



A WALL, IS A WALL...IS A WOW!

If your client wants more than an ordinary retaining wall, select VERSA-LOK. No other wall system gives you the same combination of aesthetics, installation ease and performance. VERSA-LOK's unique construction gives you the freedom to create stairs, curves, corners, columns and freestanding walls. Units can be quickly modified on site—eliminating the need to order special pieces. And their solid-unit characteristics provide unsurpassed durability. In addition, the Weathered™ texture and Mosaic® random-pattern options will give your project a look that is sure to turn heads.

To find out why customers prefer VERSA-LOK, call (800) 770-4525 or visit www.versa-lok.com.



Freestanding Walls



Mosaic Random Face Patterns



Fully Integrated Stairs



Random-Pattern Tall Walls



Freestanding Columns



Multi-Angle Corners

VERSA-LOK[®]
Retaining Wall Systems
Solid Solutions.[™]

© 2008 Kiltie Corporation • Oakdale, MN



Repair or remove weak links

There's a parking garage near work with a great "early bird" special. As long as you're in by 11 a.m., the fee is only \$4. Most early specials end at 8:30 a.m., so if I have a late appointment (or just roll out of bed later than I should), I can still park at a pretty reasonable rate.

The one drawback is on event nights. When there is a concert downtown or a Cleveland Cavaliers or Indians game, the garage wants you to clear out by 5:30 p.m. (or they start tacking on an extra fee). Usually that's not a problem, but every so often my dedication to this magazine (just in case the boss is reading this) keeps me here late. A couple months ago, I left work about 5:15 p.m. for the short walk to the garage, hopped in my car and threaded my way down the sloped parking decks to the pay booth. It was about 5:28 p.m. and there were several cars queued up waiting to sit in even longer lines on the streets heading out of downtown. Four minutes ticked by before I could pull up to pay for my nightly freedom. I handed

the young woman a \$5 bill. She said thanks and raised the zebra-striped barrier barring my exodus.

I asked for my change, and she said the fee had risen a buck because it was now past 5:30 p.m. I explained (with a little annoyance in my voice) that I was trying to get out before the deadline, but because they weren't able to process cars fast enough, the deadline passed. It was their fault, not mine.

I was about ready to forego the dollar when the attendant leaned out of her booth spoke over my head to the co-worker in the next booth, ranting about "one more customer showing her disrespect..." At that moment the dollar became about principle. I shifted the car into park and sat there until she called over her supervisor. After my brief explanation, he reached into his pocket, handed me a dollar and I was on my way.

I used to park in that garage fairly regularly. In the past two months, I've only parked there twice. I found another early bird special that is only slightly more expensive, but they don't charge a late fee, even on game nights.

Losing one customer in a garage that holds hundreds of vehicles is not going to bankrupt the company that owns the garage. It might never go beyond that supervisor. But that low-level front line employee soured me — and many of the co-workers to whom I've told the story — on the garage.

I can't imagine I was the first customer to complain that it was slow service that pushed me past the 5:30 p.m. deadline. Imagine the good will it would have created if the company had given the employee the ability to forego the extra dollar for five or 10 minutes. Heck, imagine if they'd given her a little customer service training — taught her to smile, listen to complaints and empowered her to take immediate action to make it right.

Every company is only as likeable as its front-line employees. If you don't know how to interact effectively with customers, your next communication with that client might be about why they're now giving their business to your competitor.

If you don't know how to **interact effectively with customers**, your next communication with that client might be about why they're now **giving their business to your competitor**.

Trim Your Labor Costs!

Leading landscape professionals rely on the easy-to-use, long-lasting formulation of Cutless® Granular Landscape Growth Regulator to reduce the labor costs associated with maintaining landscaped shrubs, hedges and groundcovers. Plants treated with Cutless Granular require less trimming and exhibit a more compact, uniform shape.

Use Cutless Granular today... You'll love the increased profits and your customers will love the fuller and more attractive plants.

For more information about Cutless Granular Landscape Growth Regulator, visit our web site at www.sepro.com, or call 1-800-419-7779.

Cutless® Granular Landscape Growth Regulator



Side-by-side proven results with Cutless® Granular.

Example below of reduced shoot growth and enhanced bud development of the treated Jasmine on the left, and untreated on the right.



SePRO Corporation Carmel, IN 46032

*Trademark of SePRO Corporation. Always read and follow label directions.





Sam Farison

In 1971, brothers **Sam Farison** and Dan Farison created Farison Lawn Care with the goal of delivering the best residential lawn care possible. The company grew and established itself as the premiere lawn care company in the Louisville, KY, area. In 1995, after word spread about improvements Farison made to a local high school sports field, it started a lucrative new service.

How did your company's sports field maintenance division come about? We got started as an athletic booster, helping out at the school that I attended, Eastern High School. We did that field, and other schools started asking us to do work. The athletic director there knew everybody and he kept giving our name out — and it took off from there.

We offer a regular maintenance program for athletic fields. It's neat to be the only one in town that does something like this. We're not used to that in the lawn care business.

As you know, synthetic turf is the rage in sports fields these days. Will you be getting into that business? For some schools that's the only good option, given the amount of use their fields get. Few schools have the luxury of game fields and practice fields for every sport. But we're not going into the carpet laying business. Most of that work is subsurface construction — and while we do some field construc-

tion, we're not interested in installing synthetic turf fields. We feel there will continue to be a need for what we're doing.

Farison Lawn Care has been a recognized brand in the Louisville market for more than 35 years. Tell us how it started. My brother Dan and I were basically kids, and we were looking for ways to make money on the side, so we started mowing lawns. When FIFRA (the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act, which was put under U.S. EPA oversight in 1972) came along, we were among the first people in Kentucky to get pesticide licenses.

In the late 1970s we quit mowing and concentrated on lawn care. We were the mavericks at the time because we started out as a granular company and

always put down product as granular. Now, of course, that's common.

How has the business changed since the two of you began the company? We have better products with lower levels of active ingredients. That includes fungicides, herbicides and insecticides. The evolution has been positive and environmentally friendly.

What do you see as the biggest challenges for the industry? The slowing economy and rising costs. Also the uncertainty of costs like fuel jumping up and down are making it hard to plan.

Planning for the future seems to be getting more difficult, but I'm still optimistic that consumers need and want lawn care. We'll be out there doing our own thing, which is delivering a quality lawn care program.

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Farison Lawn Care, Louisville, KY

FOUNDED: 1971

NUMBER OF OUTLETS: 1

EMPLOYEES: 21

EDUCATION/CERTIFICATIONS: Sam holds a bachelor's of science degree in plant sciences from Western Kentucky University; Dan attended the University of Kentucky

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: Sam served as a board member of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America, three terms on the board of directors of the Kentucky Turfgrass Council (two terms as president, and was on the board of directors of the Green Industry Expo (one term as president)

BUSINESS OUTLOOK: "Regardless of competitive or pricing issues, we're not going to backpedal on quality products or services."

FAMILY: Sam's two daughters, Jessica and Kylie, and Dan's son, Parker, work in the business.

WEB SITE: farison.com

“WE WERE THE MAVERICKS AT THE TIME BECAUSE WE STARTED OUT AS A GRANULAR COMPANY AND ALWAYS PUT DOWN PRODUCTS AS GRANULAR.”



FREEHAND™
1.75G HERBICIDE

You have enough things to worry about. But with **FreeHand™ 1.75G herbicide**, hand-weeding isn't one of them. **FreeHand 1.75G** gives you 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. Free your crew up to do other things, with **FreeHand 1.75G**.

betterplants.com | 800-545-9525

BASF

The Chemical Company

A ZERO-TURN FOR THE WORSE

The economy has made people cautious, but lower fuel prices and new technology give manufacturers hope for the zero-radius turn mower this year. BY DANIEL G. JACOBS MANAGING EDITOR

IT WOULDN'T BE a surprise if landscape contractors' children never learned (or at least were discouraged from singing) "Rain, rain go away; come again another day."

A sinking economy and rising fuel prices influence the way a lot of contractors run their businesses, but the single biggest factor might be the weather.

"You can give me a slow or poor economy and give me a lot of rain, and our industry is going to do all right," says Roy Dust, product specialist with Briggs & Stratton Yard Power Products Group - Commercial Division. "Give me the best economy you can, but if it's not raining, none of us are going to do squat."

The irony, of course, is that contractors can't control the weather; so they make decisions based on those other two factors. And when it comes to zero-radius turn mowers, there are several things to consider heading into 2009.

The economy

"We're all bracing for a tough year," says Gilbert Peña, commercial segment strategy manager for John Deere. "Contractors, though, are optimistic the economic trend might not affect them. They have a strong feeling we can make it through this thing."

One way to do that is to hang on to a mower a little bit longer.

"The majority of the commercial customers tend to do a higher amount

of maintenance on their mowers, rather than replace them," Dust says. "It's become more important to look at cost of operation, return on investment and productivity. The fewer people they can do more with, the lower their overhead, the lower their personnel issues."

Briggs & Stratton, which owns the Ferris brand, hopes contractors will do that with the Evolution, a compact zero-radius turn mower introduced late last year.

"Contractors needed the faster ground speed that a stand-on or a

smaller zero-turn rider provides them than an intermediate walk-behind with a sully does," Dust explains. "It's premature to say we're going to revolutionize the market. It is as compact as a stand-on, yet it is a dedicated ride-on with a very ergonomically correct and comfortable position to be in."

Doing more, more efficiently is a universal mantra.

"It looks like manufacturers are trying to take costs out and find ways to produce them for less money and really put good technology in zero-turn mowers, but keep them inexpensive," says Tim Cromley, sales and marketing manager for Walker Manufacturing.

Walker's zero-turn mowers employ electronic fuel injection (EFI) systems.

"The payoff is a proven technology," Cromley says. "We've continued to develop electronic fuel injections as an improved method for clean air and fuel efficiency."



New zero-turn mowers are more efficient and compact than previous generation models.

→ Wright Stander ZK



↑ Toro's Z Master G3

→ FERRIS
Propane Powered
IS 3100ZP



→ Grasshopper
FrontMount 735BT



Exmark Manufacturing, which introduced its Next Lazer Z at GIE+EXPO last year, also offers an EFI solution.

"We currently have EFI engines that meet the needs of some green-compliant definitions," says Dan Dorn, product sales manager. "It will be imperative that all contractors manage their money and their debt-to-asset ratio, and how they structure their business."

Alternative fuels

When gasoline prices rise as they did last summer, many contractors begin

looking at alternatives. Propane still seems the most viable, but that might change over the next decade.

Hustler Turf Equipment recently introduced the first all electric zero-turn riding mower. The battery-driven Hustler Zeon holds a charge for up to 80 minutes.

"If you imagine our industry five years, 10 years from now, what kind of run times can we get from a 100% electric machine?" muses Adam Mullet, director of marketing for Hustler Turf Equipment. "That's what we see as the long, long-term goal."

Batteries are an emerging technology, but right now they're not quite capable of delivering a day's worth of cutting.

"It's in its infancy," Dust says of all-battery powered mower technology, "but I think with the incoming (Obama) administration, and with the trend that has been started, it's on a much more accelerated course than it was (last year)."

Still, there's no substitute for a little rain. **L.M.**

↓ Walker's MT31L mower with electronic fuel injection



Change the landscape.

With almost 40 job-matched attachments for landscaping, you can get more done in less time. Check out Bobcat attachments for turf installation, land clearing, hardscaping, site maintenance, irrigation or for plants, trees and shrubs at www.bobcat.com/changelandscape.

Soil Conditioner



Flail Cutter



Root Grapple



Brush Saw



Landscape Rake



Seeder



1.866.823.7898 ext 969



Bobcat

One Tough Animal.

©2009 Bobcat Company. All Rights Reserved.



BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author is a partner with the Wilson-Oyler Group consultancy. Visit www.wilson-oyler.com.

Want *profitable* growth? Find the missing link between sales, operations

Growth is important to most business owners, but *profitable* growth is even more important. Profitable growth is possible when you link sales and operations.

The linking of sales and operations must be a company-wide discipline. Often, sales and operations departments exist in separate silos within a company. The sales department's core objective is to sell *new* work; the operations department's core objective is to execute the work and maintain client relationships. A common misconception is that sales departments *sell* work and operations departments *perform* work.

How do you link sales and operations, and what are you trying to accomplish?

Profit's the goal

To grow profitably, companies need to:

- › Sell projects that operations can produce profitably;

- › Bring in business that improves your operation's density model, thereby reducing travel;
- › Land new projects that lead to profitable enhancement work;
- › Sell to customers who have multiple properties meeting the above criteria;
- › Operate efficiently to maintain a competitive edge;
- › Engineer operations to meet customer types and project types being sold; and
- › Leverage service lines (maintenance, irrigation service, tree care, plant health care) and cross sell.

Cautions to heed

To grow profitably, companies must resist the temptation to:

- › Take only the low-hanging fruit (easy sales);
- › Match low prices;
- › Drive sales by referrals, which is easy but not necessarily profitably linked to operations; and
- › Grow solely for the sake of growth.

Back to basics

Organizationally, companies must:

- › Align sales to operations and vice versa;
- › Strategically plan growth;
- › Strategically build operations;
- › Foster communication opportunities that keep sales and operations aligned; and
- › Relentlessly control overhead costs to maintain their competitive edge.

Owners, by nature, have either an operational or a sales focus. They build their companies around their personal strengths, at least initially. Eventually, to succeed, they must link sales and operations.

Keep the concept of linking sales and operations at the forefront of planning and strategy sessions for this to remain part of the company culture. It's not easy, but the payoff in *profitable* growth is worth the effort and discipline.

The sales department's core objective is to sell *new* work; the operations department's core objective is to execute the work and maintain client relationships.

A common misconception is that sales departments *sell* work and operations departments *perform* work.

Quality Turf at a Lower Cost!

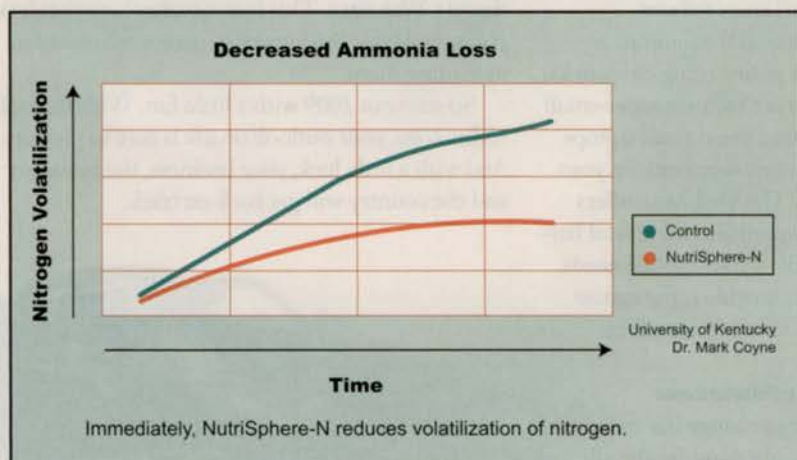


"Go with the power of green."

To reduce your fertilizer costs AND provide lawns with needed nutrition, use fertilizer with NutriSphere-N[®] from The Andersons!

The NutriSphere-N[®] Impact

Studies show that NutriSphere-N protects nitrogen from volatilization and nitrification.



NUTRISPHERE-N

- Decreased nitrogen loss
- Reduced nitrification
- Cost-effective
- Reduced environmental impact of nitrogen

NOW AVAILABLE!

For more information contact your Distributor, or your Andersons Territory Manager at 800-253-5296.

The Andersons[®]

www.AndersonsLawnProducts.com

© NutriSphere-N is a registered trademark of Specialty Fertilizer Products
The Andersons is a registered trademark of The Andersons, Inc.



INFOTECH

TYLER WHITAKER

The author is a freelance technologist. Contact him at 801/592-2810 or visit www.tylerwhitaker.com.

2009 technology buying guide



Let's face it: For many, 2008 was a tough year. Talk of recession, bailouts, financial meltdowns and endless election coverage has left us a little sober and in dire need of some fun. So with Christmas over and a new year ahead, it's time to get yourself the gifts you *really* wanted for Christmas. I've collected a list of my favorite technologies to help brighten your New Year.

T-Mobile G1 (Google) Phone | www.t-mobileg1.com

Looking for a new phone for the coming year? Check out the new phones running the Google Android mobile operating system. This next-gen mobile platform integrates all of your favorite Google software and search functionality into a state-of-the-art user experience.

T-Mobile is the first carrier to support the Google phone with its G1 offering. It's packed with all the features you have come to expect: high-speed 3G, Wi-Fi, touch screen, full keyboard and a 3.2-megapixel camera. Look for more carriers and handsets to be available in for 2009.

Dell Inspiron Mini 12 Laptop | www.dell.com

Now there's no need lug around that laptop, or learn to type on your smart phone using chopsticks. The latest trends in laptops are the new super-small "netbooks." At less than 3 lbs., these small laptops are the perfect replacement for your day planner. The Dell Mini offers plenty of storage (80 GB), speed (1.6 GHz) and battery power (six hours) for all of your mobile needs. The only thing you need to provide is the excuse for working poolside, instead of in your office.

2009 Tesla Roadster | www.teslamotors.com

If all the recent talk of climate change has really damped your spirits, you might consider the all-electric 2009 Tesla Roadster. This two-seat, rear-wheel-drive sports car will take you from 0 to 60 mph in under 4 seconds. With a top speed of

125 mph, you can put your cares far behind you.

The best part is the guilt-free, 248-hp, 375-volt AC induction air-cooled electric motor that powers the car. A 3.5-hour charge will get you a range of 220 miles.

This is the kind of car that should have "Congressional bailout dollars" written all over it.



Eye-Fi Wi-Fi SD Memory Cards |

www.eye.fi

Spend a little less time wrangling your digital photos this year with a Wi-Fi enabled secure digital (SD) memory card from Eye-Fi. If you're like me, then you love taking digital pictures. I've found

that taking them is the fun part, but uploading them to my home computer is another story.

These standard 2- and 4-GB SD cards work just like your existing cards. They also have a built-in Wi-Fi chip that can connect to your home wireless access point or the Internet. Imagine taking pictures and having them automatically uploaded to your home computer or one of 20+ online photo-sharing Web sites. This is one technology that lets you spend your time making memories instead of uploading them.

So start out 2009 with a little fun. With the right technology, your outlook on life is sure to pick up. And with a little luck, your business, the economy and the country will get back on track.

