

Staying power

It's not enough to be "here and there" involved in the community, you have to have staying power, says Scott. "That's why gaining entrée with the affluent can't be done overnight — it takes at least five years to build a stable, trustworthy reputation," he adds. "The affluent are planners and once you've caught their attention they're going to watch you and your marketing communication, to see if you are trustworthy. This segment cares about protecting their family, home, and investments."

Scott says that landscape companies that want to reach this population need to work their way into the affluent social circles and show consistency in those circles. "You can't plan to join a board for a few months or do one community project — the affluent are looking for long-term commitments," says Scott. "You have to build the relationship and prove you are in it for the long haul without looking for quick payback."

What they're all about

In order to reach the affluent, it helps to know what drives them, and what services they find most important. For example, the affluent tend to travel a lot and often have multiple properties so they're looking for someone they can count on while they are out of town, says Scott.

"They want a company that they can call up and say 'It's freezing and I forgot to shut my water off — can you do it?'" Scott adds.

"You can't plan to join a board for a few months or do one community project — the affluent are looking for long-term commitments" — JEFFREY SCOTT

"They want someone they can trust inside their house, in their intimate surroundings, near their family and valuables. That's where building a strong reputation and staying power is critical to gaining access to this market.

Upselling is a "requirement" in marketing to the affluent — although that's certainly not what they'd call it, says Scott. To the affluent, it's about doing new projects and solving problems — even the ones they didn't know they had. "It's your job to present them with ideas that inspire them and to prevent or even reveal problems that you can fix," says Scott. "That's how you service the affluent. If you don't upsell to the affluent you can lose them. The idea is to create value by both taking work off their plate and giving them fun projects to be involved in."

Keep your feelings in check

If you decide to go after this population segment, it's important to keep your personal feelings in check. Scott says it's not uncommon for the average landscape professional to have some issues with the affluent. He calls it a "comfort gap" and says that some of it has to do with money.

"We may have a subconscious mixed attitude towards money — and towards those who have it," says Scott. "It's important to recognize your own attitudes and values and make sure that your staff and your company are taught to respect the affluent as hard working, successful, deserving people. Affluent people can act snobby, and you have to be willing to see yourself as a servant that is helping make their dreams come true."

But that's not to say that you can't have confidence in yourself. In fact, that's a necessity. You need to find the right blend between making yourself available and helpful to the affluent and showing that you are an expert at what you do. "The right attitude is important," says Scott. "You need to think of yourself as a unique problem solver and a specialist in what you do. You have knowledge that your clients don't have and that other vendors don't have. That's how you become a unique resource to the affluent." **\$\$**

The author is a freelance journalist with six years experience covering landscaping. Contact her at djacobs@questex.com.

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The 6 pillars of a strong foundation

It's no small undertaking to create a lasting organization. Companies that withstand tumultuous times, survive changing conditions and continue to grow have one thing in common — a strong foundation.

To endure requires a foundation of six absolutes. Once in place, you have a core you can protect, a base for success and the power to bind your organization together for the long haul.

1 Solid financial base. Do you have a good understanding of managing both the balance sheet and profit-and-loss statement? Companies struggle when they've limited options. They're limited because they lack a strong balance sheet and adequate cash, carry too much debt and, with tighter credit markets, find themselves stuck. One or two bad receivables, and it's hard to catch up.

Mismanagement culprits sneak up when you least expect them. Are owners taking too much off the top to live on? Are margins unrealistic? A strong balance sheet with a high level of liquidity enables your company to be more competitive, simplify your forecasting, improve your ratios and give you the freedom to be more flexible.

2 Good business mix. Do you have a good diversification plan? Companies with income balanced between recurring revenue (landscape maintenance and lawn care services) and cyclical revenue (design and bid-build construction), have done well. Companies heavily dependent on construction revenue alone could not cover their overhead with reduced workload and lower margins.

In the early part of the recession, companies tried to bid with lower margins to cover overhead and keep good employees. Because this recession has been so prolonged, short-term solutions failed. A diversified business mix will strategically position your organization for lasting results and, in a seasonal industry in particular, ensure a regular revenue stream throughout the year.

3 Commitment to learning. Old strategies not working? Continuous improvement requires a commitment to learning. Learning organizations are nimble and regularly refresh their attitudes and practices to stay competitive. They have an ability to adapt, change and transform themselves in response to shifting market preferences.

Early in the recession, the companies in which people at all levels were thinking critically and engaged in their work did well. They responded by lowering costs and reducing margins to maintain their accounts and compete for new ones.

4 Decisive management. Do you fund losses during a weak revenue period to avoid making a tough decision? Effective leadership is not afraid to act decisively and quickly. Companies with decisive management teams survived the depressed business climate by adjusting prices immediately and making the overhead cuts quickly. They committed to a path, took action, then planned their next move.

5 People development. Do you decide to hire the person with experience, or the one with the best attitude that fits your company's culture? Companies that succeed do so because they benefit from HR policies that support investment in talent and training, develop a more committed work force and are committed to quality in hiring. They invest in the best, give them resources to succeed and reward them when they do succeed.

6 Customer focus. Do you have a strong service culture that builds loyal relationships? Companies are only as good as their customer base. Without customers, any business will cease to exist. The best companies have the ability to see the big picture and distinguish patterns and trends in customers' expectations. They had enough trust and communication in the relationship to understand their customers' shifting preferences — and to engineer solutions and services accordingly.

WEEDWATCH

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LARGE CRABGRASS

Digitaria sanguinalis

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This light green, bunch-type grass features seed-head spikelets in two to nine finger-like branches along the stalk.
- ▶ The summer annual germinates when soil temperatures reach a consistent 55°F.
- ▶ Leaves are rolled in the bud, and the collar is broad with long hairs.
- ▶ Its tall, membranous ligule has jagged edges and no auricles.
- ▶ It grows under close mowing, and prefers open areas with thin turfgrass.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ When soil temperatures reach 55°F in the spring, apply a pre-emergence crabgrass herbicide. If you have missed the pre-emergent timing, you can apply an herbicide labeled for post-emergent control.
- ▶ Look for the active ingredient dithiopyr, which provides season-long pre- and early post-emergence control of crabgrass. There are several liquid, granular or fertilizer granule options.
- ▶ Consult the appropriate product label for recommended rates for your area, as well as for re-seeding and overseeding.

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TROPICAL SIGNALGRASS

Urochloa subquadrifera

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ Commonly mistaken for bull paspalum or crabgrass, this blanket-like grass has relatively long spikelets, 3.5mm to 4mm. Crabgrass spikelets are narrower and not more than 3mm long.
- ▶ It roots from the nodes and has more papery leaves, compared with the soft leaves of crabgrass.
- ▶ The seedhead consists of modified racemes that emerge at right angles to the stem, spaced much like the signal flags used on ships.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Once established in turf situations, this grassy weed is extremely difficult to control. Few, if any post-emergent herbicides are effective in selectively removing this species in warm-season turf, where it is commonly found.
- ▶ Several pre-emergent herbicides, such as dithiopyr, prodiamine, oryzalin, benefin + oryzalin or benefin + trifluralin, have demonstrated good to excellent pre-emergent control of this species.

* State restrictions on the sale and use of Dimension specialty herbicide products 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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Knaack LLC

Now available for both full-sized vans and minivans, the newly redesigned Weather Guard Quick Clamp Ladder Rack offers enhanced durability while making it safer and easier for one person to load, transport and unload ladders and other oversized items. Ladder hooks on the front end of the side rails have been extended and angled outward for easier loading in tight places, while adjustable sway braces provide easy ladder change out. WeatherGuard.com

DeMore's Innovative Design Inc.

The Aerial Tool Bin for aerial platforms, scissors and boom lifts is designed to keep hand tools and supplies organized and within a worker's reach. The portable, triangular-shaped organizer attaches to square or rounded 90° corners of platform railings, where it is secured with two OSHA-compliant locking bolts. Constructed from reinforced, non-conductive, UV-protected orange polypropylene, the Aerial Tool Bin is designed to provide a clutter-free working area by keeping tools and parts off the floor and at waist height. AerialToolBin.com



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MAINTENANCE: WATER EQUIPMENT

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The 15- and 25-gal. new tank design of Broyhill's Spot Sprayers offers a quick in and out from your vehicle. They feature molded-in handles and a special 12-volt Shurflo pump with 15-ft. hose and spray wand, which mounts on the tank side. They arrive boxed for UPS shipments.
Broyhill.com



Briggs & Stratton

Four pressure washer accessories — a quick-connect turbo nozzle, second-story nozzle kit, rotating surface cleaner and roto-scrub wide nozzle — are designed to help users finish intensive cleaning projects faster and with less effort. The turbo nozzle (pictured) provides a powerful pin-point jet of water for intense cleaning — 40% faster cleaning than standard spray nozzles. With an easy connection to the quick-connect wand, it's recommended for cleaning brick, concrete and vinyl surfaces, and can be used with pressure washers up to 3,700 PSI. The kit, which eliminates the need for ladders when cleaning hard-to-reach areas, contains two nozzles: The pink jet soap nozzle extends the reach of soap, and the blue jet flush nozzle washes dirt and debris away. *BriggsAndStratton.com*

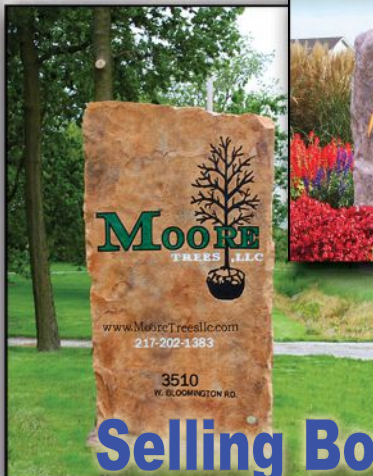


Underhill International

Featuring robust, "firefighter quality" construction, new UltraMax variable flow hose-end nozzles are designed for hand-watering sports fields, parks, playgrounds and other public areas, for infield conditioning and irrigating dry, patchy turf. The nozzles, available in four models, are also practical for stadium and playground wash-downs and equipment cleanup. The ergonomically designed pistol grip or firefighter grip has sturdy ball valves and push-pull on/off control handles. All models have 0.75- or 1-in. inlets. Leak-proof and virtually indestructible, UltraMax nozzles are constructed from aircraft aluminum, stainless steel and Thermoplastic rubber (TPR). *Underhill.us*

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Marketing to the Affluent

Free Webinar Series



Become known as the "go to" company with the affluent

March 15th, Thursday – 1:30 EST, 12:30 CST

Affluent homeowners have the income to hire you, if you know how to win them over. Jeffrey Scott, who built his company into a \$10 million enterprise by serving the wealthy, will fast-forward your learning curve so you can sell more and sell faster to this profitable customer segment. In this first of three webinars, learn what you "must" do in order to become the "go to" company with the affluent, so that they think of you first and refer you to their friends. You will learn the one mistake you must avoid at all costs when marketing to the affluent.

Sell and build trust with the affluent

April 5th, Thursday – 1:30 EST, 12:30 CST

With the wealth gap widening, you must learn how to capture the affluent segment, if you want a profitable residential business. You need to learn how to gain their trust because the affluent are extremely busy. In this second webinar, learn how to establish and build trust during the sales process, and learn how to price and bundle your services so you maximize sales, margins and client satisfaction. You will learn the one thing the affluent want more than anything else.



Train your staff to work with and wow the affluent homeowner

April 26th, Thursday – 1:30 EST, 12:30 CST

Once you have sold the affluent, maintaining their confidence is critical in order to gain referrals and more sales. In this webinar you will learn how to train your staff so they are able to impress your affluent clients and put their best foot forward. Learn how to teach them to represent your company and how to give the affluent what they most want – undeniable 5-Star Service. You will also learn the biggest psychological roadblock your employees have when it comes to servicing the affluent and how to remove it.

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Jeffrey Scott

JEFFREY SCOTT is author of "The Referral Advantage" and "The Leader's Edge." At age 34, he took over and grew his design-build-maintain firm into a \$10 million enterprise focused on the affluent market place--selling and maintaining pools, landscapes and multi-million dollar environments. He now consults with others on how to do the same. He also facilitates peer groups for landscape business owners who want to transform and grow their business. To learn more visit www.GetTheLeadersEdge.com.

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DESIGN BUILD: EARTH MOVERS



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Little Beaver

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