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# THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

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

## Re-evaluating account managers

If you are in the grounds maintenance business — and who isn't these days — the one position that will undergo dramatic transformation over the next few years is that of account manager. The reasons why are simple:

1. To flatten out overhead expense growth, account managers must handle a larger book of business.
2. To maximize contract retention and enhancement sales, they must address the customer's real service need.

The customer's value proposition is driven by the **Price-Product-Service** experience. This proposition is shifting dramatically (see Table 1). In its simplest terms, the **Product** has become a commodity, while **Service** has remained focused on horticultural expertise and responsiveness. As a result, the only point of differentiation is now **Price**.

TABLE 1: PRICE-PRODUCT-SERVICE EXPERIENCE

Year	Price	Product	Service
2007	30%	50%	20%
2010	60%	10%	30%
	Contract cost	Mowing Spring clean Fall Clean Irrigation Fertilization Pruning	Responsiveness Communication Proactivity Budget management Speed

Here's the problem: Unless you are the lowest price provider in the market, you *will* lose work if you can't differentiate convincingly and consistently. The customer's real service needs are cost management and proactive communications. I apologize for the "proactive" cliché, but few deliver this very well — as almost any property manager will tell you. The solution requires investments in a combination of web-based technologies and account manager retraining and recruiting.

### Web-based customer technology

The account manager of the future simply cannot take any more phone calls, manage crews and hope to deliver a better level of service without off-loading some of the interaction to the customer. The banking industry did it through ATMs and online banking. The leaders in the Green Industry will do it through online scheduling, service order, work order and invoice management in a direct customer interface.

In addition, these customer needs will need to be seamlessly integrated into production management and scheduling to ensure satisfaction. Web-based software already exists to do this — and it is being used right now.

### The new and improved account manager

Today's typical Green Industry account managers are horticulture experts who know how to talk to people. This is fine as it goes, but that in no way qualifies them to be budget managers and salespeople.

The future account manager will more closely resemble one who, today, works in the retail world. These professionals must demonstrate the return on investment the buyer achieves selling the vendor's products, as well as working with the buyer to provide ideas that further drive their margins.

Similarly, leaders in the Green Industry will accomplish these goals by providing account budgeting tools, sales training, and commission structures that attract a more highly paid professional. Many of these tools are available already.

I see these changes as an enormous opportunity for the industry, rather than something to be feared — or worse, ignored. We are experiencing a very normal economic process associated with the commoditization of any product. If we want to avoid price discounting as the only point of differentiation, we are going to have to learn some new tricks from those in industries who have already traveled the path on which we now find ourselves.

The good news is the leaders in these industries are making better margins now than they did before.

# Net Margin Up . . . 4 points

## Cut Costs While Growing Your Business . . .

### Is that Really Possible?

Ask Scott Hall, President of Classic Landscaping, and he'll tell you, absolutely. Two years ago Classic was struggling to maintain the status quo. Their overhead was creeping up faster than the business was growing. Scott lamented, "We reached a point where we could not sustain our costs and maintain profitability... we had to do something."

Like other landscapers, Classic was feeling the same business pressures. Scott projected, "The nature of business is fundamentally changing, and we must learn to operate in this new environment. Business management software is a critical tool for success now and in the future."

### A Vision Realized

Classic knew they needed to replace their old software system. Scott recalls, "We were pouring a lot of time and data into our system, but we couldn't get any information out of it. Only the office staff at our main location could use it and what's more, the software required too many office people."

Classic began looking for an enterprise software system that would fit their entire business and soon discovered BOSS<sup>®</sup>LM. Scott reflected, "I had a vision for this type of product in the green industry when I first saw business management software while working on my MBA."

### Results that Just Keep Coming

With the new system in place, Classic went from spending 3 days working on payroll to just 3 hours. A similar story for invoicing resulted in improved cash flow and upgraded professionalism to clients.

Beyond overhead savings, Classic has been able to reap additional savings from direct job costs by more effectively managing jobs. Scott explained, "... the new system allows us to look at data on jobs in ways I could have only dreamed of a couple years ago. This information has enabled us to quickly identify the problems and fix them."

"We've made several changes to our business and all contributed to a significant increase in our net profit. I attribute 4% of our improved bottom line directly to BOSS<sup>®</sup>LM."

A little over a year after implementing the new system Scott says, "This is the greatest thing I've seen in the industry in a long time. BOSS's impact across the entire company is similar to the addition of our mulch blower to mulching services - radical improvement of operational efficiencies."

### Opportunities Now Flourish

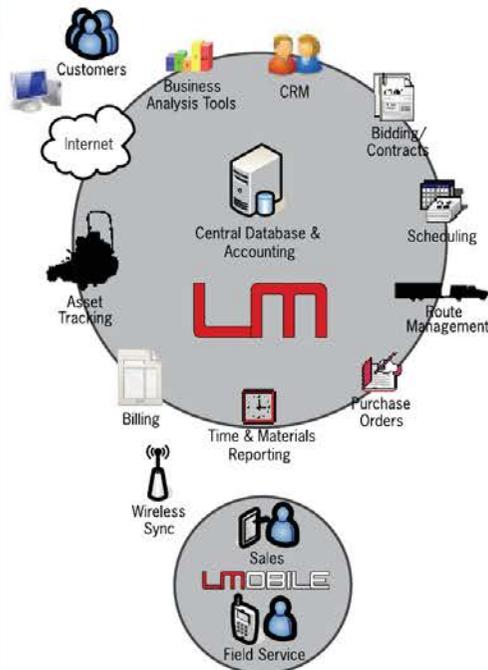
Classic has been able to shift costs from administration to other critical areas of the business. This flexibility is essential for the success of long-term growth. "As these resources are re-deployed," says Scott, "we are careful to place client care first on our list of priorities. Because BOSS<sup>®</sup>LM shoulders increasing administrative burdens for us, we have more time to evaluate other essential facets of our operation."

The changes Classic made have not only improved the bottom line but the quality of life at work. Scott contemplated that, "...two years ago running the business was a drudgery, now it's exciting!" So exciting that Classic is looking for ways to expand the business. Classic Landscaping is clearly ready.



# BOSS<sup>®</sup>LM

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# LM REPORTS

YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH

## MAINTENANCE: MOWER ENGINES

### Schiller Grounds Care

BOB-CAT has reached its goal of 2011 EPA exhaust emission engine compliance throughout its mower line. This year, through advanced engine technology that includes new Kawasaki FX & FS Series engines as well as units that feature digital fuel injection and propane-power offerings, the line even more so will live up to its "green machine" designation. The new Predator-Pro 37hp DFI, with digital fuel injection, will provide an increase in fuel economy of up to 30% while significantly increasing engine performance through an Electronic Governor (E-Gov). Plus, the new LP-61 zero-turn riding mower features a 30hp Generac 990 propane engine that uses the same common liquid withdrawal propane tanks and technology that propane forklift trucks use. [BOBCATTurf.com](http://BOBCATTurf.com)



### Caterpillar

The C3.4B, C4.4 ACERT and C6.6 ACERT are three new additions to the Cat Tier 4 Interim/Stage IIIB technology industrial engine lineup. Ranging from 60 to 174hp, they are available with a wide choice of options that are suitable for compact and midrange equipment. Compared to existing Tier 3/Stage IIIA engines, these new engines produce fuel consumption improvements across the entire horsepower band. They will begin production and distribution prior to 2012, when Tier 4 Interim/Stage IIIB emissions standards take effect for this power category of engines. In addition, the C7.1 ACERT and C9.3 ACERT will be available prior to 2011, when Tier 4 Interim/Stage IIIB emissions standards take effect for this power category of engines. [Cat.com/industrial-oem](http://Cat.com/industrial-oem)

### John Deere Power Systems

JDPS introduces the generator drive power ratings for its entire lineup of Interim Tier 4 diesel engines. The new power ratings are the latest addition to its extensive lineup of standby and prime gen-set engines that meet emissions regulations around the world. In addition, John Deere will continue to offer a full lineup of reliable engines for use in standby applications, since emergency stationary applications are not required to use Interim Tier 4 engines with aftertreatment devices. For a full listing of engines and ratings, visit John Deere online today. [JohnDeere.com/jdpower](http://JohnDeere.com/jdpower)



### B<sub>3</sub>C Fuel Solutions LLC

Mechanic in a Bottle is designed to clean a fuel system and combustion chamber thoroughly and counteract the negative side effects of bio-fuels. The anticorrosive/metal deactivator cleans machine carburetors, revitalizes old fuel, and dissolves varnish and shellac safely. It improves octane, stabilizes fuel and provides upper cylinder lubricity. [MechanicInABottle.com](http://MechanicInABottle.com)

### Briggs & Stratton Commercial Power

Four new Vanguard single-cylinder engines, with gross horsepower ratings ranging from 5.5 to 10.0hp, feature the patent-pending TransportGuard system, an integrated switch that simultaneously shuts off the ignition and fuel. A high-mounted, canister-style air cleaner has 27% more filter area than several competitive units. An all-metal fuel tank reduces emissions, saves fuel and is mounted directly to the engine block — and the heat-treated PTO bearing races ensure long-lasting equipment performance. [VanguardEngines.com](http://VanguardEngines.com)





### Subaru

Two new models of electronic fuel injection engines — EH72 V-twin and EH72 UTV — are designed to reduce fuel consumption and emissions, while providing fast, easy starts in a wide range of ambient temperatures. The engines run on an open-loop system, which uses an electronic control unit. Using several different sensors that detect manifold pressure, ambient temperature and throttle position, the ECU constantly is relaying information to the injector, which then is able to deliver the proper air-to-fuel ratio. Allowing for differences in operating speed, applications and fuel type, the estimated fuel economy improvements are 11% to 25% better than a similar carbureted engine. *SubaruPower.com*

### Kohler

The Courage XTR-6 engine joins Kohler's line of walk-behind recoil and electric start engines. The 3.5-net-hp, vertical-shaft engine's Energy-Saver electric starter provides 30% more starts per battery charge and is 40% lighter than older models. It's also available with a 0.5 amp charging system. The overhead valve design provides efficient combustion and strong performance with minimal fuel consumption and emissions. A commercial-grade, cast-iron cylinder bore enhances engine life. All XT series engines also are equipped with a flywheel ball bearing, which protects the engine when operating at extreme angles. *Kohler.com*



### Plews/Edelmann

LubriMatic Green is a family of premium quality bio-based products that include a variety of spray lubricants, penetrants and greases. These lubricants are formulated from renewable, biodegradable vegetable oils and have four times the natural lubricity of most petroleum-based products. They are less likely than traditional lubricants to "thin down" at high temperatures, so they provide lower equipment operating temperatures. In addition, each product is made from U.S.-grown crops and does not have the harsh odor found in traditional lubricants. *LubriMaticGreen.com*

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**Pine Hall Brick**

RainPave permeable clay pavers were used on Kings Court in Haddonfield, NJ. Designers were able to prevent standing water and flooding of businesses in the 11,000-sq.-ft. plaza, while keeping with the Colonial-era surroundings

using the Rumbled RainPave (a 2009 Brick in Architecture winner).  
*PineHallBrick.com*



**Redland Brick**

The Tuscan Collection Genuine Clay Pavers are the first-ever wood-molded genuine clay paver series to be available in 6x6- and 6x9-in. sizes, which allow for more sophisticated paving bonds and patterns. The pavers are currently available in four popular Rocky Ridge colors: King William, Rustique, Cumberland and Bayshore. *RedlandBrick.com*



**Vögele**

The design of the new tracked Super 700 allows a wide range of paving applications on most varied job sites. It's designed for minor to medium jobs such as backfilling trenches with asphalt, surfacing footpaths or cycle paths, or paving asphalt on traffic areas or small roads — as well as variety of

landscaping tasks. The AB 200 Extending Screed in V version (with vibrators in the basic screed and the extending units) is specially designed for use with the Super 700. As the electrically heated screed floats on the mix, the paver achieves optimal pre-compaction. *Vogele.info*



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### Willow Creek

The new Ledgestone wall system stacks up as very user-friendly landscaping solution available for building naturally rustic freestanding walls and columns. Available in the same rich color blends as Willow Creek's paving stones, Ledgestone walls are built with 4x8x12-in. weathered units dry-stacked on a standard 6-in. leveling pad of compacted crushed-rock base material. Units are secured using concrete adhesive. Neither frost footings nor mortar are required. The units are easily modified with a masonry saw and can be configured in a variety of wall patterns.

[WillowCreekPavingStones.com](http://WillowCreekPavingStones.com)



### Belgard Hardscapes

Celtik Wall is Belgard's modern interpretation of prehistoric Celt-stone. Celtik Wall 90 (pictured) refers to its 90mm size (3.5 in.). The series offers authentic stone elegance combined with today's durability, flexibility and ease of maintenance. Installation applications include encircling greenery, partitioning property and accenting light posts, among other uses. The units are available in a range of colors. [Belgard.biz](http://Belgard.biz)



### Unilock

The modern yet elegant look of new Richcliff adds a touch of class to any landscaping project. With a compressive strength rating of up to four times the strength of conventional poured concrete,

it's a virtually indestructible paver that will not split, crack or fade. Features include a MicroBevel edge, Reala surface design, StayClean Stain Resistance Technology, a non-slip surface and an AutoAlign system. Available in squares and small and large rectangles. Colors include Pebble Taupe and Dawn Mist (a mixture of which is pictured). [Unilock.com](http://Unilock.com)

*continued on page 29*

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Site: Astor’s Mansion  
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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](http://www.nufarm.com/us).

**Better Choices. Better Business.**

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[www.nufarm.com/us](http://www.nufarm.com/us)

continued from page 27

## LAWN CARE: COMBINATION CHEMICALS

### BASF Professional Turf & Ornamentals

Onetime herbicide is a soluble liquid formulation that controls more than 70 annual broadleaf and grassy weeds. Onetime combines liquid-quinclorac-based Drive XLR8 herbicide with MCPP-P and dicamba, which provides fast entry into the plant, rainfastness in 30 minutes and more effective, consistent control of grassy and broadleaf weeds than other products. Onetime can be applied to both cool- and warm-season grasses, as well as tank-mixed with other commonly used products, including pendimethalin-based Pendulum herbicide, to enhance residual control. *BetterTurf.com*

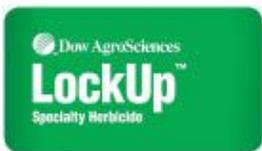


### Dow AgroSciences

LockUp specialty herbicide offers post-emergence control of dandelion and other key broadleaf weeds in turf such as white clover, kyllinga, English lawn daisy, chickweed and lespedeza. It provides activity at extremely low use rates (0.02 to 0.06 lb. of its active ingredient, penoxsulam), and is available for professional use on

cool- and warm-season turf. New granular formulations of LockUp on fertilizer

are currently available in the North from Lebanon Seaboard and John Deere Landscapes, with more formulators and distributors to be named in the near future. ProScape with LockUp (penoxsulam + dicamba + 2,4-D) is available through Lebanon Seaboard. John Deere Landscapes currently markets LockUp Extra (penoxsulam + dicamba) and LockUp Extra 2 (penoxsulam + dicamba + 2,4-D). [DowAgro.com/turf/prod/lockup.htm](http://DowAgro.com/turf/prod/lockup.htm)



### Bayer Environmental Science

Armada fungicide is a pre-mixed product containing two active ingredients, triadimefon and trifloxystrobin, for a broader spectrum of activity against most turf diseases of importance in lawns — and more convenience. It is designed specifically for lawn and landscape professionals and offers 30-day control of two major turfgrass diseases: brown patch and dollar spot. It also controls gray leaf spot, anthracnose, various leaf spots, red thread, southern blight and summer patch, among other turf diseases. It offers good compatibility for tank mixing with foliar fertilizers or insecticides. *BackedByBayer.com*

### FMC Professional Solutions

New Talstar XTRA granular insecticide combines the residual of Talstar with the speed of a new active ingredient, zeta-cypermethrin. The patent-pending formulation quickly disrupts the insect's nervous system, with a residual that lasts for at least four months. The unique, dense sand granule enables the product to penetrate mulch and thatch to reach many surface-feeding pests, yet appear invisible because of its small size. Talstar XTRA granular insecticide is labeled for use against most ants, (including fire ants), chinch bugs, fleas, ticks, mole crickets, crane flies and many other lawn pests. It's available in 25-lb. bags, which can cover more than 60 fire ant mounds (nearly 11,000 sq. ft.). *FMCProSolutions.com*



## BETTER RESULTS



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### APPLICATION RATE:

1.3 oz/1,000 sf of 4-Speed XT plus spreader-sticker (1 oz/gallon finished spray)

### APPLICATION EQUIPMENT:

LT Rich Z-Sprayer, 1/3 gal spray tips

### TIMING:

July 13, 2009

### SUMMARY:

"This was not ideal herbicide application timing for ground ivy control, but we still had great results on it and all the other weeds on the 4-Speed XT label. As a result, we saved several contracts. We'll be using a lot more 4-Speed XT and other Nufarm products in the future."

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## LMREPORTS

### IRRIGATION: TRENCHING & EXCAVATING



#### Volvo

The EW230C wheeled excavator is designed for heavier lift operations such as pipe laying and hard digging thanks to a new, more robust platform. When fitted with a standard counterweight, the rear axle weight remains below 12 tonnes — making it approved for road travel between sites. The EW230C is powered by a Volvo D6E EHE3 diesel engine, developing 125 kW/168hp net at 1,900 rpm. A choice of 18.7-ft. mono or optional articulated two-piece boom is available, while Volvo's automatic lubrication system not only ensures correct lubrication, but also reduces lubricant use by 50%. [Volvo.com/constructionequipment](http://Volvo.com/constructionequipment)

#### Case Construction Equipment

The Klac Quick Coupler System is available for seven Case compact and minimum swing radius excavators. The system features automatic locking that is visible from the cab, as well as a



secondary safety-locking feature. The system also maintains Case specifications regarding tip radius, minimizing the breakout force

impact. The quick coupler supports a full range of attachments, from buckets to rippers to hydraulic hammers. The coupler is available for all models of compact excavators — CX17B, CX27B, CX31B, CX36B and CX50B — and minimum swing radius excavator models CX75 and CX80. [CaseCE.com](http://CaseCE.com)

#### Toro

Boasting a 26hp Kawasaki engine, the new TRX-26 combines the power of a ride-on trencher with the maneuverability and control of a walk-behind. The patented Toro Dingo TX-style control system makes it easy to control. It eliminates the "jerk" steering required with handlebar control steering, allowing for smoother, more precise trenching. Three simple controls operate all traction and trenching functions. With zero-turn capability and ground pressure as low as 4.1 psi, the TRX-26 has the ability to access confined spaces without damaging existing turf. [Toro.com/trx](http://Toro.com/trx)



#### Extend Manufacturing

The new line of TMX Trowable Mini-Excavators features a quick-on and quick-off hitch system for use behind a standard half-ton pick-up, van or light-duty tow vehicle. No trailer is needed, and no commercial driver's license is required — making it the ideal option for

small contractors. Lockout drive hubs enable towing at highway speeds of 55 mph. And unlike conventional mini-excavators, TMX units eliminate tracks by using zero-turn technology. The drive tires are designed for mud terrain, ensuring performance and traction in demanding applications. Featuring a highly efficient orbital motor with tapered roller bearings on the output shaft, the wheel motors allow plenty of durability for tough loads. [TMX-Excavator.com](http://TMX-Excavator.com)