



### Vermeer Corp.

With a rated tip capacity of 2,400 lbs. and SAE rated operating capacity of 840 lbs., the new S800TX mini skid steer can efficiently lift and transport a large load of material in and around confined spaces. The hydraulic system of the S800TX is capable of providing 14 gpm, while a spring-cushioned, ride-on platform offers broad jobsite visibility. The 40.5 in. wide unit is powered by a 35-hp diesel engine. A universal mounting plate allows operators to quickly switch attachments. [Vermeer.com](http://Vermeer.com)

### Caterpillar

A new laser-based AccuGrade grading system for Cat C-Series skid-steer loaders, multi-terrain loaders and compact track loaders combines the capability of the "Level Best Grading Box" with the C-Series loader's integral electro/hydraulic controls, to create an accurate, automated grading system. The system establishes flat or single-slope grades to within  $\pm 0.25$  in. without grade stakes or the expense of grade checkers and stake-setting surveyors. Machines grade more area per hour — and are more fuel-efficient in the process. [Cat.com](http://Cat.com)



### John Deere Construction

The D-Series skid steer loaders (318D, 320D, 326D, 328D and 332D models) feature 24% more room than their predecessors and 6 in. more headroom. They're also quieter, positively pressurized and feature a larger door opening. The 50% noise reduction in and around the D-Series cab comes from a hydraulic fan drive, an auto idle feature (which also saves fuel) and electronically controlled engines. [Johndeere.com](http://Johndeere.com)



### Bobcat

The S650 skid-steer loader (pictured here with a snow blade attachment) is part of the M-Series line of compact loaders and excavators launched in 2009. It has a rated-operating capacity of 2,690 lbs. and an operating weight of 8,327 lbs., and features a vertical-lift-path design. Standing 6 ft., 9 in., the unit has a maximum travel speed of 12.3 mph and a standard hydraulic flow of 23 gpm. Options include selectable joystick controls, two-speed travel and high-flow hydraulics. [Bobcat.com/loaders](http://Bobcat.com/loaders)

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# ACUTABOVE

GREEN INDUSTRY MAINTENANCE LEADERS » BY DAN JACOBS

Not many CEOs will admit they knew little or nothing about the industry when they took over the reins, but that's the situation **Anil Hiremath** found himself in when he moved from the auto industry to The Groundskeeper six years ago.

"I was just so ready to get into a work environment — a company — where I could really make a difference," Hiremath says. Hiremath came from Toyota, but now uses his business acumen to run this Tucson-based landscaping operation. Here he discusses the issues the company and the industry face.

## TOP TRENDS

» **One-stop shop.** Customers are not just expecting one or two things from a contract provider; they're looking for a full range of services. To be a successful contractor, you can't just say 'we're here to trim and prune, pick up trash and cut the grass.' You've got to really be thorough in what you can cover. Customers don't want to be nickel-and-dimed. You have to find a creative way to package that stuff into one monthly amount that works for you — and works for them.

» **Money vs. relationship.** Bidding methodologies are starting to change. We're put through more online and reverse auctions. They want one price for all of their properties. It's taken relationship out of the equation and, to a certain extent, quality and customer service.

» **Vendor consolidation.** Larger customers are looking to consolidate what they do. They are looking to save money by having consolidation of vendors. They're making us do the work of managing the property vs. having facility managers manage a bunch of vendors.

## TOP OBSTACLES

» **Increased competition.** We're seeing a ton of outsiders coming in. People who are primarily construction or design/build are now getting into maintenance because of the lack of work on their side. It increases competition, and many of these guys don't have a thorough understanding of how to bid, and then perform these



The Groundskeeper's  
Anil Hiremath

## INSIDE INFO

**Company:** The Groundskeeper

**Headquarters:** Tucson, AZ

**Employees:** Nearly 800 full-time

**2009 revenue:** \$36 million

**LM Top 150 Ranking:** No. 25

**Key to being a maintenance leader:** "For us, hands down, it's easily been how we're training and really focusing on our employees with regard to maintenance. There is a specific difference among design/build, construction and even improvements/enhancements. Every new employee has a 30-day routine they've got to go through. We've stuck to our rule of no more than 20% construction. When you really focus on your core competency, that's how you become a maintenance leader. You can't be all things to all people."

maintenance jobs. It's really muddying the water and making it tough for those of us who hang our hats on this shingle.

» **Pricing pressure.** There's the continued downward pricing pressure due to the economy. We've actually seen the price decreases — or at least the rate of the decreases — significantly slowing down. It may have bottomed out, but we don't see that trend reversing itself in the next few months or, even, year.

## TOP OPPORTUNITIES

» **Initiative.** This has been a time to build partnerships with our clients. We are being proactive: 'We know your budgets are down; we know your revenues are down. We're willing to accommodate a lower price. Let's discuss the scope of services.' It's not realistic to say we're going to provide a 15% or 20% price cut and keep the same level of service. The clients who value you are going to want to negotiate. These guys are going to remember that when the cycle turns.

» **Quality people.** There are a lot of talented people out there. We've always wanted to maintain high levels of quality and customer service. We don't have to keep an individual who doesn't want to go that extra mile for the customer because there are people willing to do that. There are a bunch of talented folks looking for opportunities to further their careers.

» **Entrepreneurial spirit.** It's really been beneficial for us to allow our branch managers to be a little bit more entrepreneurial. We're not dictating their book of work in terms of the customer mix. We're really allowing people to say, 'The opportunities here for us are ...' and we're supporting those folks.

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LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT (ISSN 0894-1254) is published monthly (12 issues per year) by Questex Media Group LLC, 306 W Michigan St, Suite 200, Duluth, MN 55802. **Subscription rates:** one year, \$54, two years \$76 in the United States & Possessions; \$87 for one year, \$127 for two years in Canada and Mexico; all other countries \$165 for one year, \$246 for two years. For airmail delivery, include an additional \$75 per order annually. Single copies (pre-paid only): \$8 in the United States; \$10 in Canada and Mexico; \$15 all other countries. Back issues, if available: \$16 in the U.S., \$20 in Canada and Mexico; \$30 all other countries. Add \$6.50 per order for shipping and handling. **Periodicals postage paid** at Duluth, MN 55806 and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Please send address changes to Landscape Management, P.O. Box 1288, Stokie, IL 60076-0288. Canadian G.S.T. number: 840 033 278 RT0001. Publications Mail Agreement Number 40017597. Printed in the U.S.A.



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## The technology trap

*Due to unexpected volume, we cannot take your call right now. Please try again later.*

**T**hose words were etched into my brain after spending several hours hitting the redial button, trying to preorder the iPhone 4.

Yes, I'm one of "those" people. This was after repeatedly (and simultaneously) trying to log into Apple's website to place an order. Neither the phone system nor the website was working — apparently overloaded by the sheer unexpected volume of calls.

I eventually was able to preorder my phone (and one for my wife), but it took a 10-minute walk and a 20-minute wait in line at a nearby AT&T store. That 30-minute investment in human contact accomplished what nearly five hours of labor-saving, efficiency-improving technology couldn't.

Simply put, no matter how advanced our tools become, there is no replacing face-to-face interaction.

Whether it's email, smart phones, social media, radio, television or some yet-to-be-invented form of technology that gives us greater access and insight into our customers' lives and buying patterns, nothing will surpass the value of a handshake, a smile and time spent in the presence of customers.

There are a number of challenges tied to the over-reliance on technology. No matter how good the tools, no one wants to live in a house built by untrained carpenters, plumbers and electricians overseen by an inexperienced contractor. Landscape contractors have access to the same materials. Why is it some

are able to charge more for their services? They've proven their employees have the knowledge, skills and tools to get the job done well. They make clients feel comfortable from start to finish. Technology becomes a seamless part of the experience.

If only Apple and AT&T learned that lesson. When I finally pre-ordered the phones, I was given tracking numbers, which I checked daily (I told you I was one of those people). I also was told I would be sent an email notification when our phones were available for pickup.

The tracking info indicated the phones arrived at the AT&T store on a Thursday. I stopped by the store, even though I hadn't received the email indicating I could pick them up. They weren't ready. I tried again the following day (even though I still hadn't received the "pick-up" email). This time they were ready, and I happily took the two gleaming gadgets home.

The first email — which I read on my new iPhone — came four days after my torturous wait ended. It read, in part:

*We are working hard to fulfill your order as soon as possible. Due to the extraordinary demand for the iPhone, your order is not yet available for shipment. Reservations are processed in the order that they are received. Thank you for your patience.*

Now, don't take this as a rant against technology. Clearly my obsession with the new iPhone shows I'm no technology hater. Most of the problems boil down to human error. Whether it's inexperience, lack of training or laziness, technology is only as effective as the person interfacing with it. In other words, make sure your people are trained — and don't allow them to use technology to replace human interaction. No matter how helpful gadgets become, they should never replace human interaction.

According to two recent emails I received, I might have two more devices ready for me sometime in the near future. Anyone out there looking for a couple of iPhones? Just call my automated line at 1-800...







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