



» **WEB EXTRA**

Visit the Web Extras section of LandscapeManagement.net to read Korhan's lessons from the trenches.

Social creates expectations

What would you think if you visited your favorite store and found it closed at a time when it's normally open? Customers develop expectations and one of them is that your business is open, ready and willing to serve as they've known it to be.

If you operate a small business, you understand this. You open and close on time and follow a number of other standard business practices.

A new expectation is that your business is friendly. This is a byproduct of our social media-influenced world. It's just one of many new expectations that social media has created of businesses, along with others that are derivatives of it.

Here are five more relevant expectations that are becoming part of the fabric of the business environment—one in which every business will have to adapt to if it expects to enjoy continued relevance and growth:

1 | Visibility. We are living in a period in which a business without an online presence is likely to be considered irrelevant by many consumers, whereas customers will perceive a company with an active social presence to be engaged with the community and openly prepared for more business.

2 | Authenticity. Customers want to have a relationship with your company; they want to know what's going on behind the scenes. They are curious, and you have to feed that curiosity in order for those relationships to flourish.

3 | Accessibility. The web gives everyone more access to people, companies and causes. This ease of attaining information has conditioned consumers to expect to have open access to your business—and especially with you, if you are the owner or one of its leaders.

4 | Community. It's no longer possible to be successful without a meaningful relationship with the communities you serve, as communities are the new markets. They equally serve the needs of businesses and the people within them. This is why locally engaged companies have distinct advantages when all other things are equal.

5 | Relevance. Savvy businesses understand their communities care most about the little things that only an insider would know. When you speak your community's language, you develop a bond that supports your business' ongoing relevance. And that

language often includes the keyword phrases that optimize your online content for search.

This is all going to become even more interesting as a growing number of the members of the "Facebook generation" find their way into the workforce. You can expect business to become profoundly social, because that will be the expectation of your younger employees. Students in high school and college today have much different views of authority figures than their parents do. While they respect the authority of these figures and their positions, they also expect full access to them. This means they will expect to have access to you as a business owner—just as your customers will.

One way to grant this access is to become personally involved with social media implementation. As a result, you'll learn more about your custom-



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SOCIAL MARKETING

ers, while also giving them the opportunity to learn more about you. This is what Tom Peters had in mind when he popularized the term “management by walking around” (MBWA) in 1982 as the co-author of the groundbreaking business book *In Search of Excellence*. Now you have social media to digitally facilitate walking around the communities your business serves, something your competitors already may be doing.

Consumers have a voice

The collective voice of consumers will continue to grow and shape the world of commerce. The challenge for businesses is to leverage its power by first engaging with it, and then facilitating the conversation to help the community do more of what it wants to do.

People want to be heard, and every business needs to provide a forum for that to happen. Many companies are



It's arguably more important to understand the influences of social media than to necessarily be using it.

using their Facebook page to accomplish this; it's smart, but only if the company monitors and manages the conversation.

I happen to be a fan of Southwest Airlines. When it redesigned its awards program, I went over to its Facebook

page to do some research on whether to convert my old reward points or keep the free tickets from the earlier program. There was a string of hundreds of negative comments without a single response from Southwest. It's surprising because Southwest is a well respected company that's known for its friendliness and personal engagement with customers. Unfortunately, the lack of response only served to fan the flames of customers who

were looking for answers—and not finding them.

The worst thing a business or brand can do is fail to respond. If you're going to open up a Facebook page or accept comments on your blog, you have a responsibility to respond to your audi-



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ence. That expectation doesn't seem to make sense to the same companies that always will answer the telephone if it rings. Today those calls may not be coming so much by the telephone as they are from the social networks. Is your business answering the call? It's an expectation you must build into your standard business practices.

Customer service is moving online

A growing number of consumers are feeling more and more comfortable openly expressing their true feelings online. While this scares the heck out of most businesses, it's something that we're all going to have to come to grips with. For that to happen, your business has to be willing to join the conversation and be prepared to make strong moves.

Business is no longer the monologue that it used to be—when the message of the company was taken at face value.

Now, it's a dialogue with increasingly vocal consumers. According to most research studies over the past several decades, approximately 70 percent to 80 percent of all consumers do not trust businesses in general, especially large corporations.

Your company can embrace this reality by using the social networks to proactively reach out to your customers. While taking this approach makes the company somewhat vulnerable, it's much less risky than erecting perceived barriers where consumers expect transparency. Times are changing; generally accepted practices are being redefined. Social media is democratizing business in general by giving everyone equal access—as well as supporting the expectation that every customer will receive first-class service.

You can wait for this trend to become more prevalent; or, you can take action now to lead your industry.

The collective voice of consumers is growing more powerful every day—something that forward-thinking businesses know they can no longer ignore. One innovative approach is to give up control of your brand to consumers. Instead of trying to completely manage your brand, focus instead on encouraging community conversations that speak favorably about it. **LM**

Korhan is a former landscape business owner who now helps Green Industry businesses use social media and Internet marketing to create exceptional customer experiences.

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PVB LOCK BOX

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MARKET WATCH

LAWN/TREE CARE

ESA at play

RISE serves up the latest on the Endangered Species Act and its impact on you.

By BETH GERACI

At the Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) breakfast meeting at this year's Golf Industry Show on Feb. 6 in San Diego, federal legislative and regulatory issues took the spotlight. In his introduction, Steve Gullickson, RISE governing board chairman, said in 2013 the organization is setting its sights most on California, Florida and Northeastern states such as New York, Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

"Those are key states where legislative and regulatory challenges are moving at a relatively fast pace," he said.

They're challenges he said could inhibit the entire Green Industry's ability to deliver as broad a range of products as it does today (think: pesticides).

Conversation at the breakfast focused on a few issues but most dominating was the Endangered Species Act. It's at the center of multiple federal lawsuits that could curtail the Green Industry's ability to apply pesticides on their current schedules, based on alleged risks to endangered species.

A northern California district court's decision on the issue is looming. A ruling is expected this spring.

"It's really a massive challenge for us in terms of everything—from crop all the way through golf and commercial and residential (landscaping)," Gullickson said.

RISE is striving to ensure lawsuits fighting EPA on the issue aren't successful. And by intervening in *Center for Biological Diversity v. EPA*, otherwise known as "the megasuit," RISE is taking on a proactive role, one on the side of EPA.

The suit is called the megasuit "because about 380 registered pesticides (across the U.S.) potentially could be impacted under this litigation," said Dudley Hoskins, manager of regulatory policy at RISE.

Depending on the suit's outcome, provisions could delay new pesticides from coming to market or limit their use altogether, having a major impact on the Green Industry.

The nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity contends that EPA did

RISE's Dudley Hoskins says the so-called EPA "megasuit" could affect up to 380 active ingredients.

not consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service properly about the effects of EPA-registered pesticides on some endangered species in the San Francisco Bay area.

But Karen Reardon, RISE's vice president, public affairs, said there's nothing wrong with EPA's standards.

"EPA has the gold standard for risk assessment," Reardon said. "They are very well resourced; they do a fine job in meeting their remit and risk assessment. We would like the services to be more open to the EPA and the great job they're doing on this as being protective of species."

But the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has its own species risk assessment process, which it's confident in, Reardon said. As a result, she added, it simply doesn't consider EPA's perspective.

RISE's hope is the consultation process among the federal services can be streamlined under the ESA and the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA).

Regardless of the issues at stake, the conflict would be much better resolved through inter-agency partnership—not played out in the courts, said Hoskins.

Reardon said RISE intervened in the megasuit, so if there is a settlement, the organization could give lawn care professionals a voice in any future discussions.

"Our goal would be to ensure there would be collaboration going forward and more perspectives involved in the decision making," she said. "We would like the interests and perspectives of pesticide applicators and manufacturers to be represented at the table through us."

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What's hot

The ASLA's 2013 residential trends survey shows demand for mainstay landscape elements plus new areas of interest.

By MARISA PALMIERI

The American Society of Landscape Architects' (ASLA's) annual Residential Landscape Trends Survey reveals that fire pits/fireplaces and grills remain hot items this year, along with terraces, patios and decks. For the survey, landscape architects who specialize in residential design were asked to rate the expected popularity of various residential outdoor design elements in 2013.

We compared the data with 2012's survey to identify the items with the greatest change in popularity over last year. They include:

ELEMENT	2012	2013	% CHANGE
Wireless/Internet connectivity	42.7	47.8	5.1 ▲
Outdoor heaters	39.9	50.6	10.7 ▲
Ponds/streams	52.2	58.3	6.1 ▲
Rooftop gardens	38.3	50.4	12.1 ▲
Solar-powered lights	32.8	40.6	7.8 ▲
Geothermal-heated pools	21.7	28.4	6.7 ▲
Arbors	88.7	83.5	5.2 ▼
Decks	74.5	80.9	6.4 ▲
Utility shed	56.5	64.8	8.3 ▲
Columns	49.6	44.5	5.1 ▼
ADA-accessible structures	14.6	22.1	7.5 ▲



Not surprisingly, the following elements remain in demand, ranking in the 90th percentile on popularity:

- Terraces/patios/decks (97.6)
- Fire pits/fireplaces (97)
- Grills (96.3)
- Seating/dining areas (96.3)
- Lighting (95.1)
- Outdoor living spaces (kitchens, entertainment spaces) (94.5)
- Gardens/landscaped spaces (94.4)
- Low-maintenance landscapes (93.9)
- Installed seating (benches, seat walls, ledges, steps, boulders) (90.3)



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MAINTENANCE

Selling on the frontline

Encouraging employees in the field to sell add-ons can improve net profit. Here's how to get started.

By MARISA PALMIERI

Landscape companies can improve their sales and profitability by empowering frontline employees like foremen and project managers to sell, according to consultant Jeffrey Scott.

"It's very effective for raising overall net profit by selling high-margin, add-on sales," he says.

He outlined what it takes to get frontline employees to close deals during the Jeffrey Scott Sales Summit, a three-part webinar series held earlier this year in partnership with *Landscape Management*.

The frontline employee's sales role includes spotting and preventing problems, planting seeds and reporting needs, Scott says. Encouraging employees to sell requires training, incentives and collaboration.

Basic training for frontline employees should cover things as simple as making eye contact and smiling, wearing a clean uniform, asking questions and practicing active listening. Also, ensure employees know what services your company's already supposed to be providing the client.

"Don't make suggestions for things you're already doing or supposed to be doing and haven't done yet," Scott says.

Incentives are important to motivate staff who aren't accustomed to selling. If selling isn't a core part of an employee's job, incentives typically have to be enough "to make it fun," Scott says. Consider incentivizing team members for leads, bringing in new clients and making enhancement sales.

For starters, introduce the new frontline sales program to the team and explain the incentive. Consider giving your new "salespeople" business cards if they don't already have them, which adds some weight and importance to their role. Provide them with forms to return to the office for leads or sales made. Remember to celebrate successes, and not just with money, Scott says.

"Making it important is what will make it happen," he says. "You can't just throw it out like a boomerang and expect it'll come back."

Finally, good internal communication among departments is important for collaboration. "If not, you'll find you may step on each other's toes and cause more problems," Scott says.



IRRIGATION

Intro to lobbying

Use these points to guide your advocacy efforts.

By CHAD FORCEY

While the mere mention of influencing regulatory policy may seem like a long and tough road, the fact is it's becoming a necessary route for irrigation and Green Industry professionals. With demand for water on the rise, legislators and regulatory bodies require the expertise and input of irrigation professionals to shape policy that not only promotes water-use efficiency but helps our industry's interests. In that respect, every irrigation contractor and business owner, big or small, should know how he or she can play a role in influencing public policy.

The Irrigation Association's (IA's) Landscape Water Management Contractor Common Interest Group sponsors regular webinars that offer solutions to issues important to its members. One recent webinar addressed the ways contractors can influence the laws that guide their industry. Greg Mahon, budget and policy specialist for Pennsylvania State Senator Joe Scarnati, offered some tips for irrigation professionals.

► **Define your goals.** Distill them to the most salient points. Even though the legislative process is different in every state, commonalities remain. For instance, legislators and their staff members hear from numerous interest

groups. Keeping your goals simple and easily digestible will help decision makers keep facts straight and help your cause stand out.

► **Speak out and tell your story.**

Don't count on someone else to do it for you. Not only are you advocating for your industry and interests, but you're also offering expertise on the issue. Providing tangible value to legislators on what your issue is—and how it affects the local economy and jobs in their districts—is a top selling point.

► **Build a consensus.** Typically, by the time legislation reaches the floor of any legislature, it has a relatively good chance of passing. It wouldn't have reached that point without widespread support, usually across diverse groups. Broadcasting this value to lawmakers shows that your cause has widespread support across constituencies. Consensus also gives advocates a chance to "take the temperature" of pending legislation along the way. If your lobbying efforts take an unexpected turn, you will likely hear about it from someone in your coalition. These "ear to the ground" relationships are extremely valuable.



Legislators need irrigators' expertise and input, says IA's Chad Forcey.

These points represent the beginnings of an effective strategy to advocate for your interests. Partnering with state or national associations can provide guidance on more detailed tactics, help with coalition building and assist with plans on how to best access legislators and key staff.

Access to legislators and their staffs is only as valuable as the results of the relationships formed from that access. When you effectively provide them with clear goals, a compelling case and a coalition of diverse interests, it will go a long way in the success of your advocacy efforts. **LM**

Forcey is state affairs director for the IA. Reach him at ChadForcey@irrigation.org.

IA Corner

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PROJECT PORTFOLIO

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THE MISSION

Keep an upscale shopping center's surroundings looking radiant regardless of the weather and other challenges.

The client's intent was to create an upscale, family-oriented shopping center. To achieve that goal, the firm sought a lot of landscape color on the property.

However, the existing conditions presented plenty of challenges—including a lack of irrigation; pollution elements from the nearby toll way and surrounding streets; foot traffic; shrubbery; natural area plants around the lake; and water fowl.

To address those issues, Landscape Concepts Management, Grayslake, Ill., decided to go the extra mile in plant care. That included hand watering areas that needed it and adding slow-release irrigation bags to the trees.

"We also made sure we sought the right plants for the area, that can handle both drought and wet areas," says Mark Gemmer, account manager for the project.

Shade trees were planted throughout the shopping center but are kept open to prevent wind damage. Plants are changed out each season and hand watered daily; bed lines are edged monthly; and the turf is replaced annually in small areas that have been affected by salt after the winter season. Perennials and shrub roses are deadheaded weekly to control overgrowth. Soil amendments are added twice a year for maximum growth.

The first year was somewhat of "a learning process," Gemmer acknowledges, and some of the plants did not work out. Eventually, though, the team became more familiar with the site and achieved its original goals.

"We were able to populate the site with flowers and plants that have lots of color and beautiful leaves," he reports. "Our plant experts were able to pick the right plant materials needed for certain areas, like those with high foot traffic, and plants that can resist both drought and wet conditions."



PHOTOS: LINDA OYAMA BRYAN