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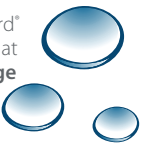


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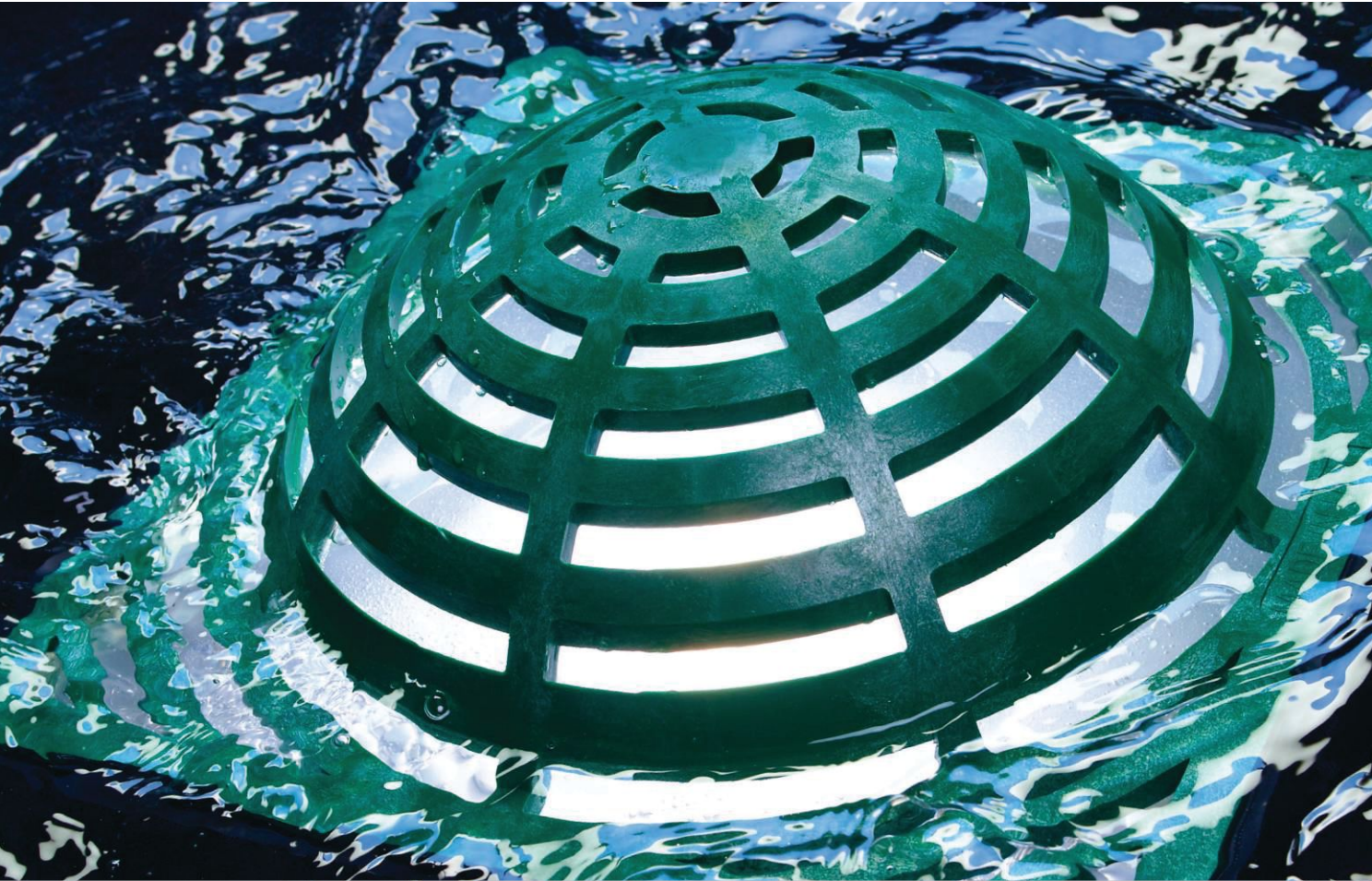
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FD2B Talk Radio Insight of the Night

As part of a new partnership between *Landscape Management* and FD2B Talk Radio, we post a tip from the show each week. To listen to the show, tune in to FD2B Talk Radio at FromDesign2Build.com. Here are a few recent gems.

» Instead of having prospective employees just submit a resume, ask them to answer open-ended questions, requiring well-thought-out answers, about a specific experience. Interviewing candidates this way will provide you with valuable insight into how they think and deal with specific situations. You're not going to get that kind of info from a piece of paper with their credentials listed on it.

—Bill Arman, *The Harvest Group, Southern California*

» Home shows and flower shows are a great opportunity for landscape contractors to touch their customers and promote their businesses, but they can get expensive. To help minimize these costs, ask vendors to donate the products to build your display. Naturally, you'll promote the products they donated as a way of thanking them.

—Kevin McLaughlin, *Mac Events, Spring Lake, N.J.*

» A great estimate is also a plan for the job. Give crews a "job planner," which provides the production team what they'll need to build the project, such as the number of man hours that are task-specific, material lists with estimated purchase prices and a list of the equipment needed to install the work.

—Mike Lysecki, *Landscape Management Network, Toronto*

WEB EXTRAS

» View additional photos from this month's Project Portfolio (p. 52).

» Get a link to download Andrew Pototschnik's lawn care marketing mistakes to avoid, referenced on p. 47.



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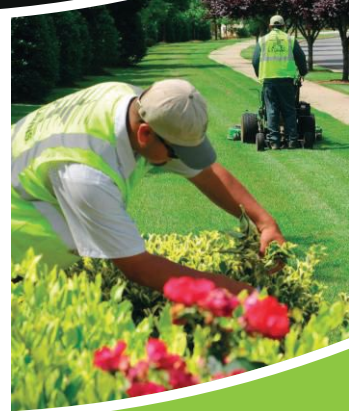
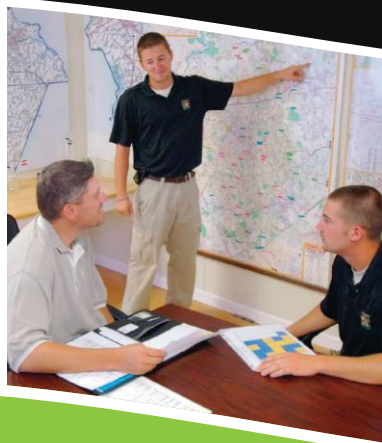


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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

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About us

This column isn't about us, as in *Landscape Management*. It's about you. Rather, it's about your website's About Us page and why you probably need to spruce it up. Marketing experts say About Us pages are some of the most frequently visited pages by potential customers; they're also some of the most poorly written. I know I always seek out companies' About Us pages when I'm perusing websites. Why? I like to *like* the people behind the company I'm buying from.

You may be thinking that well-crafted About Us pages are only important for the Apples, Zappos and Starbucks of the world. But that's not true. They're important for all companies wanting to appeal to their potential customers. For example, check out this inspiring About Us page from Austin, Texas-based Radiant Plumbing. It's not a national company with scores of marketing experts behind its efforts (although it likely worked with a video production company). The point is you should visit this page RadiantPlumbing.com/about-us/ and then try tell me you don't want to do business with them!

In my experience, Green Industry companies' About Us pages often commit these five mistakes. (No, I don't have empirical data here, but trust me, I look at a lot of landscape company websites.) If your site is guilty of these, why not spruce it up?

1. No About Us page whatsoever. Even if you don't have an actual page called About Us, you need to have

something that communicates your history, values and people.

2. A rambling, poorly written About Us page. I understand many companies have DIY websites when they're starting out, and that's OK. But it doesn't give you a pass on professionalism and grammatical correctness. If you're not confident about your writing skills, ask a few people to proofread for you or seek a marketing student to help you for a reasonable fee.

3. No owner or leadership team information. Your and your team's background and expertise are an important part of your unique service proposition. Display them proudly.

4. No photos or video. Nothing humanizes a business more than photos or videos of its people. At the least, have headshots taken of your leadership team and post an all-team picture in front of your shop or at a company event.

5. No credentials. The About Us page is the perfect place to list your team's and your company's certifications, awards and memberships. Obtain the logos of the organizations you belong to—whether it's your chamber of commerce or a local or national landscape association—and include them on this page with links.

P.S. I realize our About Us page (LandscapeManagement.net/about-us/) commits at least one of the infractions above (No. 5). I'll promise to improve it this year as we make other updates to our website if you resolve to do the same. Deal?

Landscape Management

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Eichenlaub Inc. nabs back-to-back honors

Three tips for success from LandOpt's two-time Contractor of the Year.

BY MARISA PALMIERI

As Dan Eichenlaub can attest, it's always possible for a solid company to run a tighter ship. He's the president of Eichenlaub Inc., a design/build and maintenance firm based in Pittsburgh with just under \$5 million in annual revenue.

In January the company was named the Contractor of the Year in the LandOpt network for the second year in a row. The back-to-back recognition is due to the culmination of hard work over many years to improve the company's outlook, plus impressive growth, such as a 30 percent year-over-year revenue bump from 2011 to 2012.

An engineer by education, Eichenlaub is always looking for tools and systems to help him improve efficiency. That's what appealed to him about joining LandOpt, a service organization that licenses the use of business systems for a network of landscape contractors. Eichenlaub Inc., founded by the six Eichenlaub brothers in the wake of Hurricane Agnes in 1972, was one of the original licensees in the network, which now includes more than 20 landscape businesses spread across the country.

Here are three contributing factors in Eichenlaub Inc.'s success.

1 Recurring revenue. Before joining the LandOpt system seven years ago, 20 percent of Eichenlaub Inc.'s business was recurring revenue, such as maintenance and irrigation services. Today that figure has nearly doubled to 38 percent. "That's by design," Eichen-



laub said. "Our goal is to get to 50/50. We see the value in landscape management, and we're growing it at about twice the rate of our project work."

2 Empowering people. "Most businesses will hit a threshold where your key staff—in my case it was myself and two other people—are carrying all the load," Eichenlaub said. "Now we don't have that. Now I've got the right people, we give them the right tools and training, and it's fun."

One thing Eichenlaub has been working on is engaging frontline employees so they always know if the company is "winning" or "losing." "The guys in the trenches need to know because most people want to contribute," he said. "We're learning how you pick the right indicators so on a routine basis they can look at the scoreboard and see if we're winning or losing."

What indicators are best to share? There's no easy answer, Eichenlaub said, noting you have to start by talking to the team about how their roles impact the whole company. Some metrics to consider are revenue per man-hour or for salespeople, the number of client introductions they make. "They have to mean something to the people using them," he said.

From left, LandOpt Director of Success David Gallagher; Eichenlaub sales professionals Ryan Johnson, Anthony Smith and Kevin Prall; Dan Eichenlaub; and LandOpt Success Coach Steven Bach accept their Contractor of the Year award in 2012.

3 Systemizing sales and marketing. "The key is to know what you're selling," Eichenlaub said, acknowledging that his company didn't always target the right client niche.

Another tip is properly handling prospect calls. "When people are calling to buy your services, they don't think, 'Am I walking into the wrong dealership?'" Eichenlaub said. It's the company's job to qualify customers and not be everything to everybody. "My company was like that, and LandOpt helped us get focused," he said. "You have to remember you're not a landscape company. You're a landscape company to a particular segment of the buyers."

"Everything really is coming together nicely now," said Eichenlaub. "We're meeting or exceeding our sales plan and always getting closer to what we ideally want to be. We owe it to the entire team. The general managers in the network will all tell you they're not doing it themselves. Everyone is empowered in their roles to make a difference."

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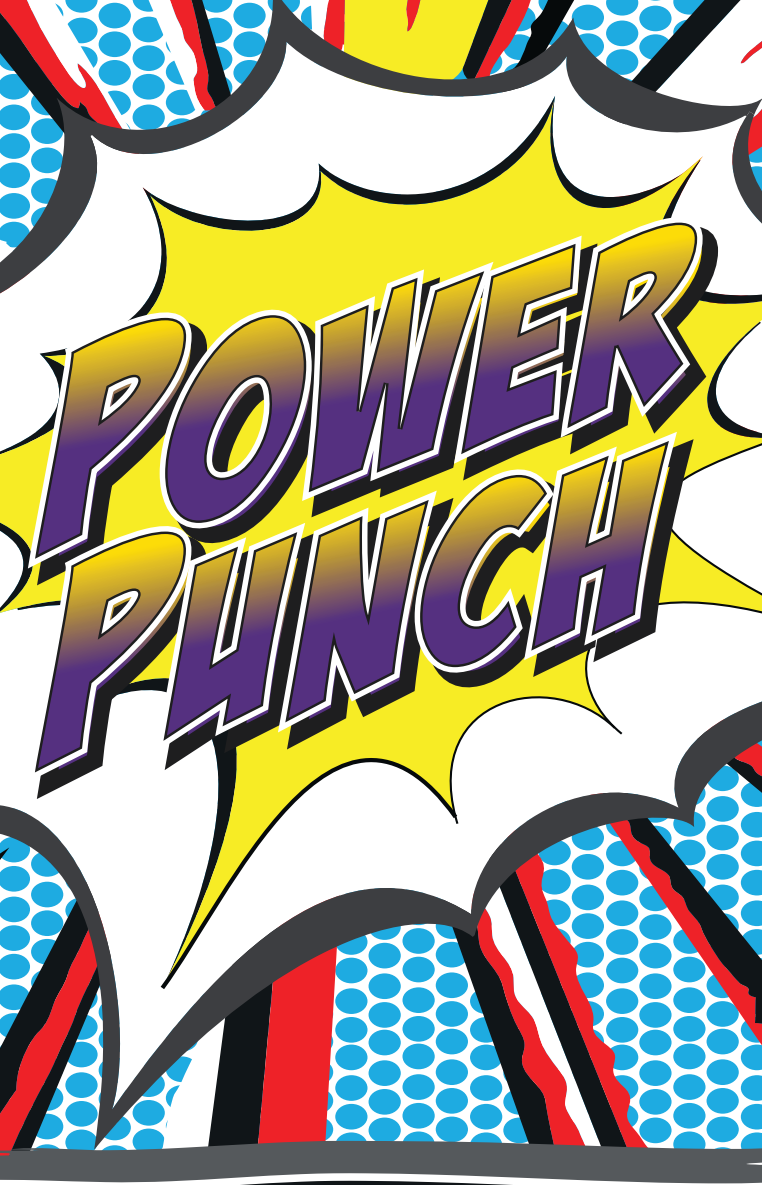
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It was lunchtime. My plane was still on the ground in Chicago, where it would stay for a very long time. Suddenly, I had six hours to kill in a Lansing, Mich., hotel restaurant. And there's only so much you can eat and drink in that span.

As I passed hour upon hour working at a small table, the diners next to me came and went. They all had two notable things in common: They were Michigan State University undergrads. And they talked about internships and part-time jobs they had just gotten.

"It's in finance and it pays \$17 an hour," one student told his friend of his internship offer. "It's a good opportunity, but it's so many hours. I'm not going to have any free time." "Just take it," his friend said. "It's only for three months. You'll be done by May."

By the end of the lunch, the girl had talked her friend into taking it. And so it went throughout the day. Even as I looked around the restaurant, the entire staff looked to be students. They were cordial and

fast and had it together.

I thought about my college days and had to laugh. I was too busy having fun and making it through the semester to worry about much else. I did have a summer internship, but it wasn't my idea. It was at a local radio station, and I spent more time at the mall buying the DJ soft pretzels than I did actually working.

But on this day, with each passing shift and each new twosome that sat down next to me, I was more and more impressed. Impressed by the students' ambition, their discipline, their maturity.

As 6 p.m. neared, a student and her mother dined over pulled pork sliders and a Caesar salad. "I had three interviews today, and they all went really well," the student told her mom. "And I have two more lined up for tonight."

Through the window behind me, I noticed out of the corner of my eye a sea of students streaming down the hall. The girl said they were all there for a career fair. Suddenly the common theme of the day's conversations made sense. It was a frigid, snowy night in the single digits, yet the lobby was crammed with hundreds of undeterred students. It was heartening to see so many of them with such promise.

The Professional Landcare Network's Student Career Days is about a month away. Will you be there? How's your internship program looking? These students will be graduating in a few short months. With an increasingly competitive environment for talent, what are you doing to attract them?

Reach Geraci at bgeraci@northcoastmedia.net.



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McKinney grows landscape portfolio

Late last year McKinney Capital, a Birmingham, Ala.-based private equity firm, added to its portfolio of landscape companies when it bought Grounds Unlimited, also based in Birmingham. Terms were not disclosed.

The intent is to merge Grounds Unlimited with Landscape Workshop, which McKinney acquired in early 2012, by the end of the year, Sam Eskildsen, managing director of McKinney Capital, told *Landscape Management*. Memphis, Tenn.-based Environmental Landscape Service, acquired in September 2011, also was rolled into Landscape Workshop last year.

“We’re in the process of building a regional platform in the Southeast based around the Landscape Workshop brand,” Eskildsen said.

As is the case with ELS, Grounds Unlimited’s management will stay in place.



“We recognize that in the grounds management space, relationships drive the business,” he said. “We very much want to keep those relationships, that’s why we prefer to partner with the existing team, and we’ve managed to achieve that in most cases.”

For “add-on” companies like ELS and Grounds Unlimited, McKinney looks for those with 80 percent or so of revenue coming from commercial maintenance clients. Landscape Workshop has a construction division that services the other locations if necessary.

McKinney, whose portfolio includes many service-based businesses with

mobile workforces, hopes to grow the Landscape Workshop brand by adding one or two companies a year. Right now it’s targeting Memphis; Birmingham; Huntsville, Ala.; Tuscaloosa, Ala.; Jackson, Miss.; Nashville, Tenn.; and Chattanooga, Tenn.

Eskildsen says McKinney isn’t a “traditional” private equity firm, meaning it doesn’t operate with a highly leveraged model.

“That allows us more flexibility,” he said, explaining the company is completely funded by the McKinney family and doesn’t take on limited partners who need their investment back within a specified time period. “We’re a family-based private equity company. It’s private equity by any stretch of the imagination, but we take a longer view. Our charge is to build great businesses and we don’t ever have to exit these if they’re great businesses.”

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PVB LOCK BOX

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CLOCK BOX

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