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- ▶ The LM Legislative Update
- ▶ Jeffrey Scott's 10-Minute Business Booster
- ▶ From Joe to Pro

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Create a disappearing waterfall in 12 easy steps.



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## DIGITAL VAULT

Select stories from our e-newsletters. Visit [www.landscapemanagement.net/emailsletters](http://www.landscapemanagement.net/emailsletters) to sign up or view.

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### Athletic Turf News

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### LD/B Solutions

The Green Industry has a number of award programs. Winning such a program opens up a number of marketing opportunities.

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Not every city has as many environmentally minded citizens working toward a sustainable future as does Portland. Even so, Portland's proven "green" practices can be replicated by pros and consumers elsewhere.

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**Landscape Management**

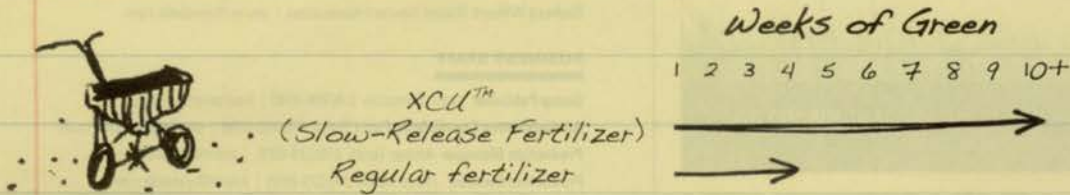
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## THE HALLMARK

RON HALL EDITOR-AT-LARGE

Contact Ron via e-mail at [rhall@questex.com](mailto:rhall@questex.com).

# Be more productive — or take less

**T**here are just three ways to weather a severe economic crisis: expect and take less, work more or become more productive. Most of us prefer the third option, although likely we're all being forced by present circumstances to accept all three in various degrees.

One thing is clear: The age of extravagant waste is over. Gone. That era is as far removed from our realities as the reign of the dinosaurs. The housing and financial meltdowns of this past year have sobered us to the realities of our new economy, just as surely as the brutal slap in the face of 9/11 awoke us to our vulnerability in an unstable world.

Simply put, uncertainty over the prospects for a short or long economic recovery is not uncertain anymore. We're in for a long, hard, painful slog. Economists are divided over when our economy will bottom and begin improving again. Some say we're already there, and predict small, but positive growth by year's end. Most aren't so optimistic. Regardless, nobody is predicting that our economy will soon return to the level of activity it displayed just two short years ago.

### Better than most

Acknowledging that, *Landscape Management's* recent industry-wide survey revealed that the landscape/lawn service industry is faring better than many

---

The **housing and financial meltdowns** of this past year have sobered us to the **realities of our new economy**, just as surely as the brutal slap in the face of 9/11 awoke us to our vulnerability in an unstable world.

other industries through these tough times.

Consumers want their properties maintained and established lawn care, and many landscape businesses are plugging along at a steady, if hardly stellar, pace. Some are actually doing better than expected — perhaps because, spooked by events of this past fall and winter, they projected too-low sales and revenues. Other firms serve markets that have not suffered so severely from job losses and home foreclosures. Weather is a factor, too. Lots of rain in the U.S. Southeast caused the lifting of business-killing watering bans.

Other positive factors in our favor include:

› **We're now an expected expense.** Many clients that have experienced the beauty and benefits of green, healthy lawns and maintained properties no longer view them as luxuries or extras but as essentials — probably not as essential as, say, cell phones or wireless Internet, but you see what I mean.

› **Our services are affordable.** The cost for lawn care and property maintenance for most homeowners is about the same as their cable or utility bills, and we've made it increasingly easy to pay for these services by promoting pre-payments, online payments and credit card payments.

› **We help protect property values.** Property owners, whether residential or commercial, realize they need to protect their properties' value in the face of decreased property prices. Commercial and rental properties in particular must be maintained to attract traffic — and tenants.

› **We improve the "staycation" experience.** Many homeowners are forgoing expensive vacations and now view their properties as sanctuaries to relax and entertain family and friends.

Of course, if unemployment keeps rising, the construction industry remains in shambles and the credit crisis doesn't improve (or worsens), even these advantages may evaporate and we will have to rejuggle the options of accepting less, working harder or boosting our productivity.

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COVER STORY

# DIGITAL SLOTS

BY **MARTY WHITFORD**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



## Playing the odds, landscapers move more marketing bets from printed local business directories to their Web sites, search engine optimization strategies, e-newsletters and pay-per-click spots.

MARKETING AND GAMBLING ARE CLOSE COUSINS.

"With both, you gotta play to win — but you also have to know when to walk away," says Steve Chepurny, president of Beechwood Landscape Architecture & Construction, a \$6 million-a-year business based in Southampton, NJ.

Every year, Chepurny, like many landscape company owners, spends thousands of dollars hoping his number comes up — his business' telephone number, that is, as homeowners leaf through pages of landscaping and lawn care ads in various printed local business directories. Last year, Beechwood Landscape spent more than \$14,000 on print business-directory ads.

"Our Yellow Pages ads yielded just 11 calls and zero new business," Chepurny says. "The few leads that did come in were mediocre, and I'm being generous when I say mediocre."

After failing to break even on these marketing spends in recent years, Chepurny scratched 85% of his print business-directory advertising. He's betting — and winning — big on digital slots such as the company's Web site, BeechwoodLandscape.com, search engine optimization (SEO) strategies — to rank among the top listings when consumers search Google, Yahoo and other Web engines — and online ads with links on referral sites, such as SuperPages.com and AngiesList.com.

"Pulling most of our print business directory ads was a difficult decision because every Tom, Dick and Harry has ads in those books," Chepurny says. "But digital marketing is where it's at. The odds on returns are much better. Our

Web site and pay-per-click ads generated 125 leads and 30 new customers last year — and we invested just half the amount there that we spent on printed business-directory ads."

Chepurny no longer follows the marketing spends of Tom, Dick and Harry. His digital marketing returns place him at the front of a new and growing pack: hungry, savvy landscapers who bet with their wallets, not their peers.

Landscape professionals like Chepurny smartly are following their customers and prospects to the Web. They're shifting more of their marketing bets from traditional printed local business directories to their company Web sites, SEO strategies, customer e-newsletters and pay-per-click ad spots to attract more prospects, better serve their customers and green their bottom lines.



Steve Chepurny

### Playing the numbers

Beechwood Landscape recently invested \$2,500 to upgrade its Web site and SEO, and routinely spends \$500 to \$600 per month on pay-per-click ads. The company also pays \$400 per month for an expanded listing and link on SuperPages.com — the digital counterpart to Yellow Pages' print directories — and \$125 per month for a similar spot on AngiesList.com. Monthly e-newsletters packed with landscaping tips and special offers help the company nurture its business relation-

ships, upsell maintenance services and reap referrals. (Note: For tips on launching a customer e-newsletter, read this month's *Whit's World* on page 56.)

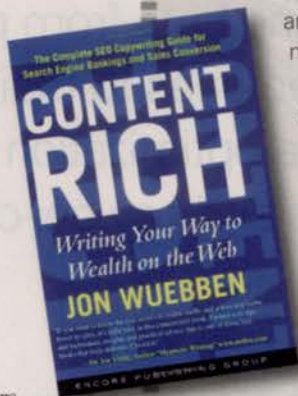
"We're spending more on digital marketing than ever before, and with good reason — our online investments pay for themselves many times over," Chepurny says.

Printed local business directories help keep the phone ringing at New Castle, CO-based Dwyer Greens & Flowers, but owner Lynn Dwyer says the calls usually waste time.

"Most of the calls we get out of those books are from price shoppers or homeowners looking for free on-site consultations or phone advice," Dwyer says. "I work 90 hours a week during our peak season. I don't have time for monkey business."

Dig Right In Landscaping in Brookfield, IL, is another digital marketing believer. During the past two years, the company cut its annual print business-directory ad spend by two-thirds to \$4,000. The company reinvested part

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## WINNING THE WEB'S GREAT RACE

Remember frantically racing your sibling, elbowing each other all the way to the side door, just to be the first to tell Mom your version of the story? Turns out, even those bruising experiences teach valuable business lessons.

Winning The Great Race to tell your story first is what search engine optimization (SEO) is all about, says Jon Wuebben, author of "Content Rich: Writing Your Way to Wealth on the Web." Wuebben spoke at the Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association's (TOCA's) 20th annual meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico, May 12-14.

"An overwhelming majority — up to 70% — assume the companies atop Google and other search-engine rankings are the clear leaders in their fields," Wuebben says. "Do you know where you rank — and why?"

Some of Wuebben's SEO tips are:

- ▶ Subscribe to [wordtracker.com](http://wordtracker.com) (\$275/year) or [keyworddiscovery.com](http://keyworddiscovery.com) (\$50/month) to stay abreast of the most-searched words online.
  - ▶ Write down the search words most pertinent to your business — in order of their popularity.
  - ▶ Incorporate one to three of these search words on each page of your Web site(s), digital press releases, e-newsletters and blogs.
  - ▶ Use three or fewer different keywords on each Web site page, taking care to not repeat the words more than three times per page because it will hinder your rankings on search engines.
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