

APP-ORTUNITY

The number of mobile users across various platforms and devices is staggering, says Rob Palmer, president and CEO of Weed Pro.

Consider this: In 2012, the U.S. saw a 55 percent increase in smartphone subscriptions to make for 98 million smartphone subscribers, according to comScore. That's nearly 42 percent of all U.S. mobile users. On top of that, 64 percent of mobile phone time is spent on apps, Nielsen reports.

So when Palmer's techy marketing director, Shaun Canary, came to him with the idea to launch a Weed Pro mobile app, he agreed it was the right move.

"It's a bridge to the future for me," Palmer says. "If businesses don't understand customer demographics, they will lose—they're already losing," he says.

The Weed Pro app, which has been available since Oct. 1 in the Apple App Store and the Android Market (now part of Google Play), was first developed by Canary himself in July, but he worked with Cleveland-based 529 App Solutions to revamp it in August. He underestimated how difficult it would be to place the app in Apple's App Store. Working with a mobile app developer eased that process and also gives him access to a user-friendly content management system (CMS) that allows him to easily change and update the app's features without redesigning the entire application. Canary says the company spent \$700 to develop the app, not including his time. Weed Pro pays \$50 per month for access to the CMS.

The free app includes a lawn ID guide that helps users identify common weeds and pests, a feed of the firm's YouTube videos and interactive features, like the ability to take a photo of a weed in your lawn and send it to Weed Pro for identification.

Since the app had only been available for about six weeks as of press time, it was too early to measure success. Canary says, "This, like our other informative guides, was made for visitors of our website to consume, use and share. We'll track the amount of downloads we receive, and how many of those prospects we were able to nurture into customers."

continued from page 18

Palmer's committed to hosting a weekly, companywide meeting to discuss field conditions and challenges, so everyone has a unified message.

IN VS. OUT

Speaking of costs, Palmer keeps a close eye on customer acquisition costs, and that's part of the reason he's sold on inbound marketing. Marketing experts say it's 60 percent cheaper to acquire a customer with inbound tactics vs. traditional marketing. (Consider that it costs Weed Pro \$90 to \$200 to reel in a customer through direct mail.)

But that doesn't mean Palmer's abandoning direct mail, despite his frustration that even the best direct mail pieces end up in the trash bin, unlike well-done blog posts that will

appear in web searches year after year.

Weed Pro will spend about \$50,000 on outbound marketing, including direct mail, in 2013—which is equal to what the company will spend on inbound marketing. For 2012, the spend ratio was 60/40 outbound to inbound. Canary emphasizes that the direct mail campaigns will drive customers to the web more so than in the past.

Now that the Weed Pro inbound marketing team's in place and the rebuilding year is behind him, Palmer looks forward to 2013. "What it comes down to is we're all spreading fertilizer and we're all spraying weeds," he says. He goes on to quote author Simon Sinek, who says, "People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it."

"With our inbound content, we hope we're answering the 'why' and providing people some value upfront," he says. **LMI**



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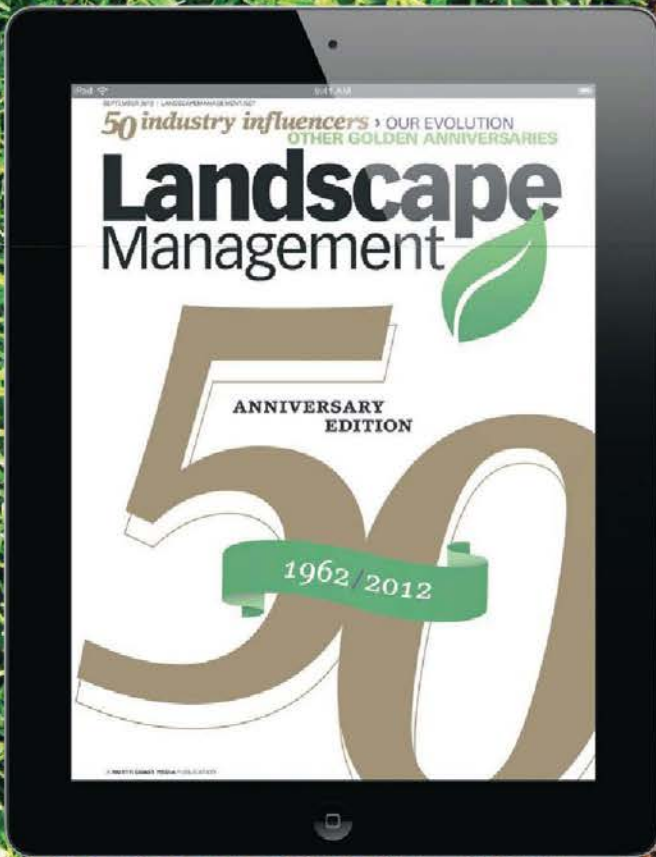
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MARKET WATCH

DESIGN/BUILD

Learning from Lambert's

Less than a week before Thanksgiving, dozens of design/build business owners converged on Dallas for a tour of Lambert Landscape Co. and three of its projects, as part of the Professional Landcare Network's DBI Symposium.

They made the trip to see how one of the country's most renowned residential design/build firms operates—and to get inspiration for their own projects, albeit on a much smaller scale.

The day started with a tour of Lambert headquarters, where attendees saw everything from the company's production room and tree division to its design and construction divisions.

The tour showed the design/build professionals much more than the responsibilities of Lambert staff. It also highlighted just how organized and

The Dallas company shows design/build professionals from around the country how to do it right.

By BETH GERACI

efficient Lambert operations are, a coup achieved after years of trial and error.

In the production room, Lambert Director of Garden Services Jodi Joseph explained a system designed to limit miscommunication and increase accountability. She pointed out the board where crew assignments are posted every day; the high-

tech scanning system used to clock the company's crew members in and out; and the ways in which crew members are acknowledged for practicing safety on the job.

Also of interest was the design room, where Tom Nugent, design studio lead, and garden designer Jonathan Swanson explained the design process and the at times deep involvement of Lambert customers in their own projects.

Lambert President and Director of Design Paul Fields said design is at the heart of the company and its 1919 origins. "It's in everything we do and touch," he said. "Our focus today is on high-level garden design and on fulfilling customers' dreams."

Attendees definitely got a taste of that as they toured the day's featured projects: three residential gardens in an exclusive neighborhood north of Dallas.

These aren't the sort of gardens where you can pour the watering can over the daisies and call it a day. These are extravagant gardens, in expansive yards, outside multimillion-dollar homes. And all are designed in the European style Lambert's has made its

continued on page 24

The DBI Symposium attendees pose at one of the tour's featured properties (left). Above: A Lambert-designed greenhouse showcases colorful lemon trees.

PG 23

DESIGN/BUILD Tour recap from Dallas-based Lambert's

PG 26

IRRIGATION WaterSense updates plus two state issues to note

PG 28

MAINTENANCE Sod installation do's and don'ts

PG 30

LAWN/TREE CARE Green Lawn Fertilizing's training day tips



continued from page 23

signature. Sights on the tour included statues from Italy and France, an old apple press, a huge olive jar, and other imported and elaborate garden complements. There were luxurious swimming pools, outdoor fireplaces, trellises, detailed stone work, even a greenhouse full of lemon trees.

“We treat the garden as someone would treat the interior of the home,” Fields explained to the group. In Lambert’s work, the outdoor areas become an extension of the home’s interior—equally as livable as the home itself. “Lambert’s strives to design the garden to the highest possible level,” Fields said. “I’m really passionate about details. If I had my druthers I would sit at a table and do nothing but details. That’s what’s important.”

And that means obtaining materials to match the quality of the work. As much as Fields spoke of importing

things from Italy for clients (including a \$300,000 statue), he emphasized that the company strives to be as authentic and use as many indigenous materials as possible. That means it incorporates Texas limestone into many of its projects, not just because it’s local, but also because it wears well, adding to the antique feel of many Lambert landscapes.

The day ended with a slide show of award-winning Lambert projects, which seemed to awe some small business owners in attendance. But they weren’t there to compete; they were there to be inspired, and they were.

Fields shared much valuable advice



Above: Lambert’s President and Director of Design Paul Fields. Left: The statue shows Lambert’s knack for using European-style materials.

with his audience throughout the day, and in his closing presentation, he left his audience with one more helpful tip. Creating a garden for a client “is more than pushing plants,” he said. “Take it to the next step.”

PHOTOS: BETH GERACI

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IRRIGATION

In the know: Irrigation Show 2012

Contractors should take note of potential WaterSense program changes, state affairs updates and innovative new products.

By MARISA PALMIERI

At the 2012 Irrigation Show and Education Conference in Orlando last month, more than 4,200 contractors, distributors and suppliers convened to learn about best practices and new products. For landscape and irrigation contractors, there are a few government affairs updates to note, reports John Farner, government affairs director for the Irrigation Association (IA), and Chad Forcey, IA's state affairs director.

PROPOSED WATERSENSE CHANGES

In October, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a notice of intent to revamp its WaterSense program specifications for irrigation certification programs. Currently, irrigation professionals can apply to become individual WaterSense partners when they're certified through a WaterSense-labeled certification program, such as the IA's certification program.

WaterSense is considering removing the individual partnership designation and expanding the partnership benefits to all professionals certified by WaterSense-labeled pro-

grams. Along with that change, the term "WaterSense irrigation partner" and its logo would be phased out; professionals would instead promote themselves as "certified by a WaterSense-labeled program" and use an "Ask About" WaterSense promotional label, according to presentation by Amber Lefstead, a WaterSense representative.

Why the changes? One of the main drivers was the need to improve the coverage of partners for other WaterSense programs. For example, the WaterSense for New Homes program requires irrigation systems be designed, installed and audited by WaterSense irrigation partners. Even though the program currently has more than 1,300 partners nationwide, it can be difficult to meet the New Homes program's demand, considering there are 20 states with 10 or fewer partners.

After gathering stakeholder feedback, WaterSense will draft a document for public comment in spring 2013. Implementation of the new structure is expected in 2014.

STATE AFFAIRS

This year there have been several waves made regarding irrigation professionals' "scope of practice," Farner says.

Illinois is facing the expiration of its irrigation contractor licensing law. If the law is allowed to expire, all irrigation contractors in the state will have to become licensed plumbers, which poses many costs and challenges for members. The IA is committed to preventing this from happening, Forcey says, and the association is working with irrigation professionals in Illinois to have the licensing law renewed through the general assembly.

In Oregon, the state landscape architect board earlier this year said irrigation design could be performed only by licensed landscape architects. In April the IA sent a letter to the board, requesting clarification of the scope of practice rules related to irrigation design under the state's landscape architect law. The board responded in August, indicating it was backing away from its position, and noting that irrigation design could continue to be practiced by irrigation designers.



INNOVATION HONORED

The Irrigation Association named the winners of the 2012 New Product Contest at the annual Irrigation Show and Education Conference in Orlando on Nov. 5. The awards highlight exhibitor entries based on a wide range of criteria, including innovative and/or changed-for-the-better qualities, increased irrigation efficiency, ease of use, cost benefits, time savings and design quality.

Turf/Landscape Category

Winner: The Toro Co. Precision Soil Sensor

Honorable Mention: ETwater SmartWorks Rain Bird 50-Pin Replacement Panel

People's Choice Winner: LASCO Fittings Push Fittings

Specialty Category

Winner and People's Choice Winner: Hunter Industries/FX Luminaire Luxor ZD LED lighting controller

Honorable Mention: Fountain Bleu Water-Vac Solids Separation System pond cleaner



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MAINTENANCE

Don't double up on sod

Turfgrass sod experts agree: Installing sod on an existing lawn will create more work in the end.

By JIM NOVAK

The Internet can be a tremendous tool, especially when it comes to seeking helpful information. Unfortunately, misinformation is abundant.

Consider this "advice" one website's contributing writer offered.

"Professional landscapers often apply sod directly over grass. The sod compresses the grass and limits its exposure to sunlight and water. This quickly kills the already existing grass, in much the same way that a brick left on a lawn kills the grass beneath it. When the grass dies,

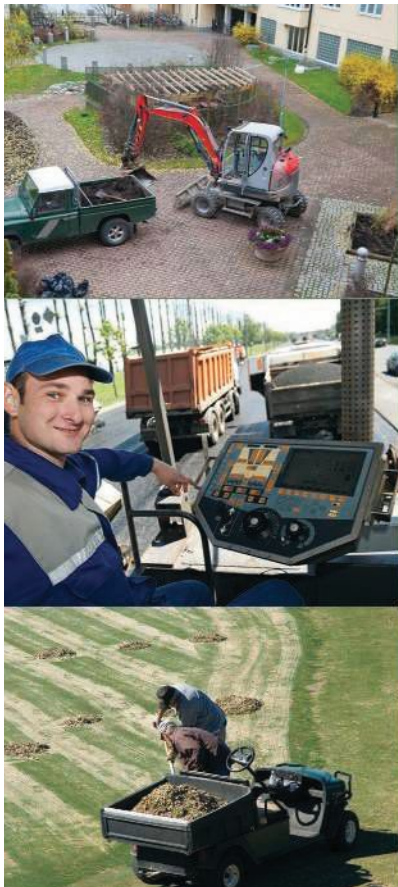
it gives off nutrients that actually benefit the new sod above it. The main nutrient that the dead grass layer provides is nitrogen. Applying sod directly over grass is advantageous because it requires less work. The lawn does not need to be treated with herbicide. Also, you do not need to till your yard."

Landscape contractors, take note: Turfgrass producers agree laying sod over an existing lawn isn't acceptable.

"Not a good idea," says Bob Weerts of Blue Valley Sod Farm in Winnebago, *continued on page 30*



PHOTOS: JIM NOVAK



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continued from page 28

Minn., who recently dealt firsthand with a landscape consultant who had just completed an inspection for one of his customers, a national restaurant chain. The problem? A dying new lawn. The reason? The contractor laid new turfgrass sod over the existing turf weeks earlier. The new grass never rooted.

“This is not a practice that I have ever heard of working,” says Mike Blair of Green Velvet Sod Farms in Bellbrook, Ohio. In addition to the new sod’s roots drying out and dying, the decomposing turf could develop an acid or slim, causing further problems, he says.

Warren Bell of Biograss Sod Farm in Sandy, Utah, concurs it’s not wise. “The surface of the old lawn has a lot of organic matter and likely will not match the soil profile of the sod being installed,” he says. “Water will never move through the profile efficiently.”

So, if a client or employee suggests you lay new sod directly on top of an existing lawn, don’t do it.

Novak is public relations manager for Turfgrass Producers International.

SOD-LAYING TIPS

Here are a few pointers from Linda Bradley of Turf Mountain Sod in Hendersonville, N.C.

- ▶ **All sod must make soil to root contact.** Existing turf must be extremely sparse or topped with soil before laying the new sod. Roots won’t penetrate hard ground; till or loosen the top 2 in. to 3 in. of soil.
- ▶ **Grade is important.** There cannot be any water-holding spots, and water never should flow toward the building or home.
- ▶ **Weeds can grow through the new sod,** so it’s important to eradicate them before installation.



Jimmy Torres, Green Lawn’s service manager, reviews all customer information, including lawn flags that technicians leave at a customer’s home.

Training day

Quarterly educational “rodeos” keep the team at Green Lawn Fertilizing on the same page.

By MARISA PALMIERI

You can’t grow if you’re not investing in your employees, says Matt Jesson, president and owner of Green Lawn Fertilizing in West Chester, Pa. When you learn he’s focused on growing his firm 15 percent to 20 percent a year, you understand why he holds a quarterly cross-training program for all of the company’s 65 employees.

“It gives everyone a better understanding of how their jobs affect the growth of the company and how they’re a part of a great company,” Jesson says. This year is the first full year he’s held the training sessions, dubbed “rodeos,” on a quarterly basis. They used to be conducted twice a year. The reason for the increase is to keep up with the natural changes that happen in the business every 60 to 90 days.

ON THE SAME PAGE

On a typical rodeo day, the company operates from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. After that, Green Lawn provides lunch, followed by three hours of education. Jesson kicks off with a presentation about the status of the business and key objectives, and he addresses questions and concerns. Next, employees rotate through stations, learning about various parts of the business, such as customer

service, operations, sales and the firm’s new pest control division. The executive team and department managers speak at each station. The idea is to give employees a taste of the processes and procedures of each area and what challenges it’s facing. For example, the sales station might cover what the sales team is currently selling and why; customer service could address what type of service calls it’s been receiving.

TEAM BUILDING

The training program also builds relationships among coworkers.

“This is a good chance for our office reps to spend more time with the sales team and the technicians,” Jesson says.

At the fall rodeo, to keep employees engaged, each department leader had 10 gift cards to hand out to employees who stood out during training.

Cross-training employees doesn’t have to be costly or complicated, Jesson says, noting he hosts the sessions in the firm’s on-site training room to keep costs down. Still, it is an investment. Paid three-hour training for 65 employees equates to nearly 200 hours.

Regardless, it will remain a priority for fast-growing Green Lawn Fertilizing. As Jesson says, “Training is the most important thing.” **LM**