

But the hybrids are about 30 percent more fuel efficient than the standard diesel engine, says Ervin, who sold the Hino trucks to John Shorb Landscaping. The payback period on these hybrid vehicles is nearly seven years. The return on investment can fluctuate depending on the price of diesel fuel, Ervin says.

Hybrid trucks, Ervin cautions, are not suited for every industry because the trucks need to idle for the batteries to recharge. They are ideal for landscaping businesses that have many clients in the suburbs, where stoplights every few miles offer an opportunity to recharge, he says.

### HOW IT WORKS

When the clutch engages in the hybrid system, the motor uses electric power stored in the battery to start the engine, eliminating the need for a starter motor. The hybrid system is active until the truck reaches a cruising speed, the most efficient operating mode for an engine. The truck then automatically switches to engine-only driving.

During braking, vehicle acceleration energy is converted to electricity, which is stored in battery. In this mode, the clutch automatically disengages to enable energy recovery and regeneration. Another potential fuel-saving feature is the “idle stop mode.” When the vehicle stops, the engine shuts off to reduce unnecessary fuel consumption. When the driver takes his or her foot off the brake pedal, the engine restarts.

### MOVING FORWARD WITH HYBRIDS

As of late July, Hino had sold about 450 195h hybrids in the U.S. since introducing them in November. Most of the sales were in California, due to the state’s Hybrid Vehicle Incentive Program.

And while adoption has been slow, more landscaping companies are showing interest in hybrid vehicles.

“I’ve quoted two or three other landscaping companies on hybrid trucks,” Ervin says. “The landscaping companies I’ve dealt with are very environmentally sensitive—a lot more than any other industry that I deal with. They’re dealing with the environment day in and day out so they seem to be more in tune with it.”

So far, Shorb says he’s pleased with the performance of the hybrid vehicles. The “idle stop mode” feature was a little frustrating at first because Shorb thought the van wasn’t working properly. “It’s a little disconcerting the first few days you’re driving it in stop-and-go traffic,” he says.

Looking ahead, though, Shorb expects the hybrid trucks will pay off.

“We hope we’re able to confirm the extra price will be offset by the fuel savings,” Shorb says. “We also believe that eventually customers will appreciate the fact that we’re doing this.

*Katz is a Cleveland-based freelance writer.*



# GO SAMURAI ON YOUR GRASS!

***Poa annua...Clover...Dandelion...Sedge***  
they’re invading your clients’ lawns. Cut them down with the chosen weapon of masters: **Katana® Turf Herbicide.**

Katana delivers exceptional control of *Poa annua*, and slices through more than 50 sedges, fescue, broadleaf and grassy weeds. And Katana is now labeled for spot treatments on residential lawns and for use on professionally managed sports fields.

***Don’t Be Just Another Turf  
Warrior: Be a Samurai.  
Wield Katana.***



**G** pbi / Gordon  
CORPORATION  
An Employee-Owned Company

800.884.3179 | [GordonsProfessional.com/katana](http://GordonsProfessional.com/katana)

Always read and follow label directions. Checkered Flag/Label Design®, Gordon’s® and ProForm® are registered trademarks of PBI-Gordon Corporation. Katana® is a registered trademark of Ishihara Sangyo Kaisha, Ltd. 10/13 03027

IRRIGATION

# Three keys to a 'smarter' business model

EPA WaterSense Partner of the Year shares tips on how to successfully sell efficient irrigation systems. *By JONATHAN KATZ*

In October, Taylor Irrigation Service became the first Texas-based irrigation designer/contractor to win the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) WaterSense Partner of the Year Award. The EPA recognized the company for changing its business model by designing and installing irrigation systems that consume as much as 50 percent less water than traditional systems.

John Taylor, director of operations and president of the Houston-based company, decided in 2011 to transition his business from general irrigation services to water-conservation technologies. The change has helped the company differentiate itself from competitors and expand the business.

The process didn't come without challenges, though. Here, Taylor shares three principles to establishing a profitable irrigation business model focused on conservation.

## 1 Sell the ROI.

It seems every business today in just about any industry is marketing some type of "green" product or service. But actually convincing customers they need sustainable solutions can be a tough sell. Irrigation contractors must demonstrate to customers efficient irrigation can provide a measurable return on investment, Taylor says.

The company performs audits to show customers how much money they can save by adopting smart-irrigation systems, including evapotranspiration

rate-based (ET) controllers and drip irrigation. The company backs its auditing services with certifications from the state of Texas and the EPA. Taylor sells systems that cost 40 to 50 percent more than standard technologies, but with the audits he can show customers more efficient irrigation technologies use up to 50 percent less water.

Taylor cautions, however, contractors should not oversell the potential savings. In addition to the property audits, he suggests contractors interview their clients about how they use their irrigation systems because some customers may manage their irrigation schedules better than others.

"How the client interacts with the system is very important because with an ET-based system the controller is making the decisions on its own," Taylor says. "So if we're going to forecast the ROI for the client, then we need to have a pretty accurate idea of what the client does with their current system."

## 2 Don't be afraid to refocus your client base.

Taylor Irrigation previously sold standard and "Cadillac" smart-irrigation systems. Before the company shifted its focus to water conservation, it regarded the higher-priced, more efficient systems as a luxury for its clients. Now, it's the only option for customers.

After making the move, the company lost the bottom 25 percent of its client base, Taylor says. But the move opened the door to a new client base that's capitalizing on the company's high-efficiency technology.



John Taylor, director of operations and president of Taylor Irrigation Service, accepts the company's EPA WaterSense Partner of the Year Award.

In addition, the company has gained an advantage over many competitors in the Houston area because it's positioned itself as an expert in efficient irrigation, Taylor says.

## 3 Ask your peers for advice.

One of Taylor's most difficult challenges in the beginning was learning how to install and price the new technology. Taylor tried to hasten the learning curve by reading market reports on the best technologies available and providing his staff with training courses.

The company, Taylor admits, learned mostly by trial and error in those first three to six months. He now suggests contractors take advantage of industry resources such as conferences and industry trade magazines to overcome some of the early hurdles.

"One of the best things irrigation contractors can do is go to the industry shows to network and ask other irrigators what they think works," Taylor says. "You'd be surprised how many great irrigation contractors are out there and available and willing to share information with guys ready to make the same choices. I think if irrigators weren't so afraid to flat-out ask, they'll be much better off."

*Katz is a Cleveland-based freelance writer.*

# LANDSCAPE



## TALK RADIO

**Every Wednesday, 7-8 pm EST!**

Landscape Live! Talk Radio, formerly FD2B Talk Radio, is a weekly internet radio show for landscape and lawn care professionals who want to take their companies to the next level.

**Tune in @ FD2B.COM!**

### UPCOMING PROGRAMS

DATE	SPECIAL GUEST	PROGRAM TOPIC	SPONSOR
12/4	<b>Tom Canete</b> , Contractor, <i>Canete Snow Management</i>	Snow, Sleet and Hail Mary – Managing MetLife Stadium	Sponsorship Available
12/11	<b>Joseph P. DeMarco</b> , Attorney, <i>DeMarco &amp; DeMarco, Esqs.</i>	The Truth About Snow and Landscape Contracts	Sponsorship Available
12/18	<b>Kevin Gilbride</b> , Association, <i>ASCA</i>	Making a Difference in the Snow Industry	Sponsorship Available
12/25	NO SHOW SCHEDULED; <b>Happy Holidays!</b>	NO SHOW SCHEDULED; <b>Happy Holidays!</b>	Sponsorship Available
1/1	<b>Barry Draycott</b> , Vendor, <i>Tech Terra Environmental</i>	A Natural Based Plant Health Care System	
1/8	<b>Kathryn Dager</b> , Consultant, <i>Profitivity Inc.</i>	How to Create a Profitability Team	

### 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](http://www.FromDesign2Build.com).



[jshilan@fd2b.com](mailto:jshilan@fd2b.com)

Remember: all shows are archived for later listening at [FD2B.COM](http://FD2B.COM)!

**Interested in sponsoring Landscape Live! Talk Radio?  
Contact Your Account Manager Today!**

**Bill Roddy**  
Publisher  
216-706-3758  
[broddy@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:broddy@northcoastmedia.net)

**Craig MacGregor**  
North American Sales Manager  
216-706-3787  
[cmacgregor@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:cmacgregor@northcoastmedia.net)

DESIGN/BUILD

# Tracking time vs. measuring value

Design/build pros weigh in on the art of charging design fees. *By SARAH PFLEDDERER*

There's a tale about Pablo Picasso that begins with the artist sitting in a cafe, sketching a woman in his view. The picture took all but five minutes to craft, but he alleged to the woman it would cost her \$2,000 to own.

While not charging for the minutes to do the drawing, he was charging for the years it took him to attain the knowledge to put the sketch to paper.

"It is a wonderful way to say what we do has so much more value than the time we put in it," Diana Grunden says.

The owner of Trio Landscaping, in Minneapolis, shares the Picasso scenario to support why she charges

flat-rate design fees instead of hourly rates.

Charging design fees is a choice of yes or no. But choosing how to charge them—hourly or flat—is complex and approaches differ per company, depending on clients, individual projects and design processes.

Grunden starts off with a \$300 base rate, an amount she figures is worth six hours of her time. The cost goes up contingent on the intricacy of the project and size of space. (She's charged up to \$1,500 for a single project.)

And, to the client's benefit, Grunden uses her design fees as a deposit instead of a source of income, reimbursing the prorated payment to clients for whatever part of the design they choose to move forward with.

For this reason, she rarely banks on her design fees.

On the flip side, Chad Wheeler makes around \$12,000 in design fees annually.

The president of Dream Landscapes in Lynchburg, Va., which is 70 percent design/build, isn't loyal to hourly or flat rates, though. His means of pricing vary per customers and projects.

"I like to take more a consultative approach, consulting with the clients, giving them their options," he says.

Typically, his "rule of thumb" is to charge an hourly rate at \$100 per hour for projects that will cost \$10,000 to \$15,000. He will charge a flat rate on projects costing more than that, factoring in some revision times for those larger projects.

Wheeler isn't set on his hourly rate either. He sometimes lowers the price to \$75 per hour to have an advantage over competitors and, on very rare occasions, also will reimburse fees like Grunden.

The biggest advantage to a flat rate, he says, is the commitment from his clients to see through an entire project.

Whereas with an hourly fee, they can back out at anytime, but he still will be paid for the hours he's already put in.

For David Marciniak, a flat rate is a greater reassurance to clients because they're able to see what they're charged for every step of the way before they choose to move forward with a proposal.

"You tend to get a lot of pushback from homeowners on the idea of design fees anyhow," says the owner of

design firm Revolutionary Gardens in McLean, Va., which does not offer reimbursements on design fees. "So when (clients) get the perception, 'You're just charging us hourly so we have no idea what's going on,' they just have an extra level of fear and discomfort."



Dave Marciniak

Revolutionary Gardens, however, does offer hourly fees to landscape contractors, with the assumption they have an understanding of design processes and procedures.

For traditional clients, Marciniak details to them the time it takes to design a project and instills there's two processes to a landscaping project: the design process and the construction process.

"I find when it's presented to clients that way, they understand it and they see the value in it," he says. "It ends up being a very transparent way of seeing what your costs are throughout the process."

In figuring estimates, Marciniak investigates the complexity of projects, factoring in the time to measure, base map, draft conceptual designs, put together supporting materials, etc.

He educates clients on these components and accounts for some revision time in his proposals, plus offers additional revision time at an hourly rate.

"Part of the value in that is it lets people know 'I need you to really think through what you're asking me for. Because if you neglect to tell me something important, I'm not going to go over and start at zero again,'" he says. "From a sales standpoint, it's just neater and cleaner to do flat rate."

Grunden adds a flat rate is fairer to clients because her design processes vary.

"How in the world do I track and budget people appropriately for back-end time?" she says, adding she brainstorms about projects in her daily tasks and jokes she even landscapes in her sleep.

"We're all artists," she says. "Our brains are all going to work in different ways. You have to do what is best for you." LM



Diana Grunden



Chad Wheeler

# THE Landscape Management APP FOR iPad®



**NOW  
AVAILABLE!**

**FREE**

**DOWNLOAD  
IT TODAY!**



Search **Landscape Management HD** on the **App Store**™

**Link:** <http://itunes.com/apps/LandscapeManagementHD>

For more information, visit **LandscapeManagement.net**



# PROJECT PORTFOLIO

A SCRAPBOOK OF DESIGN/BUILD OVERHAULS

Handle with care

## THE MISSION

Eradicate invasive plant materials that have colonized this archeologically significant lighthouse space.

Florida's Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse and Museum is more than a local landmark. Its site is a Native American shell mound, thus no digging can take place without an archeologist present.

This is what Hobe Sound, Fla.-based Rood Landscape encountered firsthand when it was engaged to rid the property of a non-native *Sansevieria* colony. Project Manager Ron Vekeman, who is also an account executive and landscape designer for Rood, notes that the persistent nature of *Sansevieria* meant it had to be removed, but physical removal wasn't really an option. Instead, the team opted to cut the plants at the root and apply an herbicide to each cut stem.

"Only a limited amount of chemical could be applied to the multitude of exotic plants per calendar year, and it needed to be reported on a weekly basis," he says. "Added to that, we were on a rather tight timeline—right during our summer rainy season."

Despite these limitations, the team was determined to make the job a success. When sufficient kill had taken place with the herbicide, an erosion control geo-grid fabric was applied on the steepest grade, at the north side of the lighthouse, to ensure soil cap stabilization. A coco fiber mat then was applied to hold the soil in place.

Into these strata, a new planting took place: A plant palette of approved native plants was chosen, each for its ability to withstand the proximity to the ocean. An irrigation system was applied within this soil cap. Irrigation work was done by Treasure Coast Irrigation, Rood's sister company also based in Hobe Sound.

Today, the *Sansevieria* colony is but a memory—and the lighthouse continues to serve as a beacon of history for thousands of visitors each year.



PHOTOS: ROOD LANDSCAPE



## THE WORK

- 1 | Before removal.** The north bank with the *Sansevieria* colony in full swing.
- 2 | Archeological dig.** Any soil disturbance on the property had to be supervised by an archeologist.
- 3 | Surgical procedure.** Treating *Sansevieria* using herbicide and wick.
- 4 | On the grid.** A grid was used for soil stabilization of the north bank.
- 5 | Material world.** Erosion control fabric was applied over the soil layer.
- 6 | A better place.** The south bank today.

Founded in 1946, Rood Landscape offers "concierge-style" landscape maintenance services, as well as design and installation for both residential and commercial customers. Learn more at [RoodLandscape.com](http://RoodLandscape.com).



## Field work

Virginia-based J.W. Townsend specializes in wildflower meadows.



J.W. Townsend reseeds its clients' ornamental meadows every spring.

**I**N ITS FIRST year of installing wildflower meadows, J.W. Townsend, a Charlottesville, Va.-based landscape company, only did one. But the interest has grown dramatically since that first meadow installation in 1998. In fact, the service has increased by 50 percent each year. This past year alone the company installed 16 meadows.

Ed Yates, the company's nursery manager and wildflower meadow expert, always has been interested in the idea of meadows as an alternative to pastures or lawns. "The most significant benefit of a meadow is what it offers to the local wildlife," says Yates, who majored in wildlife management in college. "Mown grass or pasture land offers very limited possibilities in terms of what creatures can live there. But a meadow supports a tremendous amount of wildlife. In one meadow we installed, a butterfly expert found 500 different species of butterflies."

While the service is only a small portion of the company's \$4.5 million overall revenue—accounting for approximately 3 or 4 percent—it's something that helps set the company apart. J.W. Townsend is one of the only companies in its region that does work like this, Yates says.

Meadow installations also have led to ongoing revenue opportunities via annual or semiannual maintenance services. "Every year we knock back the succession (growth) by cutting or burning the meadow," Yates says. "If you don't knock back the growth, weeds will grow really fast. Weeds don't typically hurt the meadow, but it can really hurt the aesthetic."

### TARGET MARKET

The interest in meadows has grown, Yates says, adding they're not for everyone. "Those who like a manicured lawn are not the right fit for a meadow," he says.

While meadow design and installation began as a primarily residential offering—for large-estate owners and those who didn't want the maintenance involved with a lawn—the service has evolved to include many commercial properties as well. The company has

installed meadows at several locations for the University of Virginia Real Estate Foundation.

When J.W. Townsend began offering meadow installation, it already owned the majority of the equipment required for the work. The most specific tool needed for meadows, Yates says, is a no-till drill. His meadow installation and maintenance crew also uses a boom sprayer when it's converting a field.

Converting the site may include herbicide applications, Yates says, noting every conversion is unique. It can take up to eight months to prepare a site for seeding. After seeding, depending on the seed mix used, annual wildflowers begin to appear within three to five months. By the second growing season, the meadows appear full but will continue to evolve for years. In terms of seed type, Yates's team custom designs the mix for each meadow, taking into consideration site conditions and the owner's goals.

"Many of the meadows seeded are the sustainable type, focusing upon native warm season grasses and wildflowers," Yates adds. "In general these only need to be seeded once. When a more ornamental meadow is desired we reseed every spring, focusing primarily on annual wildflower species."

Yates acknowledges there's a big learning curve when it comes to meadow installation. It's not an easy service to jump into without having some experience. In former roles, Yates worked for a park authority and was also an arboretum manager. He gained meadow experience in both positions.

"There's a lot of knowledge involved in a service like this," Yates says.

Since the service's inception, he has been passionate about his work on meadows, finding value in the opportunity to create such uncommon landscapes. "Each one is different," Yates says. "We can create an aesthetic that is unrivaled and truly original."

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

### >> SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**COMPANY:** J.W. Townsend

**HEADQUARTERS:** Charlottesville, Va.

**WHY MEADOWS?** Ed Yates, the company's wildflower meadow expert, sees this service as a trend. "There was a time where the idea of converting property into meadowland was thought of as crazy," Yates says. "But now everyone is talking about it and the trend is only going to grow."

**CLIENTELE?** "We've done everything from a 30-acre field to a meadow all around a house," Yates says. "Some residential properties want zero lawn, while others want a meadow as part of their overall property, including a trail. Commercial opportunities have also been increasing."



# LM REPORTS

YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH

## MOWERS



### Pro-Stance 36

With patent-pending features, including integrated Hydro-Gear transmissions, a dial height-of-cut and foot pedal deck lift, the new 36-in. Pro-Stance fits within gates and tight spaces. A lower center of gravity allows operators to handle slopes or uneven terrain. The isolated platform reduces vibration and operator fatigue, the company says.

**Gravely** // [Gravely.com](http://Gravely.com)



### Stryker Stand-On series

The new Stryker is available in a 48- or 54-in. deck, powered with a 23.5-hp Kawasaki FX engine. Both models are primarily composed of 7-gauge steel and 14-gauge stainless steel. The compact stand-on design creates a lighter footprint for trailer space and becomes even narrower with the platform flipped up, the company says.

**Dixie Chopper** // [DixieChopper.com](http://DixieChopper.com)



### HRC commercial series

The self-propelled, hydrostatic drive HRC216K3HXA (pictured) and push-type HRC216K3PDA feature Honda's exclusive MicroCut twin-blade mulching technology. In addition, the push model features Honda's GSV160 overhead cam (OHC) engine, while the self-propelled model uses the GXV160 engine. Both engines feature all-aluminum construction and a cast-iron cylinder sleeve.

**Honda** // [PowerEquipment.Honda.com](http://PowerEquipment.Honda.com)



### Altoz XP Z

Available in two models (540 Z, pictured, and 610 Z), these zero-turn radius mowers' features include the Aero Deck High Output System, Gator Mulcher G6 blades and the SmarTrak Monitoring System.

Other features from this new manufacturer include built-in maintenance reminders, a digital gauge, alarm protection and an on-board clock. The drive system and clutch produce 200 ft-lbs of torque for the heavy-duty deck, deck spindles, front forks and fork castors.

**Altoz Precision Mowers** // [Altoz.com](http://Altoz.com)



### IS 2100Z lineup

This new model lineup consists of six models, ranging from 25.5- to 32-gross hp and 52- or 61-in. decks. Each boasts a commercial Hydro-Gear ZT-5400 powertrain and a Ferris suspension

system featuring rear-coil-over shocks and front, adjustable shocks. This exclusive suspension system provides the machine operator with comfort, speed (up to 10 mph), consistency of cut, extended mower life and productivity, the company says.

**Briggs & Stratton Power Products Group** // [FerrisIndustries.com](http://FerrisIndustries.com)



## IRRIGATION SHOW

NOV. 19 - 20

## EDUCATION CONFERENCE

NOV. 17 - 21

## PHOENIX CONVENTION CENTER

PHOENIX, ARIZ.



[www.irrigationshow.org](http://www.irrigationshow.org)

# LMREPORTS



## Z-Force LZ and SZ

Ideal for mowing up to 5 acres, these commercial series zero-turns offer four-wheel steering and cruise control. Oversized lap bars with quick-adjust knobs, full-length comfort grips and integrated automatic parking brake system are standard. They offer a dual Hydro-Gear ZT 3100 transmission and ground speeds from 8 mph forward and 4 mph reverse.

**Cub Cadet** // [CubCadet.com](http://CubCadet.com)



## 21-in. commercial line

All five models in this new line are equipped with the Recycler cutting system; a wide, easy-empty bag; premium engines and maintenance-free transmissions. Models are equipped with a Honda or Kawasaki engine, travel up to 4.2 mph and offer 1- to 4.5-in cutting heights to mow in a variety of conditions. They also come equipped with a self-propelled Zone Start or Blade Stop System.

**Toro** // [Toro.com/professional](http://Toro.com/professional)

## Grasshopper EFI

These new electronic-fuel-injection (EFI) mowers feature Delphi-based, closed-loop engines that monitor internal and external factors and make automatic adjustments to maintain an optimum fuel ratio. Automotive-style, plug-in diagnostics facilitate faster and more precise service. Models 327 EFI and 727T EFI accept side-discharge cutting decks up to 72 in., as well as dedicated rear discharge decks and PowerVac Collection Systems.

**The Grasshopper Co.** // [GrasshopperMower.com](http://GrasshopperMower.com)



## STALKER

Made in the U.S., the new, patent-pending STALKER stand-on walk-behind mower is powered by Lithium Energy Modules (LEMs). The 48-in. cordless mower can mow all day on one charge for most contractors, the company says, noting that if needed, LEM swaps can be accomplished in less time than it takes to add gas to a gas-engine mower. Quiet and lightweight, the STALKER offers more than 350 ft.-lbs. of torque per drive wheel. The NIGHT STALKER model with LED floodlights also is available.

**Mean Green Mowers** // [MeanGreenProducts.com](http://MeanGreenProducts.com)