



THINK OF SOCIAL media like a game system — Xbox, Nintendo or PlayStation — that has been around since the early '80s. The games change, and the systems become more sophisticated, but the premise remains strong and increasingly popular. Like game systems that may have been a young person's game once, social media is expanding its reach rapidly.

It might seem easy to dismiss the trend as a time-wasting nuisance that will soon sit unused and forgotten as quickly as this year's must-have holiday toy. But social media isn't simply a new tool for business, although it certainly can and should be used to enhance your marketing efforts. Social media is the way an entire generation communicates. Few technological advances have been adopted so widely and quickly as the tools of social media.

How big is it? Twitter is the top word in 2009, surpassing Obama, H1N1 and stimulus, according to the Global Language Monitor.

Whether you're seeking customers or employees who'll serve them, Green Industry businesses need to update their statuses, blog their opinions, tweet their whereabouts and post their videos for clients, suppliers, employees and the community around them. Ignoring the social media explosion will limit growth opportunities and could erode operations. What makes social media compelling is that it's inexpensive, easy, real-time communication.

Many businesses are taking a cautious approach to social media, dipping their toes into the Internet pool to see if they want to swim.

"It was exploding all around us, and we

thought we might as well get one foot in this and see what it's all about before everyone is in it and we're behind the times," says Maria Candler, president of James River Grounds Management in Richmond, VA.

The basics

There's no one tool that encompasses all social media. The most well known tools are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and blogs. Each has its unique role in the social media spectrum.

Knowing how your customers use social media is the key to taking advantage of what it has to offer. Like any business plan, you need to know the demographics. Knowing where your customers congregate is a good start.

Each social network — Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. — has different demographics. You have to understand where your qualified audience interacts socially, says Judith Guido, owner of Guido & Associates in Moorpark, CA.

That's been a challenge for James River Grounds Management.

"We're having a difficult time thinking about how we could get our Facebook content in the hands of our customers regularly," Candler says. "Maybe that's the end result, but we're trying to figure out how that would make sense. What do they care about that would make them go to the page? They don't even read the e-newsletter."

Getting started in social media isn't difficult. It's as simple as signing up at one of the various sites to begin expressing yourself. While there are dozens of sites to choose from, if you're going to start with just one, you probably want to create a Facebook account, Guido suggests. Facebook has the status-update element that has made Twitter so popular. It also allows you to create a community and post photos. No matter where you go virtually, having a strategy in place is key.

Lack of planning is a significant problem, Guido says. Fully leveraging social media is no different than marketing or sales. Proper execution requires planning.

"You need to craft a strategy for social media," she says. "I can't emphasize that enough."

Creating interest

Scott Parker, owner of Parker Homescape in Fanwood, NJ, created his Facebook page in

“It's one of the most exciting tools in business. It creates a **COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE** at low cost or no cost, almost instantaneously.”

— JUDITH GUIDO, OWNER
GUIDO & ASSOCIATES



early 2008. Currently, the company has 306 friends, all of whom can view photos of the company's completed work and read about recent awards Parker Homescape has received.

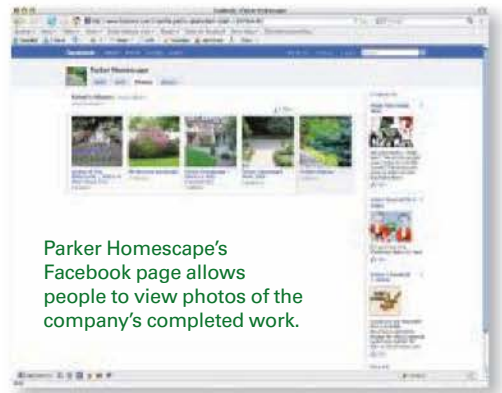
"It allows you to have a forum where you gather all your friends, and you can let all your friends know what you do for a living," Parker says. "It allows you to get your name out there, have people know exactly what you do, and keep in touch with people."

Parker likens the friendly nature of social networking to highly desirable word-of-mouth advertising.

"It's a soft sell," he says. "These are people who know you. If someone doesn't know you, they have a friend who knows you. It's automatic trust."

That sense of community is important.

"We're trying to build awareness around something," says Dennis Dougherty, president and CEO of Cagwin and Dorward in Novato, CA. "How else would you build awareness? We'd send out letters and brochures. We'd spend a lot of time creating that. As a consumer, I read the first two or three sentences, and if it doesn't captivate me, it goes right into the recycling bin."



Parker Homescape's Facebook page allows people to view photos of the company's completed work.

If someone doesn't know you, they have a friend who knows you.
IT'S AUTOMATIC TRUST.

— SCOTT PARKER, OWNER
PARKER HOMESCAPE



Social networks can provide interest because it's multifaceted with different points of view.

"If you don't capture somebody's imagination with information that's posted by the company, another person can post something, and it captivates everybody, and they talk about it," Dougherty says.

Double-edged sword

Despite all of the benefits of social media, it's not ideal. Like all tools, social media can sidetrack people. Besides providing an extraordinary tug away from job responsibilities, there's the concern social networking could replace the all-important, face-to-face element of conducting business.

MAKE THE MOST OUT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

BY JEFF KORHAN

Social media is a platform for interacting and engaging with people to make friends and build relationships that may create opportunities for your business. Unlike traditional marketing and selling, business is a by-product of new media marketing. Here are some tips to help you be more effective.

- 1 Devote at least one-third of your social media marketing to listening and learning.** Use Google Alerts to monitor your company brand, personal reputation and industry specialty.
- 2 Always use a personal photo for your profile,** as opposed to an avatar or business logo. Your personal reputation arguably is more important than your company brand.
- 3 Standardize your usernames and profiles.** Use namechk.com or knowem.com to search dozens of net-

works for availability. Claim your username on these sites for future use.

- 4 A blog is the cornerstone of your social media presence.** Use it to distinguish your unique value for your customers and prospects by helping them solve problems and make better decisions that pertain to your area of specialty.
- 5 Google indexes most of the messaging on the Web** to provide relevant information for Internet searches. If your communications are embedded with the key words your customers are using, they're like bread-crumbs that lead new prospects to you.
- 6 Multimedia content is essential for making your information consumable** by the largest audience. Search YouTube.com for instructional videos about how use video, images, and links to make your communications come alive.

7 Social media amplifies everything about you and your business with amazing accuracy. If you try to spin your reputation or capabilities, you'll more than likely fail.

8 Sharing is the grease that makes social media work. You have to become comfortable with giving, because without it, there's no reason for anyone to link up to you on the social networks.

Jeff Korhan is new media marketer who helps entrepreneurs implement online strategies that maximize Web visibility, reputation, and referrals. He blogs at <http://jeffkorhan.com>.





Cagwin and Dorward are trying build a sense of community and awareness.

James River Grounds Management purchased smart phones for its team to provide access to social

networks. But it wasn't an easy decision.

"It makes it too easy to send e-mails instead of forcing them to get in front of customers and maintain more personal connections, which we, as a relationship company, are all about," Candler says. "We have a lot of heartburn about that decision."

However, as useful as a social network is, it's still a tool that, if not used properly, could lose its effectiveness.

"My only concern there — and I've seen this happen in other social networks — is various people will join, and they're not interested in what's going on," Dougherty says. "They're trying to get people to go someplace else and look at whatever they're selling, which probably isn't landscaping."

On your own

While Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube are the big players in social media, they are, by no means, the only ways to reach your audience.

Dougherty created his own social network using the Ning Network, a service that allows people to join and create their own social platforms. As of early December, there were more than 1.8 million Ning Networks and 37 million registered users.

Dougherty created his network following a World Café (www.worldcafe.com) meeting to talk about resources used in landscapes.

"It's difficult to get people to move to sustainable landscape practices if they don't know the reasons they should do it," Dougherty says. "We were involved in the World Café, which essentially is people conversing all day around small tables. It was powerful. If you were there, you would have walked away on your toes. It was energetic."

But knowing the enthusiasm generated during a one-day event would quickly subside, Dougherty employed the Ning Network (www.ning.com) to encourage ongoing discussion.

"It's important to keep the conversation alive," he says. "Initially, people come out of them, and they're gleeful. They seem to have direction. But as every day ticks on, those memories fade. The neat thing about social media is, if they go back and check in, it rekindles their thinking about why they were there and what they were doing. I'm hoping that will give longer shelf-life to our strategic meetings and direction."

Overcoming skepticism

Dougherty admits he was skeptical before embracing the concept.

"Initially, when people brought this idea of social media up — and it was brought up a couple of times at various meetings — my initial reaction was 'No, it's going to be a time-waster,'" he says. "And I didn't want to have to learn something new. There are so many things you have to accomplish each day."

But once Dougherty gave it a try, he realized how easy and useful it could be.

Dougherty wants people of interest joining.

"The people who are invited in can invite other people to join," he says. "It's open in the sense concerned people can be invited in by any of the members."

Cagwin and Dorward may open the community to anyone, but at that point, it likely would need a full-time administrator.

The question for landscape companies about social media isn't whether to get involved or when, it's to what extent should they get involved and how will that involvement be managed.

"It's one of the most exciting tools in business," Guido says. "I could post something, and in 15 minutes, I can have a group of 15,000 targeted people responding to a bit of information or research.

It creates a competitive advantage at low cost or no cost, almost instantaneously. We thought the Internet was the greatest. This takes the Internet to the nth degree to create a razor-targeted group of qualified people you want to be in front of." **LM**



It makes it **TOO EASY TO SEND E-MAILS**

instead of forcing them to get in front of customers ..."

— MARIA CANDLER, PRESIDENT, JAMES RIVER GROUNDS MANAGEMENT



THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author is the owner-manager of 3PG Consulting. Contact him at kkehoe@earthlink.net.

10 tips to taking the offensive in 2010

It's time to shift your business focus from defense to offense. Reducing costs is essential, but the easy cuts already have been made. Additional cuts probably will slice into muscle and bone.

And, as anyone can tell you, cost cutting isn't motivational. Taking the offensive is much more uplifting. More than ever, revenue growth and cash management are essential to your success, given the realities of slow-paying customers, lower prices, and stingy banks and vendors.

Here are 10 tips to taking the offensive in 2010:

- 1. Obsess about your accounts receivable.** Review your aging reports every day and place reminder calls to your customers. Start at 15 days, get deposits where you can, and invoice each job the day the work is completed.
- 2. No one gets raises.** Tell your employees you have a plan that can keep them happily employed, but there won't be raises until the clouds lift.
- 3. Spend more on marketing.** Use door hangers, direct mail and e-mail blasts. Send a message outlining money-saving solutions to landscape problems. Do this every month. Out of sight equals out of mind. Simple, helpful and frequent "touches" are a key to lead generation.
- 4. Get out and sell.** Passive selling is not an option. Customers won't beat down your door — you have to beat down theirs, particularly in this economy. Yes, you, the owner, must prospect and make calls or find someone who will.
- 5. Work on lower pricing.** We're in deflationary times. Worry less about gross profit percentage and

more about selling enough gross profit dollars to pay for overhead every month.

6. Communicate with your customers — past and present. Other contractors are calling on your customers. Because there's little loyalty out there, you must defend your turf. Meet with your customers and ask them, "How can we add value for you and help you in this economy?"

7. Expand the services you offer. Offer more services to your customer base. Customer spending next year will have an ROI emphasis. Saving money, reducing risk and being eco-friendly (as long as it contributes to realizing the first two) top the list of potential upsells.

8. Keep your banker and vendors in the loop. You'll need credit to fund growth. Put together a budget and cash-flow forecast, then meet with these people to re-establish credit facilities and terms for 2010.

9. Clean house. This may sound harsh, but now is a good time to get rid of C players. Cleaning house has three virtuous effects: First, morale improves; second, A and B players can make more money picking up the slack; and third, you'll sleep better.

10. Look for a diamond in the rough. There are talented people looking for work. If you must focus on sales, you'll need to add talent in operations. It costs nothing to advertise on Craig's List, and everyone looking for work eventually looks there. When you find a diamond, hire him/her even if it costs more than what you're used to paying. Good people pay their way.

The old rules of the game are gone forever. We're entering into uncharted territory. These 10 ideas can help you take the offensive — so you can get off your heels and get back on your toes.

I'm reminded of my former football coach whose every pre-game pep talk was a variation on the same theme: "Boys, let's do it to them before they do it to us." That's where we are in this economy. The world is presenting business owners with a clear choice — hang onto the past or leap into the future. It's time to play offense.

The world is presenting business owners with a **clear choice** — hang onto the past or leap into the future.

HELLO HUSTLER

GOODBYE REGRET



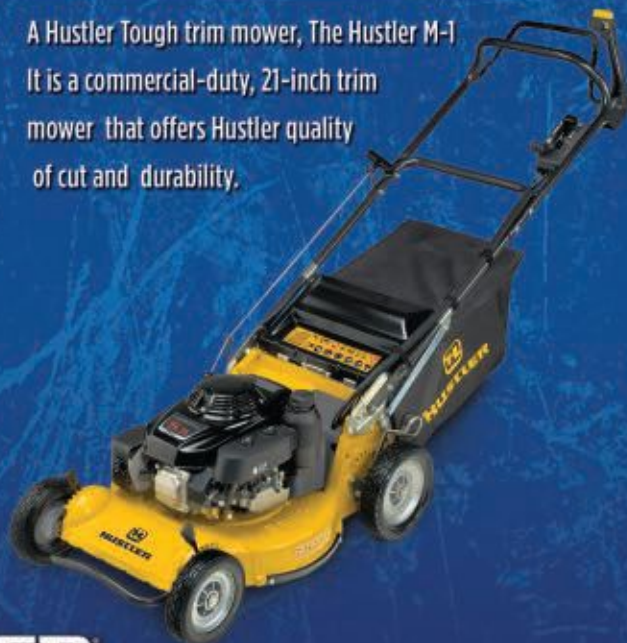
The Super Z™ sets the standard for Speed, Durability, and Quality of cut. It comes with lifetime warranties on the frame and the leading-edge of the deck and 2 year commercial and residential warranties.

The Super Z™ will leave you with a beautiful lawn, minimal service requirements and no regrets



The TrimStar™ Hydro is the most innovative, most technologically advanced walk-behind mower on the market today. For those hard to get places, The TrimStar™ Hydro is an ideal choice.

A Hustler Tough trim mower, The Hustler M-1. It is a commercial-duty, 21-inch trim mower that offers Hustler quality of cut and durability.



HUSTLER

Be sure and ask your dealer about special offers, and low financing available right now!

HUSTLERTURF.COM • UNCOMMON COMMITMENT



Several years after forming his lawn care company in 1989, **Brent A. Flory** participated on a panel at the first-ever Green Industry Conference, sharing his experiences with natural, biological products and practices. Today, he and his wife run a million-dollar-plus, full-service company in Delphi, IN.

How has your agricultural background and belief in natural processes for plant health care shaped your approach to turf care and landscape services. I raised acres of truck crops sold wholesale and ran into many difficulties with soil and plant conditions related to soil conditions. Through this, I became involved in the agriculture fertilizer and consulting business.

I developed a strong belief in natural soil amendments and fertilizing techniques, including a biological approach to soil and plant health. Many of these ideas have influenced my approach to lawn care and management. I became an advocate of using aerobically formed compost. This is the cornerstone of my approach to turf and soil health.

Which of your services have been affected most by the recession and which have been affected least. Construction, irrigation and landscaping have declined significantly. People seem to be spending money on primary maintenance services.

What changes do you plan to make for the coming season?

Changes are focused on pricing services, improving efficiency with those services and reducing overhead. This means working for less money in some service areas. We want improved efficiency and better managed overhead to help offset less gross dollars. This will mean being more productive in the field and extra hours for management. Our goal is not to reduce jobs for our employees.

What are the biggest changes since the company's founding?

There's greater awareness and emphasis on landscape. People are turning their back yards into beautiful back lawns. A second difference is the increase of service companies providing maintenance services.

What do you foresee in 2010?

I'm optimistic. We changed

our pricing structure and picked up nice, new properties. We're going to have to work harder and do a bit more, but we're looking forward to a profitable year.

If you had it to do over again, what would you do differently?

Finding good people, for growth and solid business from the start. I'd have spent more time and money on personnel. This is much easier said than done. Good people are the key to growth and business. As long as the population grows, there are new job opportunities and people required for this industry. There's never enough experienced people. So, there's always a need for training and recruiting. The search never stops for good people, even when you're fully staffed. It has been a difficult process to cash flow a business, find good people and grow at the same time.

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Freedom Lawns, Inc., Delphi, IN

FOUNDED: 1989

OWNERS: Brent and Marilyn Flory

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: One

EMPLOYEES: 25 to 35

SERVICES: Mowing, fertilization, weed control, pruning, mulching, landscape construction, paver patio/walk installation, irrigation install/maintenance, water gardens, landscape lighting, retaining walls, Bush Hog, vegetation control, snow removal

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: PLANET, Tippecanoe Apartment Association, Midwest Regional Turfgrass Foundation, Snow & Ice Management Association

PERSONAL HIGHLIGHTS/HOBBIES: Piloting his four-passenger Beechcraft, motorcycling, weight training, spending time with family and friends

FAMILY: Five grown children, one grandchild

WEBSITE: FreedomLawns.com

“ I BECAME AN ADVOCATE OF USING **AEROBICALLY FORMED COMPOST**. THIS IS THE CORNERSTONE OF MY APPROACH TO TURF AND SOIL HEALTH.”



You have enough things to worry about. But with **FreeHand® 1.75G herbicide**, early re-treats aren't one of them. **FreeHand 1.75G** enables you to get up to 8 weeks of broad-spectrum, preemergent weed control. And since **FreeHand 1.75G** utilizes two highly effective active ingredients and two unique modes of action, it's a great resistance management tool, too. Don't lose profits to re-treats. Treat it right the first time, with **FreeHand 1.75G**.

betterturf.basf.us | 800-545-9525



The Chemical Company

DISCOVERING A 'GREEN' MINE

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

Bayer and North Carolina State University are collaborating on a plethora of plant health research projects. One look in the mirror behind NCSU doctoral student Shannon Sermons reflects the pack of trade media reporters who toured NCSU's phytotron during Bayer Environmental Science's inaugural Plant Health Symposium, held Nov. 10-11 in Raleigh and Clayton, NC.

Bayer Environmental Science's first-ever Plant Health Symposium brings together landscapers, golf course superintendents, academia and trade media to discuss the key roles of turfgrass, trees and plants in sustainability, and related research, testing tools and formulations.

FIRST, BAYER PLANTS the seeds. Then it plants the trees.

"Sustainability has long been a way of life for us at Bayer — but now we're sharing more, regarding our key role in environmental stewardship, through endeavors such as this Symposium," said Nick Hamon, Bayer Environmental Science's vice president of product development and sustainable development.

"As you can tell by my title, for Bayer, product development and sustainability go hand in hand," noted Hamon during a beverage break at Bayer Environmental Science's inaugural Plant Health Symposium, held in Raleigh and Clayton, NC, Nov. 10-11. "This Symposium will help us collaborate, innovate and educate. Today and tomorrow, we're planting more seeds to sustainability. After the Symposium concludes, we'll plant a few more trees to offset our carbon footprint from this meeting."

A group of about 25 landscapers, golf course superintendents, North Carolina

State University (NCSU) "turf doctors," trade magazine editors and Bayer Environmental Science team members comprised the Symposium's participant mix.

Healthy, well-maintained green spaces with turfgrass, trees and plants, can work wonders to decrease erosion, buffer noise, reuse water, promote biodiversity, sequester carbon and cool outdoor temperatures, noted Dr. Tom Rufty, director of the Center for Turfgrass Environmental Research and Education and professor of environmental plant physiology, NCSU's Department of Crop Science.

Dr. Rufty noted the world already is grappling with limited oil and water resources and significant climate shifts — and he, Hamon and other Symposium speakers suspect carbon output caps and credits similar to those already adopted by the European Union soon might be *mandated* in the United States. Further demanding more-sustainable practices, the world's population is projected to



An infrared gas analyzer tests the carbon sequestration capabilities of tall fescue (left) and bermudagrass (right) at Bayer's Clayton (NC) Development & Training Center.

mushroom from about 6.9 billion people today to 9.2 billion by 2050.

"As countries like China and India continue to industrialize and grow, resources are going to become more costly and less available," said Dr. Rufty,

continued on page 21

ALL PHOTOS BY: MARTY WHITFORD

A festive holiday advertisement. The background is a dark blue night sky with stars and a full moon. In the center, Santa Claus, dressed in his traditional red suit with white trim and a white beard, is sitting on a yellow and black riding lawnmower. The lawnmower is loaded with several wrapped gifts. Santa is waving his right hand. The text "Happy Holidays!" is written in a large, white, cursive font at the top left. At the bottom left, it says "Wishing our customers a Prosperous New Year!" in a similar cursive font. In the bottom right corner, there is a red circular logo with a white 'Z' and the words "Z-SPRAY" and "Z-FLUID" around it. Next to the logo, it says "from your friends at L.T. Rich Products", "www.zspray.com", and "(877) 482-2040".

“In **this** neighborhood,
PERFECTION
is the only acceptable
RESULT.

That's why I use
4-Speed™ XT.”

Eric Larson, Green Systems Turf Management
Site: Astor's Mansion
Newport, Rhode Island

With contracts for many of the world's most famous mansions, Eric Larson faces customer expectations that are as high as the real estate prices. So when ground ivy, clover and other tough weeds started showing up, he turned to 4-Speed XT. Its combination of four active ingredients makes weeds 'Deader. Faster.' For more on 4-Speed herbicide brands, and more of Eric Larson's story, go to www.nufarm.com/us.

Better Choices. Better Business.

© 2009 Nufarm. Important: Always read and follow label instructions. 4-Speed™ is a trademark of Nufarm.



www.nufarm.com/us