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give the client warning that a future phase of the landscape they want would not meet requirements."

Perhaps the biggest benefit of a master plan is that it shows prospective clients what is possible. On the design, they can see how everything is going to tie in with the various parts of a landscape. This not only addresses clients' true hopes for their landscape, it can also cement your company's long-term relationship with them.

"A master plan is an opportunity for the designer to be much more creative," Doesburg says. "It's an opportunity to stretch the client's thought pattern not necessarily their budget, but it can. It allows you to show clients how ideas relate. Instead of a pool, you might find out they really want an overhead structure and an outdoor kitchen. The master plan shows them how all their outdoor spaces and uses can function together."

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MASTERING MAINTENANCE

A master plan can be used to show the client what it is they really want in a landscape, but it can also help you show them what they don't want to maintain. A project, built in phases over a number of years, is a great repeating advertisement for your company. However, a big project that the client can't maintain becomes an eyesore and reflects poorly on your company.

"It helps to create a master plan for plantings," says Rick Doesburg, president of Thornton Landscape, Maineville, OH. "Even if the client has the money to do a big project at once, it's a good idea to break them in slowly."

The client may soon discover that what they initially wanted would be too much for them to maintain. Thornton offers horticultural services to its design-build clients, but makes sure the client knows what kind of maintenance commitment they're getting into from the outset.

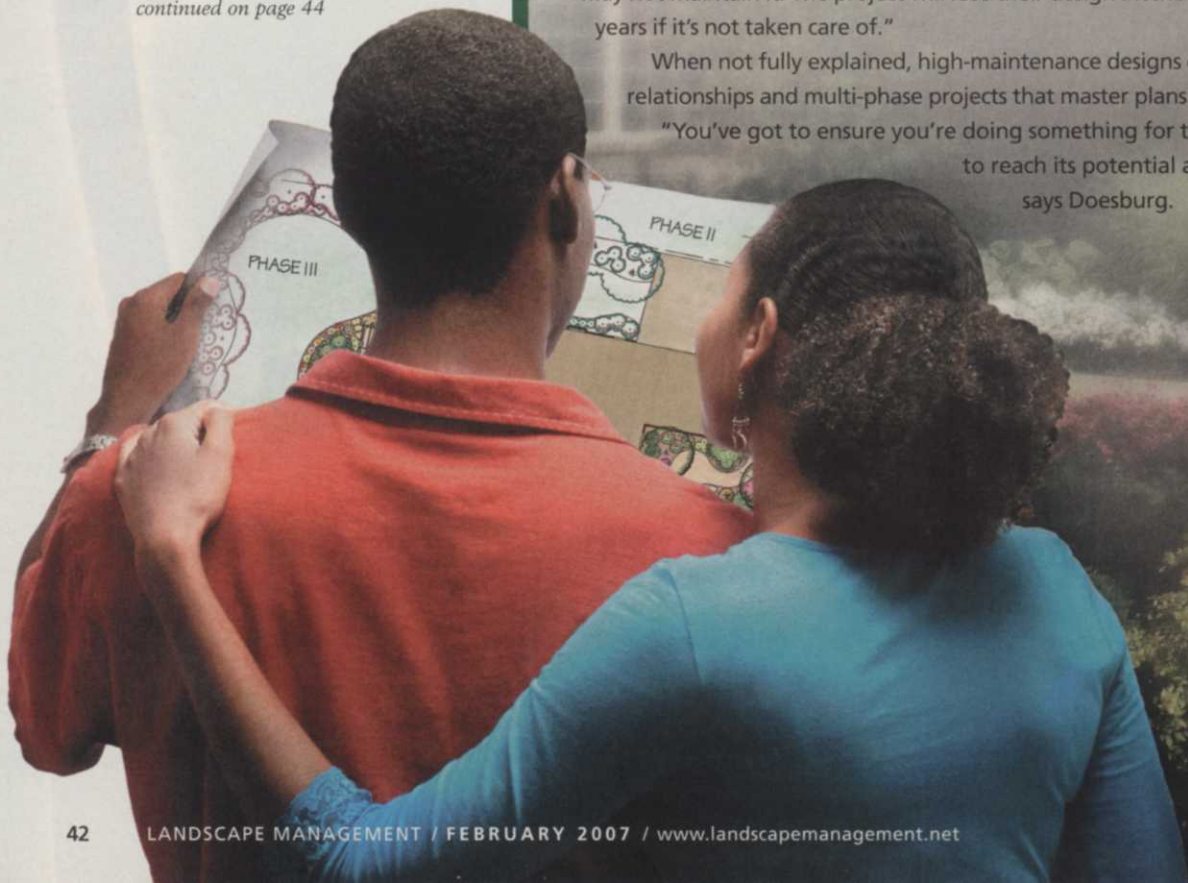
"There's nothing worse than designing a beautiful plan that the client can't maintain themselves or afford to have maintained," Doesburg says. "We didn't do our job if we presented a master design they can't take care of."

Maintenance is also on the mind of Miles Kuperus, president of Farmside Landscape & Design in Wantage, NJ, when creating a master plan. His company provides turf care, maintenance and plant health care services, in addition to design-build services.

"We do a high level of design detail on construction projects," he says. "If the customer doesn't understand what the maintenance cost is, then they may not maintain it. The project will lose their design intent in two or three years if it's not taken care of."

When not fully explained, high-maintenance designs can destroy the relationships and multi-phase projects that master plans can help create.

"You've got to ensure you're doing something for them that's going to reach its potential at a later date," says Doesburg.



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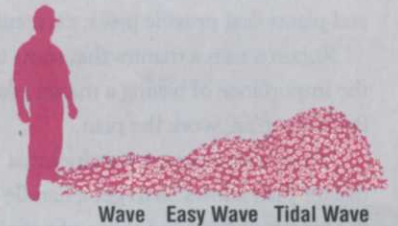
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Circle 129

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From the perspective of the design-build contractor, there are a lot of good reasons to do a master plan. Designing a project in stages may be necessary when the permitting process doesn't match up with the work season. For large projects that require outside engineering, there is often a long lead-time involved in bringing in an engineer. The master plan brings potential issues to light. It also points out the best sequence for a project.

"For instance, the client might eventually want a shaded patio," says Doesburg, whose company does about 60% of its work in stages according to a master plan. "The shade trees could be planted now so that they are mature enough to provide shade when the patio is installed five years later. Without a master plan, the client could be waiting a long time for a shaded patio. The same could be done with trees and plants that provide privacy screening."

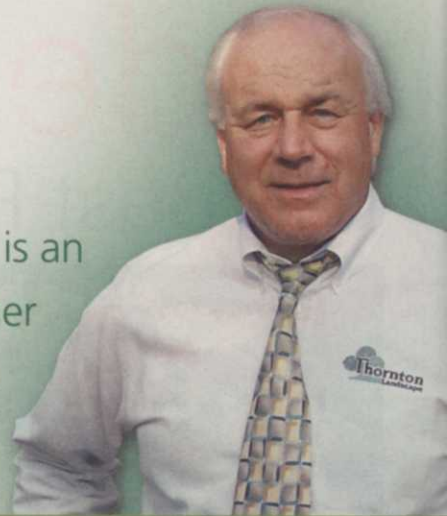
Kuperus uses a mantra that sums up the importance of having a master plan: Build the plan, work the plan.

"From a production standpoint, a master plan allows us to get a handle on the length of time and scope of a project," he says.

Master plans can also convince cus-

A master plan is an opportunity for the designer to be much more **creative**.

— Rick Doesburg, THORNTON LANDSCAPE



tomers to go the extra mile for their landscapes.

"During our first meeting with the client, we introduce ourselves and discuss what they'd like," says Kuperus. "We take a base map to our second meeting and design the landscape in front of the client. We get a huge buy-in right there. They get a great deal of insight and value from a master plan."

Though Kuperus' company hand draws all of its master plans, he sees increasing value in digital design.

"With virtual landscapes, the client can walk through the computer-generated master plan," he says. "If you make that that a positive experience, you could really show the client what they're getting for the money."

Both Kuperus and Doesburg say clients often get so excited about seeing the master plan that they decide to do the entire project right away.

That kind of buy-in can be great for the bottom line of large companies, but small companies should be careful, cau-

tions Kuperus.

"Depending on who the client base is, sometimes smaller companies have to realize that some projects are too big for them," he says. "Sometimes you can get into big projects and be in there so long that you lose other clients because you're not available to them. Make sure that you take on projects that are properly sized to your niche. If the projects are too large or small, you can partner with other companies. Carve out your niche and perform at excellent levels in that niche."

Big or small, a master plan helps contractors build relationships with clients. It ties in especially well with companies that offer maintenance or horticulture services because routine visits to the client serve as a reminder to complete the next phase of the landscape design. But design-build-only firms can steal a trick from Thornton's Doesburg.

"It's important to continue to touch the client," he says. "Sometimes we'll pull a master plan out in the winter, color in the next step, and then send it to the client as a reminder."

"I need work now, and three years from now," Doesburg says. "If we make the client happy with the first phase of a master plan, they'll call us back to do the next. That's good." **LM**

— The author also writes and edits the monthly LDB Solutions newsletter. To receive it, visit the Web site www.landscape-design-build.com/solutions. Contact the author at jgouch@questex.com.

Once they **see the design**, they want to **finish** the whole thing.

— Miles Kuperus,
FARMSIDE LANDSCAPE & DESIGN



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For more information contact Cub Cadet Commercial at 330/225-2600 or www.cub-cadetcommercial.com / circle no. 250

2 Updated for '07

Kubota's RTV900 utility vehicle is designed for heavy-duty use with its liquid-cooled, three-cycle Kubota diesel engine, hydrostatic transmission and 1,600-lbs. payload. New for 2007, the RTV900 features a deluxe hard cab with factory pre-hung doors, thermoformed roof and door panels, sound-proofing lowers noise level to 84 dBA, standard, AM/FM/CD player and speakers in hard cab. Kubota also offers its hydraulic tool system on the utility vehicle, which allows the operator to operate one of nine different available hydraulic power tools off of the back of the RTV.

For more information contact Kubota Tractor Corp. at 888/4-KUBOTA or www.kubota.com / circle no. 251

3 Bobcat's 2300

Bobcat Co.'s new 2300 4x4 utility vehicle can mow, sweep, and move materials with its RapidLink attachment system. The removable attachment arm can lift loads up to 500 pounds as high as two feet with five specially designed attachments, including a bucket, mower, pallet fork, snow blade and whisker push broom. Users operate and change attachments from their seat with joystick control. The 20-hp vehicle includes Bobcat's IntelliTrak drive system for maximum traction while traversing hills or traveling soft terrain. The 4x4 reaches up to 25 mph.

For more information contact Bobcat at 866/823-7898 or www.bobcat.com / circle no. 252

4 John Deere XUV

John Deere's new Gator XUV 4x4 utility vehicle will be available at dealerships in March in electronic fuel injection gas and diesel versions. The Gator XUV features a True 4WD system with an on-demand locking front differential for superior terrain capability. The Gator XUV features 11-in. ground clearance and a new Advanced Suspension System that provides customers with a comfortable ride, even when tackling the most rugged terrain. Maximum cargo capacity is 900 lbs for the cargo box, 1,300 pounds total payload. It reaches a top speed of 30 mph.

For more information contact John Deere at 800/537-8233 or www.JohnDeere.com / circle no. 253

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Circle 131



COMMERCIAL POWER

Ongoing training

The old saying "Knowledge is Power" could not be more true in today's world. A skilled technician not only fixes problems, but also implements a maintenance program that prevents problems from occurring in the first place. But finding skilled technicians is not an easy task, so it pays to develop an ongoing training regimen that gives your service crew the additional knowledge they'll need to keep the newest pieces of equipment up and running.

Briggs & Stratton manufactures a wide range of engines, from a model used in a hand-held string trimmer application all the way up to commercial three-cylinder water-cooled models. This product diversity creates a substantial ongoing training need to keep technicians up to speed, which is why we offer a number of education options for service technicians.

For technicians focused on commercial engines, Briggs and Stratton provides regional educational classes that feature a practical hands-on approach. Typically one or two days in length, the classes are fast paced, allowing the technician to be out of the shop for just a short time.

Technicians that have a relationship with a Briggs and Stratton distributor can view a listing of upcoming courses at www.thepowerportal.com (login information required). Technicians without an existing distributor relationship can go to our Website – www.commercialpower.com – to find the contact information of the distributor nearest them.

The benefits of well-trained service technicians are many. Not only will technicians be more confident and trustworthy in their work. Productivity in the shop will increase and equipment downtime will decrease, and since running equipment is necessary to generate income, it's no wonder education is such a powerful tool.



By Mark Nelson, Master Instructor, Briggs & Stratton Customer Education

From the Shop

TECHNOLOGY PERSONAL SAFETY

A left glove in your left back pocket and a right glove in your right back pocket is a simple, elegant storage solution.



Protect your most important tools

BY HARRY SMITH

They are the best tools you have. They are frequently abused, left unprotected against the elements and exposed to an assortment of chemicals. They get dented, dinged, cut, scraped and their poor condition ignored. Why would we do that to a fine set of irreplaceable tools? Is it just because they are attached to your arms?

How many times have you stuck an unprotected hand or finger somewhere knowing the probability is high that you will get pinched, mashed or cut? Where are those mechanics gloves you bought because you thought they were so neat when you saw members of a NASCAR pit crew wearing them? Lying on the dash of the truck? Are they still in their packaging carefully stored in your toolbox? Anywhere but on your hands is their usual location. You need to get them out and put them on, and keep them stuffed in your back pockets when not in use.

Pocket protectors

It sounds oversimplified but a left glove in your left back pocket and a right glove in

your right back pocket is a simple, elegant storage solution. You will soon get accustomed to the matching lumps, and this slight discomfort is a constant reminder that your protectors are nearby.

Consider the options

Mechanics gloves, vinyl, latex, Nitrile and Kevlar gloves have great merit in the workplace. There are not only numerous cut and abrasive hazards but also many chemical hazards out there. The long-term effects of some of these hazards are unknown. Used motor oil, some greases and gasoline are known hazards with deleterious health effects.

Whether the hazards are known or unknown it is just good common sense to protect your hands. The chemical barrier gloves like Nitrile and vinyl have gotten cheaper and tougher in recent years. There are constant improvements being made in glove materials and grip technology. You no longer have to use clumsy, bulky gloves and sacrifice touch and feel for protection. There are no excuses for not protecting your best tools.

— The author is turf equipment professor at Lake City Community College, Lake City, FL. Contact him at harry.smith@juno.com.



VoIP is a technology that allows you to convert your voice into data packets and send it over your Internet connection.



Voice over IP 101

BY TYLER WHITAKER

Does your head ache when you look at your phone bill? Are long distance charges getting you down? Do you wonder why taxes account for nearly 30% of your phone bill? If so, Voice over Internet Protocol, also called VoIP, may be the answer to your prayers.

VoIP is fast becoming a realistic choice for business communications. VoIP is a technology that allows you to convert your voice into data packets and send it over your Internet connection instead of the traditional phone system. Why would you want to do that? The answer is cost. Companies that provide VoIP services claim up to 50% reduction in your phone bill through low per-minute rates or fixed-price unlimited local and long distance calling plans.

Several factors make this cost savings possible. First, the wide adoption of broadband Internet connections creates extra, unused bandwidth available in homes and offices. Secondly, Internet traffic is unregulated and free from the fees and taxes of current phone service providers. Also, the unique nature of the technology used to compress and transmit voice over the Internet allows more concurrent voice conversations to occupy the same fixed-cost bandwidth.

I've played with VoIP for years in both home and commercial situations. But I was recently reminded of the cost savings while I was in Zermatt, Switzerland. Several people I was traveling with had purchased long distance calling cards at a rate of 1 Euro

(\$1.30 USD) per minute for calls to the United States. Fortunately I had my PocketPC with me. Using VoIP software from Skype (www.skype.com) and a free wireless Internet hotspot at a local pub, I was able to call to the States for 2 cents a minute saving roughly 99%.

How do you get started? You have several different options. Both Skype and Windows Live Messenger (www.msn.com) offer PC to PC, and PC to phone calling. This is a great way to get started with VoIP and test the functionality. You can then upgrade to VoIP services like Vonage (www.vonage.com) to use your existing phone number.

Be aware that VoIP services offer varying degrees of Enhanced 911 functionality. The flexibility to move your phone service anywhere you have an Internet connection also plays havoc on the 911 service. Read your VoIP provider's 911 disclosures so you understand what happens when you call for emergency services. Another downside is Internet connectivity and power. If either goes down, your phone doesn't work. If you live and work in areas where the power or your Internet connection has frequent outages, VoIP may not be your best solution.

As a business tool, Voice over IP has its place. For example, deploying VoIP between branch offices can significantly reduce your long distance bills. But like any technology, understanding the pros and cons can help you make the most informed and correct decision for your business.

— *The author is a freelance technologist focusing in business automation. Contact him at 801/592-2810 or visit his blog at www.tylerwhitaker.com.*