

SNOW + ICE GUIDE



continued from page 48
take to snow management.

"They do residential snow a whole different way than we do in the U.S.," Marino says. "By studying their business model I realized how efficiently they were doing things."

That method involves putting a 92-in. inverse snow blower on the back of an agricultural tractor. Instead of taking 15 minutes or more to plow a driveway, the new setup can clear a driveway in just a couple minutes. The method is so efficient, Canadian contractors can charge less than Americans and still make more money.

In addition to the ability to clear a driveway quickly, the snow blower offers another advantage over plowing.

State law forbids leaving any snow in the street. The snow blower allows Xtreme's employees to direct where the snow goes.

There are some challenges to the business model. In Canada, customers are more willing to sign season-long contracts.

"The U.S. market doesn't think about snow the way Canadian market does," Marino says. "In the Canadian market, snow is a part of their life. Where I'm stumbling is with

the idea of getting people to think about snow in September. I don't want them signing up in December, I want them signing up earlier on so it's all routed correctly."

Marino is still tweaking the model to make it work for his company. He plans to add another tractor next season to expand the service. When it comes to making money in winter, it's simply a matter of considering all the options.

"Open your eyes to new ideas," Marino says. "There are other ways of doing things out there that break the mold of the traditional way. In today's market, which is so competitive, you have to invest in efficiency in order to remain competitive." **LMI**

Xtreme Snow Pros crews clear residential driveways with a 92-in. inverse snow blower mounted on an agricultural tractor.



**XTREME SNOW PRO'S
CHRIS MARINO**

Jacobs is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

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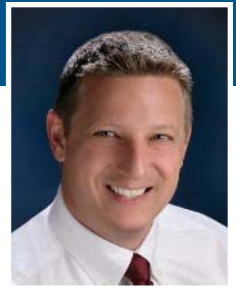
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BY PHIL HARWOOD

Off-season analysis

SUCCESSFUL SNOW AND ice management professionals have learned the spring and summer months are the best time to address many important aspects of their snow businesses. While others refuse to think about the snow season in the off-season, these pros are proactively improving their snow processes, researching innovative technologies and making major decisions affecting profitability.

The best place to start with off-season planning is with an analysis of what happened last winter. Most likely, you had successes and failures. Some things went very well and others didn't. Many companies repeat their mistakes simply because they never take the time to analyze their operations and take corrective action. I suggest you take some time to understand what

MANY COMPANIES REPEAT THEIR MISTAKES SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY NEVER TAKE THE TIME TO ANALYZE THEIR OPERATIONS AND TAKE CORRECTIVE ACTION.

you need to do to improve your snow business before you dive into planning for the upcoming winter.

Define & document

Since this analytical process is an annual event, I recommend establishing a defined and documented process for it. Who needs to be involved? What information do you want at your disposal? Where is this information and who will retrieve it? When will the analysis take place? Will this be done in one meeting or spread out over multiple meetings? Who will take notes and where will these notes be stored?

There are a number of factors to consider when analyzing last winter's snow business. As you consider each factor, make note of anything that needs to be addressed before next winter. I recommend rating each factor using a defined rating system, along with capturing any specific positive or negative comments regarding that factor.

Here's a partial list of factors to consider:

- > Weather data and trends
- > Contract portfolio
- > Sales process and results
- > Customer satisfaction
- > Contract management
- > Invoicing
- > Subcontractor performance
- > Operational controls and procedures
- > Mobilization speed
- > Routing
- > Snow watch procedures
- > Mobilization decisions
- > Equipment performance, usage, maintenance and repair
- > Material purchasing and storage
- > Accidents
- > Risk management processes
- > Staffing and training

- > Employee turnover and performance
- > Administrative functions
- > Unused capacity

This analysis is best done at the tail end of winter to ensure important issues aren't forgotten. However, it's not too late. If you didn't complete this analysis yet, now is the time to get it done.

Next, you should begin planning for the upcoming snow season. Start with an understanding of the long-term vision of the company. Clarifying this vision will provide you with a road map and greatly assist you with establishing sales goals for everyone with sales accountability. What type of growth is desired in terms of your service mix, geographical mix, customer mix and contract type mix?

Aside from establishing sales goals, planning may encompass any of the items listed above or anything else that will better position you for success. One area of particular interest to me is the use of innovative technology. Incorporating new technology into your snow business requires steps to ensure the technology is effectively leveraged. That's why off-season planning is so critical. Waiting until fall to think about the upcoming snow season will effectively preclude you from making significant improvements in your snow business.

With an established and documented process for your off-season analysis and planning, your snow business is more likely to be healthy, profitable and sustainable. You may even discover that snow and ice management is the most profitable service you provide.

I hope you're having a great off-season. **LMI**

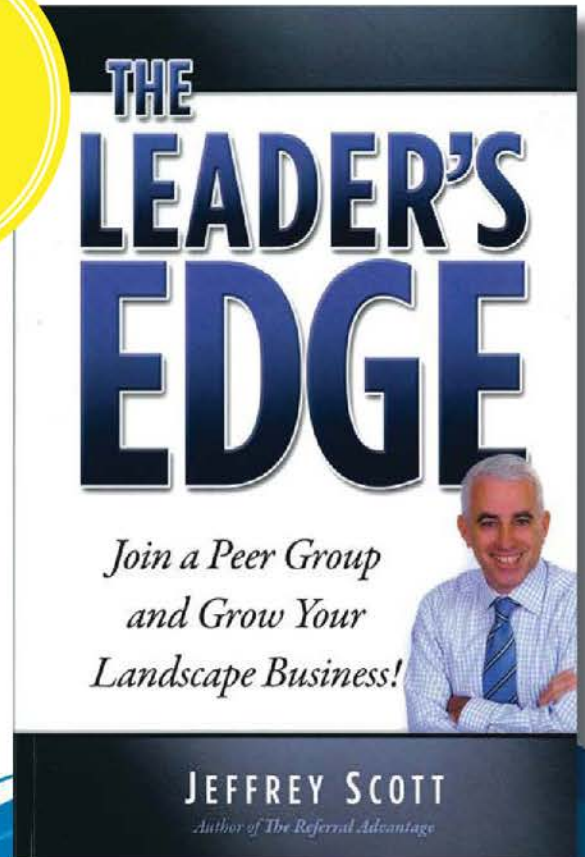
Harwood is president and CEO of Pro-Motion Consulting. Reach him at phil@mypmcteam.com.

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THE LEADER'S EDGE

Join a Peer Group and Grow Your Landscape Business!

The Leader's Edge explains the benefits of joining a peer group. Joining a peer group will increase your company's profits, improve cash flow, and give you insight and usable ideas. There is more accountability to what works in the landscape industry. Scott's book shows how to get the most out of your active participation in the peer group and grow your business.

Author: Jeffrey Scott



Multi-position winged snow plow

Western's Prodigy Multi-Position Winged Snow Plow automatically positions its patented mechanical wings for plowing efficiency, whether in straight-ahead scoop mode or when angled for windrowing. The plow is available for truck and skid-steer loader applications. The UltraMount 2 mounting system features a one-piece frame design for strength and durability.

Western Products // WesternPlows.com



Steel beam/fabric buildings

Legacy offers fabric buildings with structural steel beams instead of open web trusses. This new engineering concept is designed to provide a cost-effective, long-lasting solution for salt and sand storage facilities. Tall peaks provide space for tipping trucks to maneuver inside, while heavy-duty beams support conveyors for efficient transition of materials.

Legacy Building Solutions // LegacyBuildingSolutions.com

Roof deicing system

The RoofHeat STEP roof deicing system uses an exclusive polymer blend that heats when electricity passes through it. This thin, flexible heating element has the ability to self-regulate its electrical consumption, making it energy-efficient. Because of its ability to accept AC or DC current, solar and wind power can also be directly integrated to the system.

Warmzone // WarmZone.com



Skid-steer line

Skid-steer snow blowers are offered for a wide variety of flow rates, starting as low as 15 gpm. Seven models are available in 72- to 84-in. widths. Features include a universal coupler, a single motor design and an electric spout rotator. Adjustable skid shoes, reinforced body braces and shear bolt protection are standard.

Loftness // Loftness.com

Skid-steer plows

Blizzard now offers both the Speedwing multi-position winged-blade and HD Series straight blades for skid-steer loader applications. Speedwing clears an 8 ft., 7 in. swath in straight-ahead scoop position and a 7 ft., 10 in. swath when angled for windrowing. The HD Series is available in 7.5-, 8-, 8.5- and 9-ft. blade widths.

Blizzard Snowplows // BlizzardPlows.com



Dual-stage snow thrower

The 1830EXLT is a dual-stage snow thrower with a heavy-duty auger to feed snow into the housing; a high-speed impeller to discharge the snow; heated handles; power steering and a standard LED headlight for greater visibility in unfavorable conditions. A heavy-duty hydrostatic transmission provides power to the track drive system to tackle snowdrifts.

Husqvarna // Husqvarna.com

Utility vehicle plow

The Nordic Auto Plow attaches to any vehicle and allows users to plow up to 8 in. of snow from driveways. Weighing less than 50 lbs., it is readily moved into position and attached to the vehicle in minutes. Its rugged, ABS plastic rounded blade is designed to glide over uneven surfaces and prevent damage to driveways.

Nordic Auto Plow LLC // NordicAutoPlow.com





V plow

The Fisher XV2 V-plow features a new flared blade design. The blades now rise from a 31-in. center height up to 39 in. at the outer edge on the 9.5-ft. models. Stainless steel blades are available in 7.5-, 8.5- and 9.5-in. widths; the two widest blades are also available in 14-gauge steel with Fisher's Storm Guard powdercoat finish.

Fisher Snowplows // FisherPlows.com

Bulk spreader

The SnowEx SP-1875 Bulk Pro Spreader offers a two-stage auger system, independent spinner/auger controller, low-maintenance direct drive system and other exclusive features. Spread width is infinitely variable from 5 to 30 ft. The pivot mount requires no drill holes in the truck bed and allows the spreader to swing away, providing full tailgate or rear door access.

SnowEx // SnowExProducts.com



Hydro snow thrower

The new Hydro Pro Sno-Thro features Ariens' first hydrostatic transmission in a snow thrower, allowing for infinitely variable speed selection. The series features four hydrostatic drive models, including the Hydro Pro 28, 32 and 36 (pictured), and the Hydro Pro Track 28. They are cold-start capable, requiring little to no warm-up time.

Ariens Co. // Ariens.com

Training videos

To address the standards of the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), LS Training has released five new training videos for landscape contractors on snow and landscape equipment operation, safety procedures and ways to reduce liability. Developed in cooperation with the Snow & Ice Management Association, the 30-minute videos are available online with an annual subscription.

LS Training // LSTraining.com



Truck-mounted spreader

Built to carry 6 cu. yds. of material, the SHPE6000 spreader features the largest poly hopper in the SaltDogg line. An in-cab console features independent controls for the auger, spinner and vibrator. The series is completely self-contained and mounts on utility vehicles, pickups, dump trucks and platform trucks.

Buyers Products // BuyersProducts.com



Snow blower for compact tractors

The new 600CT features the industry's first concentric-axis design: The 18-in., four-blade impeller rotates the same direction as the auger to effectively direct snow into the discharge chute. Its 74-in. cutting width and 28-in. cutting height is designed for tall drifts and snow piles.

Sheyenne Tooling and Manufacturing // SheyenneMfg.com



Mower-mounted snow thrower

The DriftBuster features a 180-degree rotating discharge spout. With the exclusive QuikConverter implement system, any Grasshopper FrontMount zero-turn mower can go from mowing to snow throwing quickly without tools. An optional electric lift and electric spout rotation with steering lever-mounted joystick control are available.

Grasshopper // ThrowMoreSnow.com

Salt or sand storage

The Dura-Box provides snow removal professionals with a cost-effective, secure salt or sand storage bin. Features include industrial strength, a molded-in lid stop, a reinforced lid, an inner stackable design and a sloped lid for added water resistance.

OutdoorBoxes.com // OutdoorBoxes.com



PROFITING FROM DESIGN

JODY SHILAN

Shilan is editor of FromDesign2Build.com. Contact him at 201/783-2844 or jshilan@gmail.com.

Bigger project, smaller deposit

Q How much money should companies require as an initial deposit? I've heard various theories on this and wonder what your experience is with deposits.

—Benjamin Parsons, Living Landscapes, Andover, Mass.

A That's a terrific question, Benjamin. First, let me begin by making a distinction between a deposit toward a design fee and a deposit toward a design/build installation.

Design fees, for most of us, are pretty straightforward. I recommend a 50 percent deposit and then a 50 percent final payment once the plan is completed. It's simple and straightforward and, to be quite honest, we usually aren't talking about large sums of money for our design work. If you've read some of my previous columns you know my design process also is simple and straightforward. I charge a flat fee that's based solely on the size of the property. There's a copy of my design fee contract on my website that's free to anybody, access it at tinyurl.com/c9r96yf.

That takes care of the design side of the equation, so now let's talk about the build.

Benjamin, as you pointed out, there are several theories and philosophies on this topic, and quite frankly, the real answer is: whatever works best for you. With that said, I do have some very specific opinions based on both my successes and failures. As the title of this month's column suggests, one of my theories is that the larger the price of the job, the smaller the deposit should be. I'm not saying you need to structure your deposits on a sliding scale, but keep reading to see why this concept makes a lot of sense for both you and your client.

Let's look at a few examples. Projects that are in the \$3,000 to \$5,000 range are usually one- or two-day jobs. Like the design fee example above, the most logical thing is to get a 50 percent deposit and get the second half when the job is completed. You'll need to buy materials and will have some labor costs, so 50 percent upfront is reasonable.

If you're a smaller company, you may not have

established credit, so you really do need the money to start the work. Because the project is small there really is no need to complicate the process and break the payments up into thirds, which is a common fee structure for many of us. If you work this way, all that's going to happen is you're going to get a one-third deposit and two-thirds on the completion instead of 50 percent and 50 percent.

Now let's take a big jump and look at six-figure projects. Just as it doesn't make sense to require three payments on a two-day job, it also is not a good practice to ask for a 50 percent deposit on an installation that may take you three months to build and isn't going to start for eight weeks. Clients don't like writing big checks for work that's not going to begin soon, and there are too many horror stories about contractors running off with homeowners' deposits. In all honesty, you don't need a \$75,000 deposit to schedule a \$150,000 project. In fact, given the current business environment, even asking for a deposit of one-third, or \$50,000, is excessive.

I recommend taking a 10 percent deposit at the signing of the contract. It's an easy check for most clients of this caliber to write and an even easier number to calculate when you're figuring out the actual dollar amount. It's enough money to show a commitment to the project, yet it doesn't scare your client into wanting to think it over, which we all know is never good.

Here's how I manage the rest of the payment process. Although I only ask for a 10 percent deposit at the signing of the contract, I do require another 30 percent approximately one week before the work begins. This gives me 40 percent before we start. The clients are happy to cut the check because they know that the work is going to begin soon and they realize you need the remainder of the deposit to make material purchases. Once the project starts, I require a 30 percent payment due when the project is halfway completed; the remaining 30 percent is due upon completion.

To submit a question for Profiting From Design, please contact Shilan at jshilan@gmail.com.



Our mission is to preserve and enhance green spaces in our communities where we live, work and play.

BECAUSE GREEN MATTERS.

A national non-profit service organization, Project EverGreen works to help spread the good word to consumers about well-maintained lawns and landscapes, sports fields, parks—anywhere that green exists. The more people believe in the environmental, economic and lifestyle benefits of green spaces, the better off we'll all be.



WORKING TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

Together with key industry partners, Project EverGreen has established the following programs to help make a greater impact, sooner:

GreenCare for Troops SnowCare for Troops

- Project EverGreen connects military families with lawn and landscape companies, as well as snow removal companies to receive free services while their loved one is serving overseas.
- More than 3,500 contractor volunteers and 12,000 military families have signed up for GCFT, while 1,100 contractor volunteers and 1,500 military families signed up for SCFT.
- These popular programs have garnered attention on TV and in newspapers across the nation including Mike Rowe's *Dirty Jobs* and NBC's *Nightly News*.



Community Based Revitalization Projects

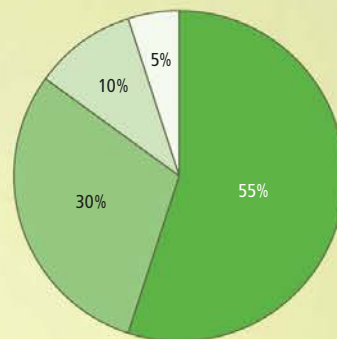
- Focused community revitalization and renovation projects across the United States encourage industry professionals, consumers and anyone who's passionate about healthy green spaces to work together to improve their city and surrounding areas.
- Over the last seven years, our message has made a positive impact in: Akron, Ohio; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Greensboro, Raleigh and Charlotte, North Carolina; Ft. Myers, Florida; Toronto, Canada; and San Antonio, Texas.
- Maintained green spaces generated community engagement, involvement and communication among residents, city leaders and visitors.

GreenCare for Youth

- By reaching out to children of all ages, we can create a greener tomorrow.
- The Art of Green Spaces Competition, sponsored by Birds and Blooms, encourages students to use all forms of art to share how they feel about the green spaces in their lives.
- Golf bag tags, featuring messages on the benefits of green spaces, are given to participants of the GCBAAs Sticks for Kids program.
- Youth sports field renovations make playing surfaces better and safer.

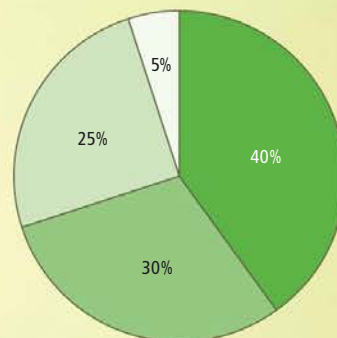
YOUR SUPPORT HELPS US SPREAD THE GOOD WORD.

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www.ProjectEverGreen.com

Selling safety

A Virginia-based company profits from safety and damage control services.



Jon Zalewski,
Professional
Grounds' business
development
manager

SAFETY SELLS. THAT'S why the crews at Professional Grounds in Lorton, Va., pay extra attention on their property walkthroughs. Though they may be there simply to access the turf and shrubs, pointing out hazards such as a hanging limb or a failing retaining wall can drive additional profit while impressing the client with the company's attention to detail.

"We're all about being as proactive as possible," says Professional Grounds Business Development Manager Jon Zalewski. "No matter why we're there, any time we're walking a property we're looking for hazardous trees, broken limbs or anything else that could be a potential liability to our client." Professional Grounds typically performs work for homeowners associations and commercial properties concerned about staying up to code. Contractors who work primarily on residential properties could take the same preventive approach, Zalewski says. "Paying attention to potential hazards is a win-win for everyone," he says.

Professional Grounds workers are known to point out potential problems even on nonclient properties when they notice them. "While we're not licensed to inspect playground structures, if we see a playground that hasn't put fresh chips down in years we'll bring it to the proper person's attention," Zalewski says. "If the kids are playing on the dirt and fall, that's a liability because the playground isn't up to code. It's not about scare tactics—it's just bringing an important issue to their attention and letting them know it needs to be taken care of, whether they use us or not."

When Professional Grounds workers bring these concerns to light, it often *does* result in new business from the effort. In fact, fixing safety hazards has become a profitable add-on service for Professional Grounds, which also offers storm damage control and emergency response services.

"All of our clients have our personal emails and cell phone numbers so that if there is an emergency situation, they can reach someone right away," Zalewski

explains. "After a bad thunderstorm we may be out on a Saturday or Sunday removing fallen trees. How quickly you respond to a situation like that is what sets you apart, and it all starts with answering your phone."

A quick response in an emergency situation not only generates extra revenue, he says, "It also sets you up as a sort of hero in the clients' eyes."

FAIRNESS RULES

Zalewski points out that pricing jobs fairly is an important part of emergency response and damage control. While it would be easy to take advantage of the customer and inflate prices in his or her time of need, he says that's no way to build client relationships. "Charging the customer a fair price for an emergency gets you more work in the long run," Zalewski says.

An emergency response service for Professional Grounds may even include last-minute landscape repair after an accident. "We've had situations such as a vehicle crashing into an entryway monument or running over a bunch of bushes," he says, explaining his team may be called in to clean up the area quickly to make it look presentable again.

"Some of our commercial clients can't afford to have that down time, so we handle those jobs immediately," Zalewski says. "They might have a potential leasing tenant coming in—or another reason why they need the area fixed up fast."

With its fast response time and focus on safety, Professional Grounds has come to be known for its emergency services and damage prevention alike. "It's really as simple as proposing work based on need," Zalewski says. "A lot of times the clients don't even realize they had the need. They appreciate that you brought something important to their attention, and it's often work that sells itself."

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

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY: Professional Grounds

HEADQUARTERS: Lorton, Va.

SERVICES: Hazard prevention, damage control and emergency response have become an everyday part of business for the company.

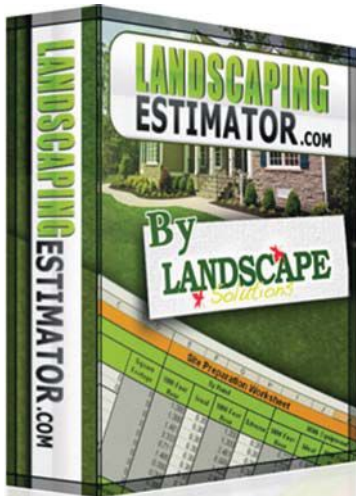
BEST TIP FOR SELLING SAFETY: "Answer your phone," says Jon Zalewski, the company's business development manager. "Frankly, response time is what sells that kind of job."

HOW IT WORKS: "It's company policy that employees are available during bad weather events or other natural disaster types of situations," says Zalewski. "We then prioritize the jobs based on their severity. If it's a tree on a house or a car—or in danger of falling—that takes priority over a tree in a field."

LM REPORTS

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BUSINESS SOFTWARE



Landscaping Estimator

Landscaping Estimator is Excel-based software for all facets of estimating landscaping, including hardscaping, water features, erosion control and special projects. Features include invoicing, change orders, cost analysis, materials lists and numerous reports.

Landscaping Solutions LLC //

LandscapingEstimator.com

Virtual Property Architect

This design software enables users to simultaneously create 3-D designs and detailed 2-D plans from a catalog of actual industry products. Features include real-time sun and shadows, plus the new SketchUp Importer.

Each design can be saved and shared online as a complete 3-D virtual property with screen shots, high-definition videos, project photos and the 2-D plan.

VisionScape // VisionScape.com



Square Foot Advantage Calculator

This mobile-ready application is designed to compare real-world data and the total cost-in-use of controlled-

release Driven By Duration fertilizers vs. ordinary or conventional fertilizers. Variables include square footage, the number of times an area is fertilized annually and the overhead cost (product and labor), both by square foot and by total area fertilized.

Agrium Advanced Technologies //

DrivenByDuration.com



DynaSCAPE Design

DynaSCAPE Design's CAD tools, which integrate with the rest of the DynaSCAPE Suite, offer the ability to present landscape designs in black and white, full color or 3-D. Users can insert pre-drawn shapes from an extensive symbol library and add plants from the HortiCopia-powered online database.

DynaSCAPE Software // DynaSCAPE.com



LandSpec Pro

This new, free mobile app lets users create profiles for multiple projects, upload site plans into a smartphone and quickly build plant and materials lists for each. LandSpec Pro assembles shopping lists for multiple projects at each vendor, and geo-positioning allows the mobile device to map out the best route.

LandSpec Pro LLC // LandSpecPro.com



Px3 Maintenance Package

Need the total square footage of a maintenance job but don't have time to walk it? The John Deere Landscapes Px3 Maintenance Package gives a customized portfolio on scope of work and square footage, as well as a pricing quote for turf, planting beds, trees and other items.

John Deere Landscapes // JohnDeereLandscapes.com

HARDSCAPE



BPR25/40 Series

Designed with the size and maneuverability of a single-direction plate compactor, BOMAG's BPR25/40 series reversible plate compactors offer high centrifugal forces and convenient maintenance features. With a working width of just 15.7 in., each plate compactor works in confined areas larger reversible plates cannot reach, making the series useful for landscaping, site prep, patios, sidewalks and other mid-size applications.

BOMAG Americas // BOMAG.com/us

Smart-Bit Pro Plug System

The new Smart-Bit Pro Plug System for decking, wide-plank flooring and woodworking projects includes the Pro Plug tool for wood, the Pro Plug glue nozzle (not pictured) and the Pro Plug plug & fastener kit in different wood species and fastener sizes. These combine to quickly and consistently create plugs in less than half the time of other plugging methods.

Starborn Industries // StarbornIndustries.com



Edgetite paver edging spikes

Created by a landscape contractor, new Edgetite spikes help solve the separation problem that can occur when installing paver edging: When hammered in, the patent-pending angled tip design deflects away from the installation, while the head pushes the edge restraint tightly against the brick. Watch the demo at Edgetite.com/videos.

Edgetite Products // Edgetite.com

