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OFFICIAL
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P R O V E N S O L U T I O N S

COVER STORY

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17-hp, propane-certified Kawasaki engines that he had installed on commercial mowers. Each conversion cost him \$800.

Because he was using less than 700 gallons of propane that season, he paid top dollar for the fuel. After meeting state and local regulations he was per-

mitted to install a fill site at his shop.

Hansen has since been ramping up the number of propane-powered units his crews use. This season he's expecting to use more than 5,000 gallons of LP gas and, of course, he's buying it at a better price. He says the propane industry, which is aggressively attempting to build its presence in the landscape market,



Propane units are becoming more common, especially on commercial and municipal sites.

needs a "step-by-step guide" to help owners like himself.

"The interest in alternative fuels is in its infancy at this point," says Garry Busboom, director of research and development for mower manufacturer Exmark. Nevertheless, Busboom predicts industry adoption will grow as property managers and owners, especially those responsible for government and large commercial properties, seek to reduce the carbon footprints on their properties.

Ruppert Landscape, Laytonsville, MD, reportedly has been testing several different models of propane-fueled units on federal property in the Washington D.C. market, and many contractors and municipalities in Texas now operate propane mower fleets exclusively.

Texas is the hottest market in the U.S. for propane mowers for several reasons. It's where most LP gas is produced. Equally significant, the Propane Council of Texas offers \$1,000 incentives for the purchase of new factory-direct LPG, zero-turn commercial mowers or a conversion of a zero-turn commercial mower with less than 200 hours of operation.

Exmark's Busboom points out propane mowers, unlike gasoline mowers, can be operated during ozone-action days in cities such as Houston when the hours of use of gas-powered equipment are restricted.

The performance factor

One of the biggest concerns with using alternative fuels is performance, the amount of energy provided by each unit of fuel. Since LPG holds 86% of the energy of gasoline, it requires more

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The Andersons

COVER STORY

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storage volume to produce an equivalent amount of work, according to the Consumer Energy Center.

That's where another emerging alternative fuel, biodiesel, shows an advantage. And biodiesel, unlike propane which is a by-product of refining, is a truly domestic product as it is made from domestically produced vegetable oils.

Diesel provides the most punch for energy dollar (even when blended with biodiesel), and diesel-powered mowers are often the choice for municipalities or landscapers with big or tough properties to cut because they produce more torque and are better able to maintain blade speed in high or wet grass versus gasoline or LPG.

Because diesel fuel contains 12% more energy than gasoline and 52% more than propane, according to the Energy Information Center, it can produce more work per gallon of fuel. Extrapolated over 875 hours of use (35 hrs/wk X 25 wks), fuel savings can amount to as much as 500 gallons per mower, says Ray Garvey, marketing coordinator for The Grasshopper Co.

Additionally, improved engine technology, the introduction of ultra-low sulfur "clean" diesel and the growing availability of biodiesel provide new diesel-powered mowers with many of the same environmental advantages of alternative-fuel units, says Garvey.

He adds that Grasshopper tested propane for mowers extensively in the 1970s before deciding diesel offered its mowing customers more advantages than other energy sources.

Toro, which has done extensive testing on biodiesel fuels and other fuels for years, offers diesel mowers that accept up to 20% biodiesel (B20) in a blend with petroleum diesel. Biodiesel, says the company, is a non-toxic, clean-burning fuel that is biodegradable.

Toro says that B20 is approved for use for all of its 2008 or newer diesel-powered mowers, and offers biodiesel kits to refit 2003 or newer diesel-powered commercial equipment.



Competitive Lawn Services started with two propane-certified Kawasaki engine units.

In spite of appealing reasons for using biodiesel/petrodiesel blends, acceptance by landscape contractors to date has not been robust.

"Biodiesel hasn't really taken off as well as we had initially hoped, and we believe one of the biggest reasons has to do with the pricing disparity that now exists between gas and diesel fuels," says Randy Harris, senior marketing manager for Toro Landscape Contractor Equipment, Bloomington, MN.

"For years diesel fuel prices were much lower than gas. But, about the time we introduced our B20 equipment, diesel fuel prices shot up well beyond gas prices, and remain higher even today. More than anything else, that seemed to put a damper on the appeal of diesel and, ultimately, biodiesel.

"In addition, many contractors express concern about limited availability of biodiesel fueling stations, while others worry about their crews inadvertently mixing-up diesel and gas when refueling."

The National Biodiesel Board maintains a list of retail locations selling biodiesel on its website (biodiesel.org).

WHAT'S NEXT?

» Increased adoption of alternative fuels, especially for mowing government and large commercial sites.

» More prodding from environmental groups, farmers and government for the use of renewable fuels such as biodiesels and ethanol.

» More use of fuel injection on engines.

» Catalytic converters for the exhaust systems of gasoline- and diesel-powered mowers.

» Greater control over fuel spillage and fuel theft.

» Growing adoption of low-permeation fuel systems.

The site lists 1,334 locations across the nation. By contrast there are an estimated 115,200 retail operations selling gasoline in the U.S.

John Deere's new diesel mowers also accept B20.

"We and every other manufacturer are looking to step our way up to higher and higher contents for biofuels," says Deere's Pavcik. "We're dedicated to coming out with alternative-fuel machines, but we want to make sure they deliver the power and job productivity that customers want."

Gas still a contender

Does this growing attention to alternative fuels mean the end to gasoline units? Don't count on it, says Pavcik.

Engine manufacturers remain confident they can produce small, spark-ignited gasoline engines that meet all emission requirements and still offer great value for the price, he says.

"Technology coming to the small, air-cooled gasoline engines is becoming similar to the technology in the gasoline engines in today's automobiles," he says. "Fuel injection is coming on pretty strong. It offers the mower operator

between 10% to 30% fuel savings, depending on where they're running it in the duty cycle."

Manufacturers are making progress in curbing emissions, as well, he points out. Today's mowers generate significantly less exhaust emissions than they did in 1995, when California first regulated small-engine emissions.

Equipping new mowers with closed-loop fuel injection equipped with oxygen sensors and catalytic converters will reduce emissions even more.

While alternative-fueled units offer specific advantages, gas-powered units will remain commercial mowers' work-horse into the near future.

Beyond that . . . we'll see. **LM**

BIODIESEL PRECAUTIONS



- » Make sure you buy biodiesel from a reputable source.
- » Buy fuel that is already blended. This will help ensure that the biodiesel has been properly handled and treated for climatic needs.
- » Never buy from someone making fuel in his or her garage or backyard.
- » Biodiesel is a cleaning agent, which means petroleum deposits may end up in the fuel filter until the system is clean. Stick to your regular maintenance schedule unless your mower feels sluggish when accelerating. This is a symptom of a plugged filter and should be checked immediately.

Source: *The National Biodiesel Board*

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THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

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

Sales: The hardest position to fill

The greatest personnel challenge we face these days in building a grounds maintenance business is finding and managing sales representatives. We are deep into the second year of an economic recession, without any real and sustainable uptick in demand or prices in sight. Revenues are flat, at best, for more than 80% of the industry.

Revenue growth comes from two sources only: acquisition or salesmanship. Either way, you are taking market share at the expense of others, and you are buying business. And after two years of cutting costs, there is little overhead left to pare. Therefore, an investment in sales and/or acquisition is a must.

The typical first investment for business owners is hiring a salesperson. The challenge is recruiting someone in sales these days feels a lot like sticking your hand in a bag of jelly beans and hoping to pick the right one. Otherwise, you run the risk of him or her taking too long to produce results.

But if you as the owner are not prepared to invest the time to be the salesperson — and most

owners don't want to — you must find *someone* to do battle out there for you. The alternative is a slow erosion of the top line, resulting from contract losses and decreased enhancement sales.

Reaching your goals

Success in sales is primarily driven by the quantity and quality of sales activities. The key activities are first calls, follow-ups, needs assessment, and negotiation. Even the best salespeople need help managing the quantity and quality of these activities.

As you can see from the chart below, there is very little time to waste in a selling cycle. A sales goal of \$1 million in new contracts at a target job size of \$30,000 per year requires 33 new jobs sold. Applying a close ratio of 22%, the salesperson will need to bid 152 jobs. Given that not every lead qualifies (only 40% typically), the salesperson must make 379 first calls and a minimum of three additional follow-ups to get to bid the job.

Each of these activities requires *time*. By applying reasonable estimates for each activity, it becomes obvious there is little time for marketing activities and inefficiency.

Therefore, because it is not always possible to recruit the best salesperson on the first attempt, you must be certain you establish expectations clearly at the start. Before you hire a salesperson (assuming you do not take the job), there are two things you must impress upon him or her:

- 1. You are being hired to do sales, not marketing.** Marketing is an office activity, and sales is a field activity. You must live in the field.
- 2. Expect your activities to be scrutinized weekly.** You will be managed to pipeline numbers, and if this makes you uncomfortable, don't take the job.

The best hire, of course, is someone who has strong local contacts and relationships and can hit the ground running. You need to find someone who is a planner/doer, undistracted by marketing activities and unperturbed by the close and helpful management of their activities.

	Benchmark factors	Activity	Hours per activity	Hours required	Weekly activity
Sales goal	\$1,000,000				
Target job size	\$30,000				
Number of jobs to be closed	33	Negotiation*	8	267	0.7
Closing ration (likely)	22%				
Number of proposals required	152	Needs assessment**	4	606	3
Qualified ratio (likely)	40%				
Number of first time calls	379	First calls ⁺	0.50	189	3.8
Minimum follow-up calls required	3				
Number of follow-up calls	1,136	Follow-ups ⁺	0.50	568	11.4
TOTAL TIME REQUIRED*				1,630	

* Total time required does not include company meetings, measuring properties and estimating time
 * Negotiation — face to face includes proposal writing, presentation preparation, call time and drive time
 ** Needs assessment — face to face includes preparation, call time and drive time
 + First/follow-up — includes phone and data base documentation time

The next great leap in broadleaf weed control is coming.

October 2010.



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“Even after 30 years with Lawn Doctor, we still get calls here from people saying, ‘I want to speak with the guy with the funny name that I can’t remember,’ and the calls are automatically passed on to me,” says **Ewald Alstadt**, vice president of operations & support services for Lawn Doctor. “I’m an immigrant, one of the legal ones. I was born in East Germany, and all of my family escaped into West Germany before the Berlin Wall was put up.”

Briefly describe your role with Lawn Doctor. My role is to coordinate and provide support for the Lawn Doctor operating system in the key processes and procedures it provides all franchise owners in our system — the new ones and those that have been in our family for 20-plus years or more. This includes training, business planning/management, marketing, sales, service, equipment, agronomic, horticultural, pest, technology and customer relations.

What’s the most important thing you have learned since joining Lawn Doctor in 1981? First is that Mother Nature is unpredictable, and sooner or later reminds you she is the boss. Second is you must have a plan, whether it’s a business plan or a personal plan for your life. You should have an end in mind and a list of action items that must be executed in order to accomplish your goals. You must plan, and you must execute the plan.

What’s the biggest change you’ve seen in the industry in recent years? Customers are buying differently, they’re communicating differently and their expectations have shifted. We need to focus on customers’ needs, and use new ideas and technology to meet those needs. We have to get better at using our business and operating data to make better business decisions regarding customers’ specific desires.

What about the lawn care business do you find most rewarding? It’s been absolutely awesome to be able to work with new franchise owners and help them get started, grow their business and become successful using our operating system. I’ve formed some great relationships with franchise owners that are priceless to me. This is a great business that affords

owners tremendous operating flexibility, low inventory levels and the freedom to determine their own comfort zones and lifestyle ceilings.

Obviously, you believe franchises still offer great opportunities for individuals. A franchise provides a strong branding message that the public recognizes. From a franchise owner’s perspective, it offers a jump-start to starting the new business or opening up in a new market.

While a franchisor can’t guarantee that an owner won’t make mistakes — everybody makes mistakes — it will do everything it can to reduce the number of mistakes. A franchise also offers the opportunity to join a network of other franchise owners to share ideas and best practices in a non-competitive framework. And, finally, and this is certainly critical

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Lawn Doctor

CURRENT LEADERS: Russell Frith, president/CEO; Robert Magda, sr. vice president of manufacturing; Ewald Alstadt, vice president of operations & support services; Janice Capiro, vice president finance & administration; Scott Frith, vice president of marketing & franchise development

HEADQUARTERS: Holmdel, NJ, with 460+ locations

EMPLOYEES: 1,500 to 2,000 peak season

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: Past president, Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA); past board member, Professional Landcare Network (PLANET); certified franchise executive of the International Franchise Association

ALSTADT’S HOBBIES: Freshwater and ice fishing

WEBSITE: Lawndocor.com

to the success of any franchise and to the individual company owners, it provides a regularly updated and improved operating system that covers every aspect of the business — from the financials to the field service itself.

“THIS IS A GREAT BUSINESS THAT AFFORDS OWNERS ... THE FREEDOM TO DETERMINE THEIR OWN COMFORT ZONES AND LIFESTYLE CEILINGS.” — EWALD ALSTADT, LAWN DOCTOR



Knock out multiple weeds in a single round.

Only Solitare® takes on crabgrass, sedges and broadleaf weeds with no tank mixing required.

Fighting more than one weed problem used to require more than one product. Now there's new Solitare® herbicide from FMC Professional Solutions, the only all-in-one postemergence solution designed to help you control multiple weeds in a single, fast-acting application.

Wherever several weeds like crabgrass, sedges and broadleaf weeds come together, you'll experience the Solitare "sweet spot." That's because Solitare controls or suppresses over 60 weeds without the hassle and cost of tank mixing. Dual-action Solitare herbicide features a patent-pending combination of active ingredients that combats weeds from the foliage down and the root up. Solitare also impacts viability of seeds and tubers within the soil, helping to decrease weed populations this season and next. When multiple weeds gang up on you, there's only one solution you want in your corner: Solitare herbicide.

For more information on Solitare and other solutions from FMC, visit www.fmcprosolutions.com or contact your FMC Sales Representative or local FMC Distributor.

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WEEDWATCH

STANDING SENTINEL TO PROTECT PLANT HEALTH



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solution
Snapshot®
specialty
herbicide

HAIRY BITTERCRESS

Cardamine hirsuta

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ The leaves on this winter or summer annual consist of two to four pairs of round leaflets arranged alternately along the stem, up to 12 in. high. Individual leaflets are round in outline.
- ▶ Small white flowers occur in clusters at the end of stems.
- ▶ It's often found in wet, disturbed areas such as landscape beds, containers or poorly drained turf.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Hairy bittercress can have multiple genera-

tions per year, and is spread by seed that projects when the plants are disturbed. Pre-emergent herbicides are considered to be the best way to maintain control of this weed.

- ▶ When putting in landscape beds, start with weed-free soil. A few weeks after transplanting, apply a pre-emergent herbicide and cover with a layer of mulch. Be sure to read and follow the pre-emergent herbicide label to ensure all of your desirable plants are tolerant of the product.



Recommended
Dow AgroSciences
solution
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YELLOW WOODSORREL

Oxalis stricta

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This perennial features hairy stems and reproduces via seeds and rhizomes.
- ▶ Leaves alternate along the stem with three heart-shaped leaflets.
- ▶ Bright yellow flowers have five petals that flare outward.
- ▶ It prefers moist to slightly dry conditions in rich loamy soil.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Yellow woodsorrel is not easily controlled with two-, three- or four-way

post-emergence herbicides. Repeat spring applications are usually needed. Ideally, a pre-emergence herbicide should be used to keep woodsorrel from becoming a problem. Check the product label to see whether woodsorrel is controlled.

- ▶ Perennial broadleaf weeds are capable of living more than two years. Proper turf maintenance is the key to controlling this weed. Fertilize, mow and water turf to encourage dense growth.

For more information regarding these and other turf weeds — and related control technologies and tips — please visit www.DowProvesIt.com or call 800/255-3726.

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