



in your services throughout the year, and make a list of what you would talk to your clients about each month if you met with them in person. Take stock of completed projects and newsworthy stories from your staff, and compile any available photos now.

### FREQUENCY

The key to marketing with Facebook, as with any marketing venue, is consistency. So, don't do it if you can't stick to it. In a recent issue of USA Today, Emily White, Facebook's "director of local," suggests that businesses that want to succeed with Facebook should post three times per week. This may be more than you can handle, but even if you aren't highly active with your Facebook page, pick a schedule and keep at it (with the understanding that you probably won't get instant results). Managing your expectations ahead of time is important to maintaining consistent activity.

**My suggestion:** Put it on the calendar, either yours or that of someone in your organization

whom you can depend on to actually follow through. The easiest way to put it all together is to create a spreadsheet this fall that will serve as your master schedule and editorial calendar for 2012. Designate a cell for each date you want to post, and fill in as many topics as possible now. Assume that you will have to come up with some topics as you move through next season, but give yourself a leg up by plotting out as many ideas as you can this fall.

Facebook marketing, like most marketing, is not terribly complicated — nor does it require any advanced technical know-how. If you want to engage in the vast and growing community of potential clients on Facebook, create a simple, manageable plan this fall, then commit to following through with it in 2012. **LM**

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# MEASURING SOCIAL MEDIA ROI

The route from time to money is not as direct and easily measurable as people would like. **BY CHRIS HEILER**

A participant in a recent webinar asked me the following question: “How is updating my status on Facebook going to get me new clients?”

This wasn’t the first time I had heard this question, and it’s a fair one.

I’ve received many others in the same vein that all come down to this:

“How will investing time with social media make my business money?”

I aim to show you. But it won’t be easy.

First, let’s talk about “easy” marketing.

Easy marketing is handing a check to a phone directory advertising rep. Easy marketing is sending a pretty postcard to 5,000 people you don’t know. Easy marketing is blanketing a neighborhood with generic flyers and door hangers. Hand

over your money to an ad rep or printer and hope for the best. Your responsibility usually ends there, until you have to pick up the telephone to take a call from an unqualified responder.

This is the style of marketing to which the Green Industry is accustomed, and it has worked for some.

Let’s not confuse this easy marketing with social media marketing.

## MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

I think this confusion is holding back many Green Industry companies from adopting social media into their company culture.

Go back to the original question: “How will investing my time with social media make my

business money?”

A single word in that question should jump out at you. It changes the entire game: time.

When you place an advertisement or send a direct mail piece, you are investing money — not time.

How do you measure the success of a direct mail piece? Typically, by response rate, number of leads, sales and profit per sale. In other words, money. These are all metrics that can easily and accurately measure the campaign's impact.

To simplify: Invest money --> Get money.

Most companies have the same expectation when it comes to social media: Invest time --> Get money

Too bad it doesn't work that way.

The route from time to money is not as direct and easily measurable as some expect — thus the confusion, frustration and ambivalence toward social media in the Green Industry.

## THE MISSING LINK BETWEEN TIME AND MONEY

The return on investment of your time cannot be measured in dollars and cents.

On the Web, we deal in a different currency: attention and reputation.

These non-monetary markets are often referred to as the “reputation economy” and “attention economy.” In his book, “Free,” Chris Anderson writes: “No longer is money the most important signal in the marketplace.”

Talk about a shift in mindset! Here is how we need to think about social media as it relates to ROI:

Time --> (Attention + Reputation) --> Money

It's an indirect route, which makes measuring the effectiveness of your social media efforts much more difficult. However, concrete measurables are what everyone seems to want. The problem, of course, is that you can't measure attention and reputation as easily as dollars and cents.

## MEASURING ROI IN A NON-MONETARY ECONOMY

Success with social media means: capturing attention and building your reputation. Over-simplified? You bet. But it's a step down the right path. If you do this — trust me — the money will follow, and it's a lot more than what a directory ad or door hanger will deliver.

A terrific case study to illustrate this is Andrew Keys, a landscape designer from Massachusetts.

The following excerpt is from Victoria Harres Akers for PRNewswire:

“@OakLeafGreen, a.k.a. Andrew Keys, is a landscape designer, blogger, and since the spring of 2009, a devoted tweeter. After a bit of coercion from a good friend, Keys decided to give Twitter a try for promoting his organic landscape design firm, and subsequently his investment of time resulted in an invitation to contribute to a national gardening magazine (Fine Gardening). Three articles later, Keys now adds “freelance writer” to his résumé.” Keys captured the attention of “Fine Gardening” Associate Editor Michelle Gervais. As a result, his writing for the prominent consumer publication is building his reputation as a landscape designer.

How did Keys appear on “Fine Gardening's” radar? Did he post a bunch of self-promoting tweets and get lucky? Of course not. First of all, he was savvy enough to follow editors of gardening magazines. Second — but just as important — Keys gave his attention to others before getting attention in return.

Isn't this how life works? Givers gain! It is the same with social media.

Keys' rising reputation and influence will no doubt lead to more business (money) for his company (higher-level clientele, as well, would be my guess). But can he measure exactly how much? Can Keys trace his future clientele back to a single tweet or Facebook update? Of course not.

Go back to the question I was asked during the webinar: “How is updating my status on Facebook going to get me new clients?”

The answer is: It won't!

You don't tweet an update and a dollar bill falls from the sky. Success doesn't come from a single tweet or status update. It's the cumulative impact that matters. Understanding this is the first step toward getting the real results you are after with social media marketing. **LM**

*Chris Heiler is a social media strategist and consultant for Green Industry companies. He shares his social media expertise with thousands of landscape professionals in his weekly Get Social! e-newsletter and exclusive Social Media Club at [www.LandscapeLeadership.com](http://www.LandscapeLeadership.com).*

# GROWTH PROFILES

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Listening to the mainstream media, it would be easy to think the entire nation is wallowing in an economic

malaise, struggling just to survive. That's simply not the case. *Landscape Management* talked with the top executives at 12 companies that are not only surviving, but thriving. Read on to learn how they're doing it.

PROFILES BY **CASEY PAYTON**



# EARTHWORKS INC.

**C**hris Lee, president of Alvarado, TX-based EarthWorks Inc., says it was some foresight in mid- to late 2008 that set his company up to be the fastest growing landscape company on Landscape Management's list.

"It was around that time that it became apparent to us that new construction was drying up, and that we wanted to move on to something different," he recalls. "The writing was on the wall that things were slowing down. There were 12 guys bidding a job, making it difficult to even make any money."

Lee says it became obvious at that point: Commercial maintenance was not going away, so he began to shift more focus there.

"City ordinances won't let you grow your grass to 12 in. tall, plus commercial buildings were still invested in keeping up their appearances," he says. "So we shut down the construction department, kept everyone employed, and just started pushing maintenance."

Of course, there's a lot of price pressure in the maintenance market, so Lee says he had to be

willing to keep prices competitive.

"What we realized was that even if we couldn't make a lot of money on a maintenance job, it was our best way to get future work from the client — things like installation, tree trimming and irrigation," he says. "We were willing to accept the lower-paying maintenance jobs, with the hopes of building a long-term relationship with the client."

Building that relationship also meant adopting an attitude of "we're all in this together," says Lee. "We gave clients some leniency and took some short jobs on maintenance without a lot of profit, just to keep our clients happy in these tougher times," he says. "Our idea was that things would eventually turn around — and when they did, we'd be the maintenance contractor already working with the client and get the first shot at any bigger jobs."

That's precisely how things have played out. With the company operating lean and helping clients through difficult situations as best they could in 2009, they were in the perfect position to take off in 2010.

"We kept our maintenance base strong, and did a lot of good will for our clients," says Lee. "So in 2010, people started coming to us and saying 'you worked with our sister property through tough times — I have some work I need done at my own property.' That's exactly what we'd hoped would happen."

Lee says that the company's good customer service has been the best way to build and maintain those relationships. He makes sure clients always get a call back on the day they called — even if it's just to say "I don't have an answer, but I'm working on it," says Lee. "If you consistently do what you say you're going to do, you'll win people over — even the most difficult ones!" **LM**

GROWTH  
WISDOM

"Don't be scared to make a decision. You're better off making a poor decision quickly than doing nothing at all. If we had sat back and waited for the construction market to dry up, we'd be in serious trouble today. It's better to keep moving than to stand still. If you make the wrong decision, at least you have things in motion and can work on fixing it. But sitting around will get you nowhere."





## RCI

**J**oe Rotolo, president of Rotolo Consultants Inc. (RCI) in Slidell, LA, which saw 30.1% growth in 2010, says that while a lot of companies throw around slogans, it's three "characteristics" that his employees strive to maintain: good work ethic, good character and a good sense of team.

"If you don't have all three of those, you won't stick around here very long," he says. "Our success can be attributed to having employees who meet all three."

Rotolo says there have been many situations where his employees have made him proud. "The most proud I am is when I find out something great an employee did after the fact — meaning they didn't do it to get recognized or attention. They did it because it was the right thing to do."

Louisiana has certainly seen its share of hard times in recent years, but Rotolo says his team didn't miss a beat in stepping up to help.

"When the oil spill and hurricane hit, everyone jumped in immediately," he says. "They just knew what they had to do. When you find out two weeks later that one of your employees was on the road at 2 a.m. on a Sunday, responding to a problem, you know you have good people."

Even six years after Hurricane Katrina, Rotolo says the effects are still being felt. They've been

Clockwise from top left: Keith Rotolo; Michael Rotolo; Rod Rotolo; and Joe Rotolo

both positive and negative for business — as has the more recent oil spill. On the down side, there have been more out-of-town and even out-of-state contractors in Louisiana than ever before. But there have also been opportunities.

"We've been in business since 1978, and for the majority of our careers, we've focused on landscape construction and maintenance," says Rotolo, who is in business with his three brothers, Kerry, Rod and Keith. "But we've also been entrepreneurial. Katrina opened up our eyes as to what we could do. We had to choose new scopes of service to survive. Nobody was looking at landscaping when their house or jobs were gone."

That's when RCI transitioned into doing more environmental work — remediation and demolition — which put them in a prime position when the BP oil spill occurred. In February 2011, the company also bought Midwest Environmental Resources (now known as Midwest Environmental Resources International or MERI), a 35-year-old environmental company.

"Instead of developing a new division, we felt it was better to do an acquisition," says Rotolo. "We knew we needed to diversify."

The company has also expanded into the cell tower industry.

"What that has done is afforded key people in our company to have a larger opportunity than they traditionally would have with RCI," he says. "Our managers are now moving into upper management, and having voice and direction in the company. It's allowed for organic growth." **LM**

GROWTH  
WISDOM

"Look around. Landscape contractors deal with a lot of business issues that are transferrable to other industries. We realized we were capable of much more than we thought. I think our industry suffers from low self-esteem because we're always told 'anyone can push a lawn mower.' But we are capable of much more than that. Remember that adversity creates opportunity."

# GOTHIC GROUNDS MANAGEMENT

**G**rowth tends to start with a clear vision of where you want to be. So says Ron Georgio, president of Gothic Grounds Management (GGM), headquartered in Valencia, CA. That original vision started more than 10 years ago, when Georgio's brother, Jon Georgio, president of Gothic Landscape Inc., had the foresight to know a bad economy was ahead. To survive, he knew a maintenance division was needed — and GGM was born.

Today, Ron Georgio says, GGM continues to always try and look to the future, the way his brother has.

"It comes down to what the end game looks like," he says. "We try to think as big as possible — and we're already talking about what we want our business to look like at the end of 2015."

Knowing those long-term goals helps workers also know their responsibilities, Georgio says.

"Sales are given very specific goals; branch managers are given specific retention goals; account managers are given specific expectations on enhancement sales; and my executive management team understands what they need to do to make our vision happen," he explains. "Everybody knows exactly where we're going and how we're going to get there. We've developed a formula — and if we all hit our goals, it's basically mathematically impossible that our company would not become what we envisioned it to be."

Besides this internal focus, the company is also



always looking to understand exactly what the customers' needs are, so that they can respond to them, says Georgio.

"We hired a team of master students from UCLA to contact our customers and drill down deeply on how we can better meet their needs," he says. "We got some very surprising, but helpful information from that. We also do regular monthly and annual customer surveys to find out what's important to them. One thing they've told us is that they want more in-house services, so we responded to that by adding arbor care and chemical treatments — two services we'd previously outsourced."

The company has continually seen growth over the years, and grew 14.4% in 2010. But Georgio says that this rapid pace of growth has meant extra effort on his part to keep that family culture with which the business started.

"We've grown from a couple million in 2000 to \$24 million in 2010, and are now projecting \$28 million for 2011," he says.

"We're a family company, and want to maintain that family culture," he concludes. "I block out time on my calendar regularly to make sure I'm visiting every team at every location. We currently have nine branches, and I try to get to each of them every single month." **LM**

## WHAT'S AHEAD

"We're in the process of growing our arbor care division, and already see that expanding rapidly. While most people close their checkbooks in a down economy, we didn't do that in sales. We brought on a really talented sales director who strengthened our sales team across the board. They're gaining a lot of traction for 2011, and will continue to help push us forward."



# LUCAS TREE EXPERTS

Lucas Tree Experts in Portland, ME, has always focused on organic growth. This year, it saw 23.9% growth.

“We focus on growing internally because we feel there are less culture pains than through acquisition,” says CFO

Arthur Batson III.

“Strong management has been the key to our success,” he continues. “We’ve developed a manager-trainee program that begins near the corporate office so the manager understands our culture, work ethic and business practices, so

they can be successful when they are moved to a new location.”

Lucas Tree Experts was founded in 1926 to help the local power company complete the electrification of rural Maine. Today, it focuses on tree work, integrated pest management (IPM), lawn care, mosquito and tick spray, lighting and utility line clearance.

Since its beginning, Lucas has hurdled many obstacles. The company’s most recent challenges include the training of the labor force. It’s something that Batson says the company has worked to overcome by relying on its strong management team.

“We have developed management systems and business practices to streamline the training and focus on an identification of skill sets, so we can put the proper people in the correct locations to succeed,” he says.

With the right management in place, Batson says the company is projecting growth again this year.

“Our growth has come and will continue to come because of the leadership of our management team,” he says.

He adds that Lucas works hard to empower top managers “to be the face of the organization, so that employees recognize that a successful company is about the team, and not just the owners.” **LM**

Lucas Tree Experts CEO Arthur Batson, Jr. (right) with his son, Lucas CFO Arthur Batson III



GROWTH  
WISDOM

“Growth is only good if it is profitable growth. I see a lot of companies that just want to get bigger, but we would rather give up growth to increase profitability — and more importantly, predictable profitability.”

# MAINSCAPE

**M**ark Forsythe says his company's success in 2010 comes down to good old business practices. "I wouldn't say it was anything particularly special or unique that we did to have a successful year," admits the president and CEO of Fishers, IN-based Mainscape. "There are a lot of basic business principles that you read about in magazines like *Landscape Management* that seem simple enough, but many people don't actually apply them. We just try to be diligent about actually applying those best practices for our business."

Clearly, the company succeeded at that goal: It saw 22.4% growth. But Forsythe points out that its annual average growth rate has always been around 20%.

In addition to applying smart business practices, Forsythe says it's the people and the culture that have made a difference in the company's success.

"I know that's something that everyone says, but it's definitely true," he emphasizes. "Having really good people makes a huge difference."

Because the company places so much value on

## WHAT'S AHEAD

"We are projecting 20%-plus growth for 2011 and targeting 20% growth in 2012. It comes back to the company culture and motivation that we've developed. Our people have the opportunity to grow, develop and take on new challenges. It's really our people who continue to drive our growth."



Mark Forsythe

employees, Forsythe says there's a constant effort to foster a positive working environment.

"We make sure to provide employees with the framework and infrastructure to succeed," he says. "Plus, we just try to create an atmosphere that's fun to work in."

"I believe that our people enjoy working here. We've created an atmosphere where they don't just come in to get paid, they actually enjoy getting up and coming to work."

"There are enough difficulties in life," he adds. "If we can make everyone's job a little easier, it pays off. We want to have a positive impact on people's lives — both within our company and with those we work with."

Of course, it's also important to foster a great relationship with clients, he says.

"We view our work as a partnership with our customers, and we have a great team that is committed to our customers' success," he concludes. "That has enabled us to expand our existing relationships, and develop exciting new relationships, as well." **LM**