

The misinformation age

BY RON HALL / Editor in Chief

We live and work in what's often described as the "Information Age."

It can as easily be labeled, the "Misinformation Age."

Maybe you feel like I do sometimes — that we're the targets of a perpetual rainstorm of messages, claims and counterclaims. Which do we process? Which do we believe? Regardless of what we do, where we go, we're pelted with news, sales pitches (some ingenious, some clumsy), spins (corporate and political), opinions, requests, solicitations and rants.

These days most of us don't rely exclusively on the local newspaper or the 6 p.m. television newscast for our daily information. More likely most of it comes from CNN, a podcast from the Internet, an Internet search engine, emails or a favorite radio commentator.

Not a bad thing

I hope I'm not coming across as a snarling curmudgeon because I welcome and am convinced this incredible flood of information is a good thing. After all, each of us gets to choose or reject the message. *We* can believe or not believe. *We* choose.

Even so, I have reservations. The technology that allows anyone to post practically anything online (Web sites, blogs, YouTube, etc.), and make it instantly available, also brings with it the need for caution and, more importantly, critical thinking.

There's a saying that "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own fact." That may be,

but today's consumers of landscape and lawn services, like us, are bombarded by all kinds of information, and the lines between opinion and fact are often blurred, sometimes intentionally.

Emotion vs. reason

An obvious example is the issue of the use of chemical products on our lawns and landscapes, which often generates more emotion and heated rhetoric than reason. And it will continue to do so and, probably, intensify thanks, in large part, to technology that gives voice to any organization or person who cares to have one.

But, although the pesticide issue is the easiest to identify, there is plenty of other misinformation in the Green Industry, including the most common — exaggerated product or service performance claims.

As consumers, we must remain critical thinkers and ask questions such as — "Who says?" "Where did they get their information?" "Are they a reliable source for this information?" "What are they not telling me?"

Beyond that — and this is the take-home message — we have to be the source of "information" for the consumers of *our* products and services. We must adequately answer all of the same questions for them.

Contact Ron at 216/706-3739 or
e-mail rhall@questex.com



We're the targets of a perpetual rainstorm of messages, claims and counterclaims

PRODUCTIVITY | UPTIME | LOW DAILY OPERATING COSTS

“Wah-hooo!!”





JOHN DEERE

Nothing Runs Like A Deere™

“I’m going to the big show! They were just about to install me here at the factory when the call came in from a charged-up dealer needing a part ASAP. Better to shut this factory line down than to have a customer machine down. So I got the nod. And I’m on a plane tonight. This time tomorrow I’ll be installed and on the job. Gotta run!”

What’s a Deere Dealer have that others don’t? Quick, cooperative parts sharing between 400 dealer locations. Nine regional parts depots for back-up. And an all-consuming determination to rapidly get you the part you need.

Got a parts emergency? We’re on it.™

www.JohnDeere.com/WereOnIt 1-800-503-3373



Haven't we all heard "that this place does not look as good as it used to" even when we know we have greatly improved the property.



Get off to a good start

BY BRUCE WILSON

I have always believed making a good first impression is the key to starting a long-term relationship on the right foot. And, without question, it leads to a more profitable relationship with your customers. When a customer gives you a contract for the first time, they have certain expectations that you have helped create, or they may have created based on your reputation in the market.

These expectations are usually high, so obviously, they watch you more closely at the start. Sometimes, the slightest, seemingly littlest glitch starts to erode their trust in your organization. They may not say anything at first, but the doubt starts to creep into their thinking.

Beginning the process

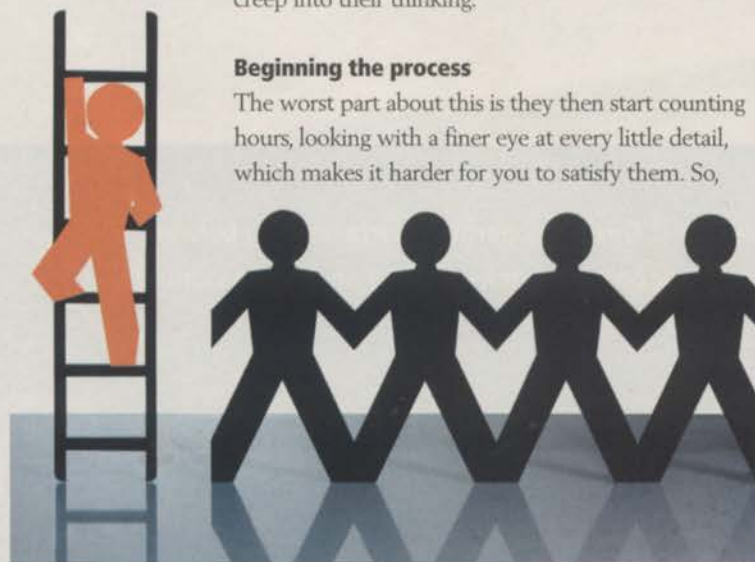
The worst part about this is they then start counting hours, looking with a finer eye at every little detail, which makes it harder for you to satisfy them. So,

here are some suggestions for assuring that you get your customer relationship off to a great start:

1. Take control of setting customer expectations. Communicate what they should expect to see during the first 30 days, preferably in writing, and then stick to it.
2. If possible, sell an extra clean-up to bring the property up to the level that is in the specifications for ongoing maintenance. If you can't, I suggest that you clean it up in the first 30 days anyway. Though the customer at first might agree to the longer timetable to avoid paying for the clean up, they soon forget they agreed to the extended time frame and begin to get dissatisfied. It then becomes your fault.
3. As a manager or sales person, be on the job the first few visits to make sure that job is being done the way that meets your expectations. Make sure the customer knows you are there and that you care.
4. It is a good idea to take pictures before you start to establish the baseline. Haven't we all heard "that this place does not look as good as it used to" even when we know we have greatly improved the property? Pictures can refresh everyone's memories.

It is spring and many of you start many new jobs, as well as, most of your old ones, at the same time. You must place additional emphasis on planning and communication during this very stressful period. If you can get off to a good start, you will be surprised how much easier and more profitable the rest of the season can be.

— The author is a partner with entrepreneur Tom Oyler in the Wilson-Oyler Group, which offers consulting services. Visit www.wilson-oyler.com.





Solutions that fit any ornamental pest problem.



When it comes to nasty ornamental pests and diseases, Bayer has the solution—products that will prevent or control every sorry insect or fungus that you may come across, quickly and effectively. Therefore, keeping your customer's landscape healthy and lush and your business healthy and in the black. And all our products are **Backed by Bayer™** and all the support and science that come with it. For more information ask your Bayer Field Sales Representative or visit us at BackedByBayer.com.

MERIT®

TEMPO®
INSECTICIDE

MERIT®

TREE INJECTION INSECTICIDE

allectus®

Armada®

COMPASS®

FORBID®



BACKED
by **BAYER.**

Coaching does work, but only if the "coachee" is into being coached.



When coaching fails

BY BILL HOOPES

I got a call from a friend of mine, a client. Try as he might, he "just couldn't make the coaching process work." He was seeing to it that his people got the instruction they needed to perform their tasks, and he personally followed up on the job to reinforce the right habits. Still, he was upset because the process only worked with some of his people some of the time.

The call led me to reflect on the recommendations I make and how dependable they really are. The fact is, coaching does work, but only if the "coachee" is into being coached.

When you put a loser on a winning team, it doesn't work. One of two things happens; the loser goes away, or the team is negatively impacted by his or her presence. You must get rid of negative people. And you should do that on *your* schedule. That means you must be proactive and have a process for dealing with those who are not meeting your expectations.

When coaching fails, take corrective action

Because, when most of your team enthusiastically turns right, some people just seem to turn left, every leader needs to understand and become proficient at using corrective action. I'm talking about what you do when coaching fails.

Here is the corrective-action process

► First, don't act without all the facts. It's very easy to assume you know what's up based on history, but

you can be wrong. Verify the facts, and don't rely on word of other employees.

► Once you have details, set up a private meeting.
► In the meeting, document all that you and the employee say and any commitments either of you make. If the situation results in a termination, it can become a legal matter. You need documentation.

Holding a corrective-action conversation

You need a private setting and plenty of time to talk.

1. Confirm that the employee understood and accepted the assignment in question. Be sure there were no roadblocks preventing expected results.
2. Explain the person's performance versus agreed to goals. Point out the failure to meet expectations and the negative impact on the team.
3. Important: Ask and allow the employee to explain why he/she failed to meet expectations.
4. Evaluate the employee's response to identify any legitimate causes of failure to perform and decide on necessary and immediate corrective action behavior you will require.
5. Require the employee to commit to the corrective-action performance plan.
6. Arrange a series of follow up dates/times when you will meet to confirm improvements.

Using this process doesn't guarantee you'll turn the person around, but it ensures that you will have done your best to correct an unacceptable situation.

The author is founder of Grass Roots Training in Delaware, OH. Contact him at hoopes@columbus.rr.com or visit www.grassroots-training.com.

better TURF™

Attracts Attention
(for your lawns *and* your business).



Our patented technology makes **Pendulum® AquaCap™** herbicide easy to handle, mix and clean up — with reduced staining potential and virtually no odor. But it's the proven control of the 21 most common unwanted grasses and 25 most troublesome broadleaf weeds that will get your customers' lawns (and your business) the attention they deserve.



Find out more: turffacts.com
Find a turf care supplier:
800-545-9525

**We Don't Make The Turf.
We Make It Better.™**

BASF

The Chemical Company

Circle 115

Always read and follow label directions.

Pendulum is a registered trademark and AquaCap, Better Turf and We Don't Make The Turf. We Make It Better. are trademarks of BASF.
© 2007 BASF Corporation. All rights reserved. APN 07-14-002-0024

In the Know

BUSINESS

NEWS YOU CAN USE

Senators take another crack at H-2B extension

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Senators Barbara A. Mikulski (D-MD) and John Warner (R-VA) have reintroduced their bill to provide a 5-year extension to a crucial provision from her Save Our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act that many in the Green Industry rely on to bring seasonal guest workers into the country. A last-minute extension was included as part of the 2007 Department of Defense authorization bill in the 109th Congress, but it expires on September 30, 2007.

"Without these seasonal workers, many businesses would not survive — forced to limit services, lay off permanent U.S. workers or, worse yet, close their doors," said Mikulski. "This extension protects workers, and gives us an-

other congressional session to keep up the fight until we make this cap exemption permanent."

Added Warner: "This legislation is absolutely essential to protecting our small businesses and maintaining their positive impact on our economy. I am hopeful that this legislation will help small and seasonal businesses find enough workers to keep their doors open."

The Save Our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act, signed into law by President Bush in May 2005, exempted returning seasonal workers from counting against the national cap of 66,000 people, created new anti-fraud provisions and ensured a fair allocation of H-2B visas among spring and summer employees.

However, the Department of Home-



"I have been fighting for years to help businesses and workers wade through the unfair procedures of the H-2B visa process. They can count on me to keep fighting," said Senator Mikulski.

land Security already announced that the cap has already been reached for the rest of this year. Without the Mikulski-Warner exemption, these businesses would have no way to bring in staff.

ServiceMaster agrees to \$4.5B buyout

DOWNERS GROVE, IL — Lawn care service and pest control provider ServiceMaster Co. bowed to shareholder pressure March 19, and agreed to be bought by an investment group lead by private equity firm Clayton, Dubilier & Rice Inc. in a cash deal valued at \$4.5 billion.

The owner of TruGreen Lawn Care, Terminix pest control and Merry Maids cleaning service, announced the deal nearly five months after the Downers Grove company announced it was exploring strategic alternatives.

Clayton Dubilier officials said there were no immediate plans to split up the company.

The buyout group will also assume about \$1.02 billion in debt, bringing the

total value of the sale up to \$5.5 billion. Under terms of the agreement, ServiceMaster stockholders will receive \$15.625 in cash for each outstanding share.

The deal represents a premium of roughly 31% above ServiceMaster's closing stock price of \$11.90 on Nov. 27, the last trading day before the company said it would explore strategic alternatives.

ServiceMaster's board has approved the acquisition. Its stockholders will vote on the transaction at a special meeting expected to be held in the second quarter. ServiceMaster agreed to pay a \$100 million termination fee if the deal collapses. Three class-action lawsuits were filed against ServiceMaster by stockholders opposed to the acquisition after the

deal was announced, alleging inadequate and unfair pricing of publicly owned shares of ServiceMaster stock.

"The board's support is based on the conviction that this transaction will deliver value to shareholders that is superior to what the company could achieve under its current business plan," J. Patrick Spainhour, ServiceMaster's chairman and chief executive, said in a statement.

Once the deal is complete, Clayton operating partner George W. Tamke will become ServiceMaster's chairman, replacing Spainhour, who will stay on as ServiceMaster's chief executive.

In 2006, ServiceMaster had 32,000 employees and a network of 5,500 company-owned and franchise locations.

100% ACCURATE.

EVERY WORKER. EVERY JOBSITE. EVERY COST CODE. EVERY DAY.

372:16
238:49

Total hours: Irrigation
Total hours: Placing Sod

38:53

Hours Bill Owen worked last week

611:05

Total hours to date:
Crestview

WEEKLY TIMECARD

NAME: Bill Owen DATES: 9-13

	START	LUNCH	END	JOB CODES	JOBSITE/PROJECT	HOURS
Mon.	7:00	1/2	3:30		Brentwood	8
Tues.			3:30			8
Wed.			4:00			8 1/2
Thurs.			4:00		Crestview	8 1/2
Fri.			4:00			8 1/2

SIGNATURE: Bill Owen TOTAL HOURS: 41 1/2

GUESSWORK

Employee Report

Owen, Bill Date Range: 4/9/2007 through 4/13/2007

Day	Date	Jobsite	Start	Stop	Cost Code	Hours	Total
Mon	4/9	Brentwood	7:08 AM	12:05 PM	Irrigation	4:57	
			12:41 PM	3:22 PM	Irrigation	2:41	7:38 hours
Tue	4/10	Brentwood	7:12 AM	12:07 PM	Irrigation	4:55	
			12:43 PM	3:23 PM	Irrigation	2:40	7:35 hours
Wed	4/11	Brentwood	7:12 AM	12:02 PM	Irrigation	4:50	
			12:46 PM	3:49 PM	Irrigation	3:03	7:53 hours
Thu	4/12	Crestview	7:17 AM	12:19 PM	Placing Sod	5:02	
			12:50 PM	3:46 PM	Placing Sod	2:56	7:58 hours
Fri	4/13	Crestview	7:13 AM	12:07 PM	Placing Sod	4:54	
			12:44 PM	3:39 PM	Placing Sod	2:55	7:49 hours

SIGNATURE: Bill Owen TOTAL 38:53 hours

100% ACCURATE

- > TRACKING service work?
- > DOZENS of cost codes?
- > Crews on the MOVE?

Ask About
PocketClock™

Find out why more than
350,000 workers clocked in today
with The JobClock System!

Circle 118

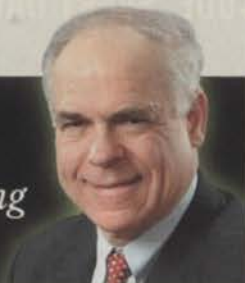
THE JOBLOCK® THE LANDSCAPER'S TIMECLOCK™

Call today: (888) 788-8463 • www.jobclock.com

EXAKTIME
INNOVATION AT WORK

In the Know

LEGALLY Speaking



BY KENNETH D. MORRIS, ESQ., L.L.C.

Q Should my employees sign a "code of conduct" prior to employment? What should be included in it, and how will it protect me?

A It does not matter what it is called, but it is a good idea to have employees sign at least a confidentiality agreement agreeing to keep company information proprietary both during and after employment. However, covenants not to compete with your company if they leave may be problematic to enforce. Being able to enforce them will depend on their length, their geographic scope, and the industries, or businesses, in which they are precluded from working. No court will enforce an overly restrictive non-compete covenant if it unreasonably prevents an employee from earning a livelihood forever. In the absence of a specific employment contract, the "code of conduct" should also contain a statement requiring an employee to acknowledge that the employment relationship is an employment "at will," is not for any definite period, and may be terminated at any time by the employer or the employee.

Kenneth D. Morris, a Philadelphia-based attorney with more than 30 years corporate and law firm experience, offers information on industry legal issues in each issue of LM. Contact him via www.kennmorrislaw.com.

Note: The above should not be interpreted as offering legal advice in any jurisdiction where such practice is not authorized. Engage competent counsel familiar with your jurisdiction when legal issues arise.



ValleyCrest managers build California park in one day

LOS ANGELES — ValleyCrest Landscape gathered more than 150 managers and executives from across the nation to participate in a corporate philanthropy project — building a new park in Sylmar, CA, in one day and offering much-needed green space to the children and families of this San Fernando Valley community.

Furthering the community of Sylmar's recent revitalization efforts, ValleyCrest donated cutting edge design talent, plants, material and labor to design and build the park.

ValleyCrest managers, who were unaware of the project until they arrived for their annual meeting, built the park in a day. It is estimated that their efforts saved the city and taxpayers more than \$500,000.

"As a business resident of the San Fernando Valley for the past six decades, we thought this was the perfect location to donate our time and resources and build the



The new park, designed by ValleyCrest Design Group, will offer local residents green space for recreation, including a playground, picnic area, soccer field, barbeques and more.

residents of Sylmar their new park," said ValleyCrest President Richard Sperber.

"It is inspiring to see what can be accomplished in one day. This is an incredible example of a company and its employees stepping up, reaching out and making a difference in the lives of local residents," said California State Senator Alex Padilla.