



Renewal & REMEMBRANCE

PLANET'S 2013 Renewal & Remembrance and Legislative Day on the Hill

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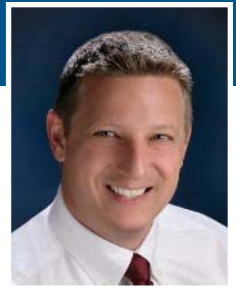


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BY PHIL HARWOOD

Smart portfolio management

SNOW AND ICE management professionals face one of the most difficult variables of all—unpredictability. How many other businesses have no idea when they'll be required to perform services, how long they'll be performing services or what demands will exist for labor, equipment and materials? The unknown makes it very difficult to plan, manage and be profitable.

Trying to predict snowfall totals and ice formation is like to trying to predict who will win the Stanley Cup before the season starts. Since 1880, there's no pattern to seasonal snowfall totals in Southeast Michigan, where I'm located. They are completely random. However, with smart portfolio management (and smart management of individual contracts themselves), much of the risk inherent in the randomness may be mitigated.

Because we have decades of weather history, we're able to easily determine monthly and seasonal averages, along with probabilities for event frequencies. We may create scatter plots, run statistical regressions and more. Armed with this information, we may develop very accurate estimating models. These models and related estimating programs are especially useful when estimating seasonal limited or unlimited contracts.

When we consider the impact of snowfall on the bottom line, we need to realize that seasonal snowfall totals may not line up with the fiscal year. In fact, most snow businesses have fiscal years beginning Jan. 1, which splits the winter season

into two fiscal years. If a business' revenue is more than 50 percent snow, it may be wise to change the fiscal year. One of our clients has a fiscal year that begins Oct. 1, which keeps the winter season in one fiscal year. It's important to compare apples to apples when looking at financial information.

A balancing act

We've developed models for sensitivity analysis of snow contract portfolios. These models prove that most of the risk, due to weather, may be mitigated in the portfolio. For example, our models show that a portfolio of 100 percent per-push (or per event/visit/application) contracts will result in a 101 percent drop in net profit in a light winter (30 percent below normal) and a 110 percent boost in net profit in a heavy winter (30 percent above normal), compared to an average winter.

The risk inherent in such a wide swing in net profit is unacceptable to most business owners and has put many snow and ice contractors out of business. The result of a 100 percent seasonal portfolio is similar, only in reverse—90 percent boost in net profit in a light winter and a 90 percent drop in profit in a heavy winter, compared to an average winter.

However, with a balanced portfolio, the risk is mitigated in a dramatic fashion. In our sensitivity analysis example, with a balanced portfolio, net profit only drops by 52 percent in a light year and increases by 56 percent in a heavy winter. In both scenarios, our example company is very profitable, creating a no-lose situation.

So what's a balanced portfolio? A balanced portfolio is simply a collective bundle of different types of contracts. In the snow business, the most critical variable is the percentage of "per" and seasonal revenue in the portfolio. A 50-50 split is desirable but anything over a 33-67 split in either direction would be considered a balanced portfolio in my book. Strategic selling is the way to ensure that a balanced portfolio exists.

Strategic selling begins with an analysis of the existing portfolio to determine what types of contracts are needed to keep the overall portfolio in balance. This analysis will establish sales goals. Once the selling cycle begins, sales tracking and reporting are necessary to monitor sales activity from a portfolio perspective. At all times, it should be crystal clear as to what the portfolio looks like, so salespeople are able to use their influence to sell the right types of contracts. In some cases, it may be a good move to only offer a specific type of contract so that the portfolio doesn't become imbalanced. It may be better to walk away than to take on too much portfolio risk. Professional gamblers exist but not in the snow business.

Another aspect of portfolio balance is the percentage of contracts expiring in any given year. The higher percentage of contracts up for renewal in a given year, the more portfolio risk increases. Selling multiyear contracts is the only way to reduce this risk. Again, strategic selling is the key. Selling without strategy, tracking and control is a recipe for disaster—or low profitability.

Smart portfolio management equals high profits. There's no reason to settle for mediocre or low profits in the snow business. **LM**

Harwood, LIC, CSP, is president and CEO of Pro-Motion Consulting. Reach him at phil@mypmcteam.com.

» WEB EXTRA

For tips on smart management of individual contracts, visit the Web Extras section of [Landscape Management.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net).

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8/14	Danny Wood , Consultant, <i>Sandler Training</i>	Cold Calling; Overcoming Objection	Sponsorship Available
8/21	Michael Reed , Vendor, <i>Holganix</i>	The Truth About Organics	Sponsorship Available
8/28	Ron Edmonds , Consultant, <i>The Principium Group</i>	Exit Strategies; Mergers and Acquisitions	Sponsorship Available
9/4	Joe Pedatella , Consultant, <i>Spa 23</i>	Creating a Successful Corporate Culture	Sponsorship Available

Remember: all shows are archived for later listening at FD2B.COM!

ABOUT THE HOST

Jody Shilan, MLA is an award-winning landscape designer and former landscape design/build contractor, who has sold tens of millions of dollars of design and installation work throughout his career. He now uses his 35+ years of experience to coach other landscape contractors how to easily and dramatically increase their sales by following his unique landscape design/build/sales process. He does this through public speaking, private consulting, group workshops and his "exclusive" members-only website www.FromDesign2Build.com.



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"I listen to FD2B Talk Radio to educate myself on the landscape design/build topics to better my business. Jody responds to all my questions promptly and with helpful hints you can't get anywhere else." —Kim Stratton, landscape designer, *Stratton Landscape Design*

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SNOW + ICE GUIDE PRODUCTS

SNOW REMOVAL



Hydro Brush 36

As the newest addition to the Power Brush line, the Hydro Brush is an all-season machine capable of moving snow, sand, dirt and gravel. It easily removes up to 6 in. of snow and other debris from sidewalks, driveways and decorative surfaces like patio brick or cobblestone. It also can be used to dethatch or remove gravel from lawns.

Ariens Co. // AriensCo.com



Little Bully dozer blades

Multipurpose Little Bully dozer blades attach in place of the out-front mowing deck of any FrontMount Grasshopper zero-turn mower, providing the same time-savings for plowing snow or leveling dirt as mowing grass. They operate straight ahead or 25 degrees left or right, and can be raised or lowered with hand or foot controls. Options include hydraulic lift and angling for precision feathering.

Grasshopper Mower // GrasshopperMower.com



Snow blower line

Seven models of Loftness' skid-steer snow blowers are available in 72- to 84-in. widths. They feature a universal coupler, a single motor design and an electric spout rotator. In addition, 11 rear-mount-driven tractor models are available in 60- to 108-in. widths—accommodating tractors with 540- or 1,000-rpm power takeoff (PTO) drives and 16- to 200-PTO hp.

Loftness Specialized Equipment // Loftness.com

2013 Landscape Management

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Skid-steer snow blowers

Ranging in size from the S510 to the S590, the five new medium-sized Bobcat skid-steer loader models feature an exclusive cab-forward design, providing an increased level of visibility as well as a larger cab door opening. With widths from 36 to 84 in., the snow blower attachment is ideal for deep snow banks, hard, compacted snow or heavy snowfall.

Bobcat // Bobcat.com



DXT plows

Featuring a dual-trip design, the new 98- and 110-in. poly, steel and stainless steel DXT multi-position plows join the 10-ft. steel DXT model. THE BOSS full moldboard trip protects against taller obstructions (6 in. or more), such as frozen snow banks when in vee, scoop and angled positions. They use the SmartHitch 2 Attachment System.

THE BOSS Snowplow // BOSSPlow.com



Power Broom

Equipped with a Kohler 208CC Command Pro Multi Season engine, Toro's new 36-in. Power Broom features a variable speed, shift on-the-fly transmission with six forward and two reverse positions. Patented power steering reduces operator fatigue. Available accessories include a tire chain kit, snow cab, turf caster kit, dirt deflectors, concrete/snow bristle discs, turf bristle discs, light kit and a debris box.

Toro // Toro.com



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— Marisa Palmieri, editor

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SNOW + ICE GUIDE PRODUCTS



Power Pusher box plows

Power Pusher skid-steer models are available in 8- and 10-ft. widths, while backhoe loader models are available in 10- and 12-ft. widths. Both feature 36-in.-tall moldboards and side plates. Three wheel loader models are also available in 12-, 14- and 16-ft. widths, with 48-in.-tall moldboards and side plates. All models feature adjustable and reversible rubber cutting edges and heavy-duty abrasion-resistant bolt-on wear shoes.

Blizzard Snowplows // BlizzardPlows.com



MVP 3 V-plow

The new MVP 3 blends the best features from the MVP PLUS V-plow, with added performance and durability capabilities. Its new flared blade design takes the center height on the 9.5-ft. models from 31 in. up to 39 in. at the outer edge. Blades are available in 7.5-, 8.5- and 9.5-ft. widths in either powder-coated steel or poly material.

Western // WesternPlows.com

XBlade

The new XBlade (pictured) and HD Series for skid-steer loaders feature a universal skid-steer mounting plate; the machine's standard auxiliary hydraulics provide the power to angle the blade left or right. Available in 8- and 9-ft. widths, XBlade combines Fisher's exclusive X-bracing with corrosion-resistant, stainless-steel moldboards and proven trip-edge design.

Fisher // FisherPlows.com



DEICING EQUIPMENT

Crossfire Spreader

The new Crossfire is designed for 3/4- to 1-ton pickups. Available with 6- (1.5 cu. yds.) or 8-ft. (2 cu. yds.) beds, the spreader is available in a standard model or DLX model (pictured), which features an integrated pre-wet system that reduces the amount of material used by up to 30 percent. The double-walled, high-density polyethylene hopper has a five-year warranty. Meyer Products LLC // MeyerProducts.com



Drop Pro spreader

SnowEx's two new tractor-mounted Drop Pro electric spreaders offer controlled application of bagged ice melters and bulk rock salt. Model SD-600 has a 6-cu.-ft. capacity with a 36-in. spread width, while Model SD-1400 has a 14-cu.-ft. capacity with a 48-in. spread width.

SnowEx // SnowExProducts.com



Tension fabric buildings

Legacy buildings use a durable rigid frame in place of the hollow-tube, open web truss framing traditionally used for fabric buildings. The solid structural steel beams are not vulnerable to unseen corrosion originating inside a tube. Additionally, the company says the hot dip galvanized framework provides years of low-maintenance use.

Legacy Building Solutions // LegacyBuildingSolutions.com

Legacy Building Solutions // LegacyBuildingSolutions.com

T370 trucks

As Clintar Landscape Management's mainstay truck in its snow removal business, the Kenworth T370 in single- and tandem-axle configurations spread salt and a salt-liquid mixture in government and private sector parking lots throughout the southern Ontario and the Maritime provinces. During the spring and summer, the salt boxes are removed so the trucks can haul gravel and mulch. Some are outfitted with 1,000-gal. tanks so Clintar can use them for watering sod installations or for power washing operations.

Kenworth Truck Co. // Kenworth.com



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PROJECT PORTFOLIO

A SCRAPBOOK OF DESIGN/BUILD OVERHAULS

Addressing
Gettysburg

THE MISSION

Maintain the integrity of this historically significant site as its visitors center relocates elsewhere on the premises.

The Gettysburg battlefield is a reminder of three fateful days in July 1863, when the tide of the American Civil War shifted from Confederate to Union advantage.

Commemorating this historic battle and its significance was originally undertaken in the 1960s, with a visitors center and cyclorama building designed by renowned architect Richard Neutra. But to return the battlefield to its original state and relocate the center to ground that saw no major battle action, the National Park Service, in conjunction with the Gettysburg Foundation, undertook the construction of a new 139,000-sq.-ft. center in 2008.

Ruppert Landscape, based in Laytonsville, Md., was responsible for planting, removing existing turf, re-grading, sodding, drainage and irrigation at the new facility. The team also installed pavers, the concrete subslab, a bench, a statuary, boulders, river rock, lighting and trees; restored the rubble wall; and installed pedestrian-control safety fencing.

Perhaps the biggest challenge on this project was that the visitors center and paths leading to and from it were open during the landscape installation. There also were boulders (some in excess of 20 tons) and large caliper trees (one with a rootball weighing nearly 15 tons) that had to be craned into position.

Ruppert's Landscape Construction Foreman Leroy Barton worked closely with the landscape architect, Andy Balderson of Donovan Feola Balderson, and grower Halka Nurseries to dig a flat side of the rootball to more easily "face" the project's large 40-ft. specimen tree toward the courtyard area.

"When all was said and done, our team had assisted the client with their original intent of drawing and allowing visitor access during construction," says Bob Jones, vice president and director of Ruppert's Landscape Construction division.



PHOTOS 1 AND 5: GETTYSBURG VISITORS CENTER;
PHOTOS 2, 3, 4 AND 6: ANDY BALDERSON /
DONOVAN FEOLA BALDERSON

3



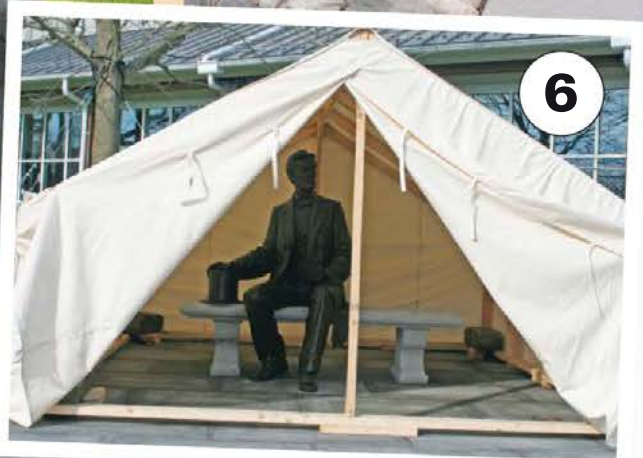
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6



THE WORK

1 | Living history. The Gettysburg Museum & Visitor Center and its landscape have been melded to create a site that's sensitive to the historic nature of the surrounding landscape and evokes the emotions of 1863 while meeting visitors' expectations of a 21st-century museum experience.

2 | Rock solid. This 20-ton boulder is one of several included in the design as an homage to rock formations at Devil's Den, which were used during the battle to shield soldiers from gunfire.

3 | Sky's the limit. To lift this tree and its 30,000-lb. rootball into its final position required two moves: First from a lower parking lot to midpoint, which was as far as the crane boom would extend. The crane was then repositioned and the tree was deposited to its final destination.

4 | LEED-certified. To satisfy LEED requirements, materials had to be sourced from within 500 miles of the project and come from a palate of native plant material, increasing sourcing time by 25 percent. Some of the native species: fragrant sumac, Itea, arrowwood Viburnum and winterberry.

5 | Multipurpose. Stone walls commonly seen throughout Pennsylvania fields and the battlefield were echoed along walkways for visual effect, to stabilize the slope and to control erosion.

6 | The big reveal. Prior to the statue's unveiling in fall 2008, it had to be shielded from view. Ruppert procured and erected a Civil War-era tent so it would blend in with the surroundings until its unveiling.

Laytonville, Md.-based Ruppert Landscape offers estimating and pre-construction services, general installation, project management and design. For more information, visit RuppertLandscape.com.



If you build it

Carpentry projects have led one New Jersey company to launch a new division.

DOING THE OCCASIONAL pergola or deck project for some of his landscape clients led Simon Darlington, owner of Darlington Designs in Glassboro, N.J., to launch an entire carpentry division for his landscape company. Though he knows it's a bit of an unusual service for a landscape company to offer, the strong reputation for quality and craftsmanship he's built on projects completed so far has allowed that division to grow and thrive. In fact, Darlington has now hired three full-time crew members to handle the carpentry work.

During college, Darlington says he worked for a custom home builder, spawning his interest in carpentry. When he started his landscape business in 2003, he offered small carpentry projects—like pergolas—if homeowners requested them. His business blossomed from there as clients began asking for more. In 2007, Darlington launched a separate carpentry division. He calls the service “wood construction” on his website,

and it encompasses just about anything a general contractor does. Darlington says the division grew organically.

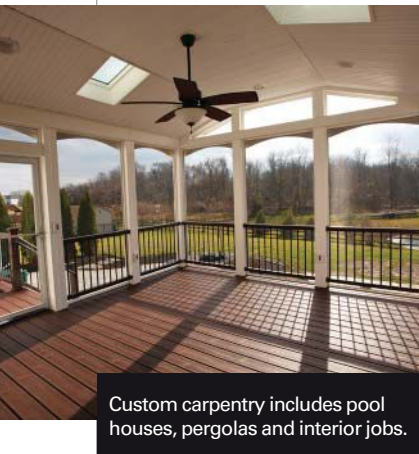
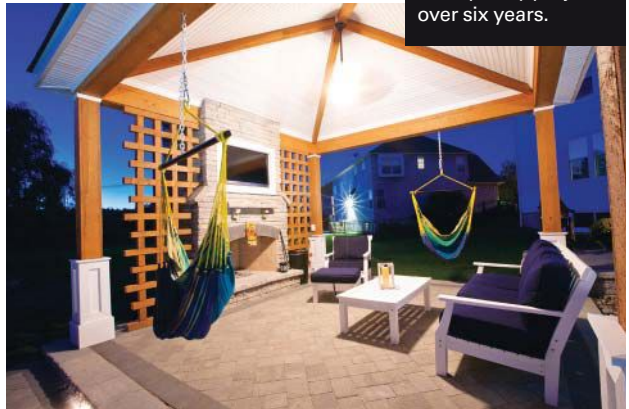
“As the work grew, I hired an employee to work on that division—then another—and now we're up to a crew of three full-time workers,” Darlington says. “All they do is custom carpentry, which has included everything from pool houses and cabanas to interior work like hardwood flooring or trim work. We don't always go out and look for those jobs—they often just happen naturally.”

The carpentry division of Darlington's business has even handled roofing, siding and small additions. Darlington says it's getting to the point where customers are hiring him because of the carpentry offering.

Darlington says the company had to prove itself in the field.



Darlington Designs has built a portfolio of carpentry projects over six years.



Custom carpentry includes pool houses, pergolas and interior jobs.

“We've been doing the carpentry work for about six years and the first three were a little slow,” Darlington says. “As a landscape company we don't look like carpenters, so we had to slowly build a portfolio as jobs came along, which proved we were really good at doing this, too.”

As the division has grown, Darlington says it's been a substantial investment. Carpentry tools are not cheap and Darlington also had to purchase an additional box truck. Still, he says the investment in those tools are cheaper than the construction equipment needed for outdoor landscape projects. He adds that he's been able to recuperate the cost relatively quickly as carpentry projects often can produce a nice profit.

Recently Darlington has begun marketing the carpentry division as its own entity.

“We're doing specific brochures and using our website to showcase that division,” he says.

One of the biggest benefits of adding the division has been the year-round work it produces. In fact, he started this division in part to generate winter work for his staff.

“We've been increasingly able to accomplish that as the division has grown. It's something I'm very proud of,” he says. “We try to get some interior work lined up for the winter, and that gives us an extra 12 weeks a year where we can generate revenue. We're even able to use some of our landscape crew members when we're doing a carpentry project that requires extra hands.”

Payton is a freelance writer with eight years of experience writing about the landscape industry.

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY: Darlington Designs

LOCATION: Glassboro, N.J.

EMPLOYEES: 17

SERVICE: Custom carpentry division

COST TO INVEST IN A CARPENTRY DIVISION: Approximately \$30,000

YEARS TO RECOUP INVESTMENT: Three to five