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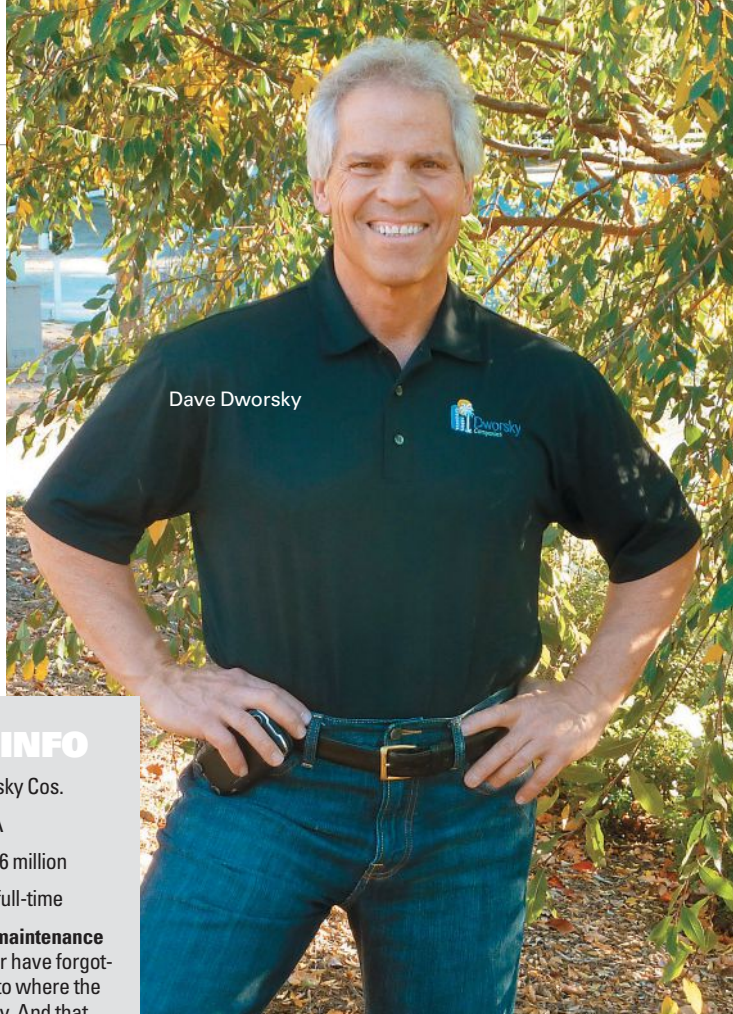
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PROVEN SOLUTIONS



Dave Dworsky

You might call **Dave Dworsky** a serial entrepreneur. For nearly 30 years, the owner of Dworsky Cos. has been buying, operating and selling a variety of service business. And since 1987, the Gardena, CA-based business has been evolving and providing customers with a variety of landscaping services.

Initially an interior plant business, Dworsky eventually sold that operation. “I then immediately ventured out in the business opportunity world and found a business that was synergistic with my old stable of clients and bought it, he says. “Through-out all the past business opportunities, I did learn the value of proactive, persistent and routine and consistent client communication. What illustrates this best is the client following and loyalty I have been blessed with through all my business transitions. Never have we forgotten them, nor have we ever taken anything for granted.”

INSIDE INFO

Company: Dworsky Cos.

HO: Gardena, CA

2010 revenue: \$16 million

Employees: 350 full-time

Keys to being a maintenance leader: We never have forgotten how we got to where the company is today. And that has been by taking care of the client and taking nothing for granted. We also maintain a flexible, resourceful and communicative company culture. We take care of our techs, our managers and our vendors. We also offer unique client programs to ensure client retention and commitment. The diversification of our client base, innovative operating and management technologies and the continuous challenge of management recruitment will continue to keep us at the forefront.

reduction is another challenge — and all this while maintaining reasonable margins will be difficult at best.

› **Regulations.** Local and state water restrictions make plant choices and grounds management difficult.

› **Costs.** Educating the client on the need to modify specifications is always a paramount. Insurance costs and the ‘statutory’ increases in Workman’s Compensation are always looming. Last but not least are the ‘expected escalations’ of oil prices and their impact on our fuel costs. We have to be competitive while being creative.

TRENDS

› **The environment.** Many trends today center on environmental consequences, like water management, the need for ‘smart controllers’ and the installation of drip systems, to mitigate inefficient water usage. Other examples of big industry trends are the installation of drought-tolerant plant materials and the goal of creating innovative plant designs to facilitate budget-reduced ‘discretionary’ plant replacement budgets.

› **Education.** Another trend involves continuing education and, for example, becoming certified in some of the key landscape component tasks such as irrigation auditing and effective, efficient irrigation design.

› **Diversification.** Besides our core landscape maintenance business, many companies are turning to other, ancillary services — offering their customers a bundle of service opportunities outside of the typical grounds maintenance tasks, like graffiti removal, environmental cleaning and sweeping services, to name a few.

OBSTACLES

› **Budget restrictions.** Some of the biggest obstacles facing our market are overall budget restrictions and reductions. Keeping pace with the client’s continuous requirement for a ‘good-looking’ project while coping with a major landscape budget

OPPORTUNITIES

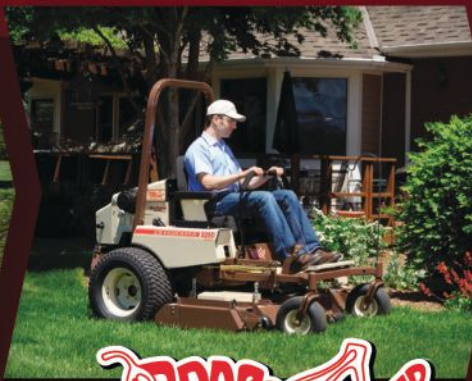
› **Growth.** I believe there are a number of wonderful opportunities ahead of us for 2011. For those companies whose plans are to grow organically with the expansion of existing and new client opportunities, there are also a number of organizations with the financial flexibility, business creativity and management horsepower who will have the ability to acquire companies within their market regions as tuck-ins. There is a wide window of this type of opportunity for those who wish to consolidate operations with the prospects of growth while achieving the anticipated economies of scale. We have done three in the last two years, and we will hopefully do more in 2011.

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Educate to aerate

Knowledge is the power to getting more clients signed up for aeration services.

Core removal through aeration helps breathe life into a lawn.

NEW ENGLAND IS a good market for aeration. The clay soils, thatch build-up and soil compaction issues make it a valuable service to improve the overall condition of turf. However, Cliff Drezek, general manager of Arbor-Turf Services, Inc., in Marlboro, MA, says that doesn't necessarily make it an easy sell. When the company first introduced the service in 1995, it didn't catch on right away. He saw a need for it among his existing clients' lawns, but it required education for them to understand that need for themselves. It's just one of those add-ons that takes persistence, says Drezek. You often need to pitch the service and remind clients about its benefits several times before they give it a shot. Once they do, and they witness the benefits, making the sale next year is much easier for this annual service.



Cliff Drezek

One reason aeration can be initially tricky to sell is clients don't really understand the benefits. Drezek says a big part of selling the aeration service is being knowledgeable and fine-tuning the sales pitch to the client's needs. "Whether it's a thatch problem, a soil compaction issue, or maybe even drought, you need to explain how the process will stimulate grasses to fill in and improve the overall quality of the lawn," he says. "The long-term benefits in the health of the turf are very noticeable."

But it's not something that looks different overnight, so that's where education comes in. Once they see those long-term benefits, they'll understand and likely become repeat clients for the service.

LESSONS LEARNED

Marking sprinkler heads on a property that's about to be aerated is a service Drezek says the company now charges

to handle. His employees used to spend as many as 45 minutes marking all of the heads on a large property, which was time and money lost. "Now we add it as a priced service in contracts if clients don't want to do it themselves," he says.

But no matter how diligent crews or the client is in marking heads, puncturing an irrigation system can still occur. As a result, Drezek recommends crewmembers are trained to do some minor repairs, such as fixing a damaged irrigation line. That also requires having basic parts and tools on hand.

Another challenge the company has faced since they began offering this service is finding out the hard way that irrigation systems aren't the only on-site concern. After damaging a few invisible fences, Drezek says the company quickly learned how important it was to communicate with the client. "In terms of a lesson, that was baptism by fire," he says. "We hit a few invisible fences and found they are very expensive to repair. It could be \$500 just to fix one damaged area of the fence. You realize how important it is to make sure you know who has one and where it's buried."

In terms of marketing, Drezek says he uses leave-behind printed materials and talks one-on-one with the client to pitch the service. It all comes down to education. They have to know what it is and why they need it. "Overall, it's a very good service to add on, and the customer will get a lot of value out of it since it will make their turf that much better," adds Drezek. "And it can be a great enhancement for business, as far as profitability is concerned. Like anything else, it's just a matter of getting your clients initially interested."

The author is a freelance writer with six years of experience covering landscaping.

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY NAME: Arbor-Turf Services, Inc.

HEADQUARTERS: Marlboro, MA

WHY AERATION? The clay soils and thatch problems in the region made it a no-brainer.

INITIAL INVESTMENT: You can start out with a walk-behind aerator, which is easier to get to the site. If using a tow-behind aerator, you'll need the tractor to pull it and a trailer to haul it. You'll also need some tools for making minor irrigation repairs, hand tools to do minor lawn repairs on any area that gets torn up, and flags to mark the sprinkler heads if you plan to offer that service.

INVESTMENT RECOUP TIME: First year, if you have a client base.

WHY CUSTOMERS LIKE IT? They get an overall healthier looking lawn.



AT A GLANCE

COMPANY NAME: U.S. Lawns of Western Kentucky

HEADQUARTERS: Mayfield, KY

OWNER: Mark Carrico, president

EDUCATION: Murray State University, degree in agricultural business

FOUNDED: 2004

LOCATIONS: One

MARKET AREA: Far western Kentucky

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 7 (peak)

SERVICES OFFERED: Lawn maintenance, enhancements, lawn care, snow

HOBBIES: Vacationing with family and friends

FAMILY: Wife, Beth, and daughter, Anna

While you may not be able to fix past mistakes, learning from those errors is the next best thing. **Mark Carrico**, owner of U.S. Lawns of Western Kentucky, reflects on the seven years since he purchased a U.S. Lawns franchise. "I would have liked to be bigger than we are right now," he says. "Those first years I was too conservative. I felt if I got too much work I couldn't get it done. I was really conscious of doing whatever I got as good as I could and to build a good reputation. I should have been more aggressive because I found out I could do it."

Mark, we're hearing a lot about bargain basement pricing for lawn maintenance services. What are you seeing in the western Kentucky market?

We're in a mostly rural area. We work out of Mayfield (pop. 10,100), but we do work in an area 20 miles north to Paducah, southeast to Murray, east to the Lakes Region and to the Tennessee state line south of us. Paducah and Murray, where there's a university, are the biggest markets. Sometimes I admit I've been confused by the competition's pricing here. We've established production rates for every job we bid and sometimes our numbers are much higher than the competition and, on some properties, our bids are lower by a considerable amount. I guess some people are looking at jobs and just throwing out a price of what they think it is worth to them.

We understand you're in the process of building the lawn application portion of your company. Yes, this past year we bought a ride-on applicator, which I operated for the most part. The ride-on machine has been a good investment. Previously, we had done applications, mostly as part of our general maintenance contracts, but I still expect our employees to take care of any weeds they see in the beds or in the cracks of the pavement of our customers' properties. Our maintenance contracts are 90% commercial properties. Now, we're expanding our fertilization and weed control services to the residential market.

How are you going to market your lawn care services? My wife, Beth, started working for our company last year. She had her own career and was given the opportunity to

WEB EXTRA

For more of Mark Carrico's best practices, visit www.landscapemanagement.net/carrico.

buy five years into her pension plan, so she took advantage of that and left that job. Besides doing our books, she now does our marketing and began sending out monthly e-newsletters using Constant Contact with information we feel they would find useful. It's our way of giving them something other than an invoice. We're marketing harder now and started getting some calls because of it.

Tell us how you've fared since the beginning of the recession.

We lost one of our biggest clients last year (2009) and several others. We were underbid. This year we'll be back to where we were before the recession depending on some work coming in at the end of the season. So far this fall the work has been steady but we're not rushed.

// I SHOULD HAVE BEEN MORE AGGRESSIVE IN
GOING OUT AND GETTING THE WORK
BECAUSE I FOUND OUT I COULD DO IT" — MARK CARRICO

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Stellaria media

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This low-spreading, prostrate winter annual succulent features oppositely arranged, small elliptic-shaped leaves, pointed at the tip and stems with rows of hairs. It grows in dense patches, and thrives in moist, shaded areas.
- ▶ It's similar in growth habit and appearance to mouse-ear chickweed (*Cerastium vulgatum*). Common chickweed leaves are less hairy and light green in color; mouse-ear chickweed has dark green or gray-green leaves covered with soft hairs.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Apply a pre-emergent herbicide containing di-thiopyr or isoxaben prior to germination in fall/winter.
- ▶ For post-emergent control, apply a two-, three- or four-way product that contains an ingredient such as triclopyr, fluroxypyr or clopyralid.
- ▶ For optimum post-emergent control, apply to actively growing, immature weeds in the fall/winter. If a spring application is made, you may need more than one application.



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PARSLEY PIERT

Alchemilla microcarpa

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This low-growing winter annual spreads by seed.
- ▶ Fan-shaped leaves alternate on the stems.
- ▶ The leaves contain three lobes, and each lobe is subdivided again into three to four lobes.
- ▶ The flowers are inconspicuous in the leaf axis.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Apply a pre-emergent herbicide containing di-thiopyr or simazine prior to germination in fall/winter.
- ▶ This weed can be a major problem on nutrient-deficient lawns or lawns that are mown too closely. Manage with a good fertility program and keep mow height optimum for respective turfgrass.

* Confront is not for sale or use in Nassau and Suffolk counties, New York. Other state restrictions on the sale and use of Confront apply.

** State restrictions on the sale and use of Dimension apply.

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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TOP PLANT TRENDS FOR 2011

Focus on smaller spaces and bigger value to create opportunities.

WHILE RETAILERS experienced better-than-expected sales over the important 2010 holiday shopping season, economists are predicting a mixed bag for 2011 with some sectors recovering sooner than others. But the economic turmoil over the past three years has already taken its toll on homeowners, many of whom have downsized to smaller homes and apartments. Consumers, still unsure of their economic futures, are also likely to be even more focused on getting the most bang for their landscaping buck.

That's not all bad news for landscapers who install high-value livescapes and are prepared to offer solutions for smaller spaces. Bright colors in containers and growing vertically make the most of small landscapes, while edibles and water-saving cultivars can save consumers' money.

But how do you explain that to consumers?

"The question on many marketers' minds is, how do we as an industry market horticulture products in this unique economic climate?" says Anthony Tesselaar, co-founder and president of the Australia-based Tesselaar Plants. "So, how



Contrasting colors provide high impact, allowing homeowners to do more with less.

do we make sure we stay in their cross-hairs? We've learned it's not necessarily about price. These days, it's all about value — and values — to me, the purchaser."

Promoting value

Tesselaar suggests taking a page out of retailers' sales strategies.

"Of course retailers know they need to focus on sales and promotions to bring in shoppers. And of course price is a factor for just about everyone," says National Retail Federation vice president Ellen Davis in the group's recent 2010 holiday shopping survey report. "But unlike 2009 — and most definitely 2008 — price is not the only factor shoppers will consider when making buying decisions."

Instead, the report suggests a need to demonstrate how a product or service offers long-term benefits, prevents problems or hits on something so emotionally important to the consumer that the extra cost is "worth it."

For instance, is the drought-tolerant

plant that costs 20% more than its similar counterpart worth the purchase because the consumer can go on vacation and not have to find a plant-sitter? Can the price for a season-long-blooming shrub be amortized over several years because it boosts the resale value of the home? Does the more expensive hanging basket also work in the shade or save space in a downsized or urban dwelling?

Even though the economy is improving slightly, the recession has changed the mainstream mindset, moving shoppers toward a "save-save-save" mentality.

Maximize multiple uses

Can a garden perennial be overwintered as a houseplant, helping to beautify the in-

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POPULAR COLOR PREDICTIONS

Pantone LLC, a provider of professional color standards for the design industries, has announced PANTONE 18-2120 Honeysuckle, a vibrant, energetic hue, as its color of the year for 2011.

While the 2010 color of the year, PANTONE 15-5519 Turquoise, served as an escape for many, Honeysuckle emboldens us to face everyday troubles with verve and vigor, according to the company. A dynamic reddish pink, Honeysuckle is encouraging and uplifting.

"In times of stress, we need something to lift our spirits. Honeysuckle is a captivating, stimulating color that gets the adrenaline going — perfect to ward off the blues," says Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute. "Honeysuckle derives its positive qualities from a powerful bond to its mother color red, the most physical, viscerally alive hue in the spectrum."

For over a decade, Pantone's Color of the Year declarations have influenced product development and purchasing decisions in multiple industries including fashion, home and industrial design. For more information, visit pantone.com.

AkzoNobel, the world's largest paint-ings and coatings company and manufacturer of Dulux paints, has announced light, airy, citrus yellow as its Color of the Year for 2011 along with next year's top five color trends at its annual ColourFutures showcase.

ColourFutures is the result of international color trend research, developed by AkzoNobel's Aesthetic Center with an international group of creative experts from the fields of color, design, architecture, and fashion. For more information, visit: icidulux.com.my/EN/colour/.



Spreading flowers that fill large areas will continue to be popular as homeowner budgets are expected to stay tight in 2011.

Container plants offer high value because they can be moved where needed. Some can be also be moved indoors and enjoyed during the winter.

doors, boost moods and improve indoor air quality? Can it provide healthy food for the family and save on the grocery bills? Can it become a gift for someone else?

Container plants that can easily be carried in from the patio to serve as winter-time houseplants are big sells, especially in colder climates, Tesselaar says.

And why can't quick-growing edibles like swiss chard, ornamental kale and lettuces be packaged up as ornamental containers?

Save with green

Drought-tolerant, pest- and disease-resistant plants can cut spending on inputs, plus they require less time to maintain. Such plants can also be promoted as socially and/or environmentally responsible products — something 67% of respondents said they'd buy, even in a difficult economy, in a 2009 survey by brand-marketing firm BBMG.

Tesselaar says he has noticed landscapers are moving toward buying smaller containers of such plants at a lower price, because they know these plants will soon fill out and reach the mature size of the more expensive ones. They're also buying

less of a variety of plants, but more of what they choose (i.e. only the tested, top performers they can count on and that won't need replacement anytime soon), he says.

Smartphones prompt thinking locally

"With smartphones becoming the dominant mobile force, Quick Response (QR) codes and application technology will pique interest, provide portals into unique experiences and improve our quality of life," says James Limbach, author of "Economic Hard Times Bring Lasting Changes to Consumer Behavior." He notes that sales of smartphones grew 82% from 2008 to 2010.

This ability to filter information by geography has inspired a "local-local" mentality. "Empowered like never before," says Limbach, "consumers are showing a deeper interest in where they are: from the city to a specific store."

Ride the wave of this trend by offering location-based services, promotions and solutions. Perhaps you can highlight native plants that work well in your area, trumpet your experience with your area's specific landscapes and architecture, and promote your company's involvement in the local community. **LMI**



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