efficiency

Although customers can sometimes misperceive the situation, they can also be correct. Mistakes happen. The best way to avoid them is to recruit the best people for the job.

"One of the root causes of callbacks is the individual making the application," says Todd Graus. "If we don't hire people who take pride in what they're

doing, the chance for misapplication increases."

Graus, President of Green Turf Landscapes, Worland, WY, stresses the importance of screening job applicants and offering ongoing training to ensure happy customers.

"When they first come in the door, we



Misapplications can happen if individual applicators don't take pride in their job.



# callbacks

prefer to hire people who are already certified by the state," Graus says. "We do regular training and provide financial incentives for them to improve their skills, with raises tied to education. If they want to make money, they'll come up to speed as fast as they can."

Understanding products and procedures, weather conditions, the status of the current plant pallet, and how to handle contingencies — if a mowing crew arrives right after an application has been put down, for example — are all part of the ongoing training for Graus's crews.

He also suggests setting up a system to monitor the amount of product use to better ensure proper application.

"One thing we do is compile production reports at the end of the day telling us whether we're over or under on the amount of herbicide we should have used," Graus says. "It gets us more in tune with what we're actually doing and sets up an environment of accountability. The more that we understand our operation, the less callbacks we have."

Along with keeping track of usage, applying the best products to get the job done is also a prime consideration. Kevin Johnson, President of All-American Turf Beauty, Van Meter, IA, recommends keeping up on new product development.

"Part of our strategy for reducing callbacks is using newer products or better

## Callbacks: main causes and remedies

- ▶ **Unrealistic customer expectations** — Often, a client doesn't understand what's involved in weed control. Communication is key. Explain the service you intend to provide and what to expect, including that you'll address each problem promptly as it appears.
- ▶ **Inadequately trained crews** — State certification is only the beginning; people require ongoing training to do their jobs well. Check their work often and point out areas where they may be falling into a pattern. It's human nature to develop habits, but you can help your crews stay alert with positive, regular reviews of their work.
- ▶ **Product selection** — Keep apprised of new chemicals, and be open to changing the products you use when something better comes on the market. A small investment in enhanced products could result in big labor savings from reduced callbacks.
- ▶ **Things you can't predict** — Weather changes, what the customer does when you aren't there (such as watering and mowing), and indigenous factors (earthworms, etc.) are just some of the things you can't control. Again, the key is customer education and prompt response when an uncontrollable factor comes into play.

*"Get right on it, and build the cost of callbacks into your pricing. Whether it's misapplication, weather, customer ignorance, or whatever, you're going to have to contend with callbacks."*

— Tom Speirs

products that may cost more initially but achieve better control," says Johnson.

"It's less costly to spend a little more up front for the better products if necessary than to cover the labor costs of having to go back.

"It's trying to solve the problem before you have it. Everybody's got their own standard products, but sometimes they may not give the best control on

some of the things that cause callbacks."

Even if you've streamlined your customer communication skills, trained your crews to peak efficiency, deployed top-of-the-line products, and closely monitored usage levels, you're still going to have callbacks. Why? Because you can't control Mother Nature.

"You can't do everything under ideal circumstances. You've got production de-

mands that have to be satisfied," says Spiers. "Say the forecast is for rain. But the reality is, half the time they're calling for rain, it doesn't. So you go out and do the job and, 20 minutes later, the skies open up and negate the herbicide application. The point is that we understand that there are some circumstances under which we might not be successful, and those would require some follow-up work."

Kevin Johnson agrees. He advises his customers that, in the event of rain, another treatment will be applied in a certain time frame — usually about two weeks. "Again, it's about keeping very good lines of communication open," Johnson says.

There's no single "best" method for handling callbacks. But one thing that all



Kevin Johnson



Tim Doppel

companies should have is a contingency plan to let the customer know right away that they'll be taken care of.

Handling customer complaints is a delicate business, especially because people tend to be irate when they call. Tim Doppel, President of Atwood LawnCare, Sterling Heights, MI, recommends an effective approach that remedies the problem quickly and eliminates the customer's irritation.

"A timely response is vital," says Doppel. "Our experience is that when a customer calls in a complaint, they're typically going to be very rude and angry on the phone — especially if they're a new cus-

tomers, because they assume that they're not going to get service unless they rant and rave. The important thing is to be very accommodating, listen and write down what they're saying."

If you do get a callback, the best thing you can do is put yourself in the customer's position. How would you want it handled if the roles were reversed?

"We try to perform our services in the same manner we'd like to receive them if we were the paying customers," says Johnson. "If I were the customer calling in a complaint, I'd want someone to follow up right away and follow through." **LM**

— The author is a Green Industry freelance writer in Sacramento, CA. His e-mail is

[mriley33@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mriley33@sbcglobal.net).

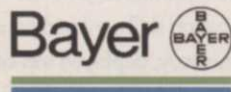
## Now you have access to the industry's best research —

# FREE

■ TurfGrass Trends' award-winning content is organized by category in a completely searchable article database

■ Get your hands on the latest scientific solutions for the green industry in a snap

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:



Precision cut. Legendary performance.



[www.TurfGrassTrends.com](http://www.TurfGrassTrends.com)

The screenshot shows the TurfGrass Trends website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with "TurfGrass Trends" and "Golfdom" logos. Below that, there's a search bar and a "Which Site" dropdown menu. The main content area features a featured article titled "Researcher Proposes Offers Alternative for the Future" with a sub-headline "Since 1980, the University of Georgia Griffin has conducted a year-round breeding program to genetically create a new machine for use in golf courses and, we hope, in all other turf environments. Promising analyses were sent to golf courses to determine performance in real-world situations." There are also sections for "NEED TO KNOW" and "PRACTICAL RESEARCH".





***Why do  
over 90%  
of landscape  
professionals  
reach for the  
penetrating power  
of Roundup PRO®?***

***They value its reputation  
built on trust and  
PROformance™  
technology.***

