

BEING VISIBLE, WHETHER THROUGH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT OR NETWORKING, IS PARAMOUNT IN TODAY'S MARKETPLACE.

static. If you haven't added a blog, don't delay. A blog allows you to further engage visitors, showcase your companies' personality, highlight your interests and helps with search engine optimization. You have only two or three seconds to make a good first impression online. Be sure your website mirrors your promotional materials and is streamlined for easy content navigation and intuitive user engagement.

Suitable social media. Look to your target audience when deciding which social media platforms are right for your business. The big three are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, followed closely by Houzz and Pinterest in the residential market. Each platform has its own advantages and a different way to engage. LinkedIn can be an amazing tool for consultants and managers, if used properly.

Purposeful public relations. Support the community that supports you. Being involved in the community benefits your company image, but it's also important for your employees. Psychologically, helping others strengthens the bonds of a group and develops employee loyalty. Fulfilled employees are typically your best marketers, so share your stories online and in press releases (locally and nationally) before, during and after events.

Effective networking. Being visible, whether through community involvement or networking, is paramount in today's marketplace. With active lifestyles, it's imperative to be involved and reachable. Your target audience, however, determines how often and in what capacity. Even as time is limited, networking is effective only if you take a sincere interest in the person and enrich the relationship. Supplementing face-to-face interactions, LinkedIn allows you to engage your audience even when you're unable to meet in person.

Where you invest your branding efforts will differ depending on the market sector, consumer and community. Start small and focused so you allow time to direct your initiatives effectively. Consistency and professionalism should be your guiding principles. As time and staff

permit, add another strategy and continue to review what's resonating with your prospects, clients and industry colleagues. Through effective brand marketing, you'll build awareness, encourage engagement and create lasting relationships. **LM**

Moffat, ASLA, who owns LM Creative Consulting, is the former director of marketing for a nationally recognized design/build/maintenance firm. Reach her at LM@LMCreativeConsulting.com.




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HOW DO I BUILD A WORLD-CLASS SALES TEAM?

BY JUDY GUIDO

A The one point all Green Industry folks agree on is the importance of sales. Let's face it, sales is the engine that drives your business and your salespeople are the drivers. As the competitive landscape continues to grow more fierce and becomes increasingly more difficult to create a competitive advantage, it's imperative you have a strategic sales plan in place to attract, grow and retain a world-class sales team. That team is your competitive advantage.

IT'S IMPERATIVE TO CREATE A SALES CULTURE THAT'S UNDERSTOOD AND RESPECTED BY THE ENTIRE ORGANIZATION. TOO OFTEN, SALES IS SEEN AS THE ENEMY, ESPECIALLY BY OPERATIONS.

How does a company develop a world-class sales force? Successful sales organizations focus on four key areas:

- › strategy and process;
- › talent and training;
- › customer relationship management; and
- › sales management.

The first steps to success begin with the owner (who's often the sales manager and is generally unqualified and unhappy doing so), sales team and key field personnel collaboratively designing a sales strategy based on an accurate analysis of their market dynamics and skill sets.

The next step is ensuring the sales strategy is communicated accurately to the entire team. It sounds

simple, but this important step is overlooked more than 80 percent of the time. Professional sales and operational talent are attracted to companies that can prove they've done their homework and have a road map for success. Everybody wants to feel they're a part of a winning team with an intelligent vision.

It's imperative to create a sales culture that's understood and respected by the entire organization. Too often, sales is seen as the enemy, especially by operations. Those companies that have a sales-centric culture and collaboration between sales and operations are market leaders. Aligning sales and operations is a key component in world-class sales organizations. Make sure your plan includes tactics fostering both groups working together while sharing accountability and rewards. The Green Industry is competitive enough, why make it any more difficult by creating internal challenges and obstacles that may sabotage the company's success?

Next, match your core competencies and unique value proposition with your customers' needs. This is called customer segmentation and qualification. It seems like common sense, but aligning customer needs with your offering and qualifying and assessing the potential value of customers happen much less than you think.

Account planning is another important step. It includes identifying your geographic footprint (the areas where you'll conduct business) and the specific industries and market segments poised for growth (or that are underserved) within your geographic locale. Then you must assign your sales

team accordingly. Will you assign them geographic territories or specific industries to grow? Will you assign them to markets where they have experience and a network of contacts? For example, stating your market segment is commercial maintenance isn't a good example of account planning. Stating that multifamily, specifically high-end residential apartments and condominiums within a 20-mile radius of your headquarters, is your market segment is much more predictive and focused. Assigning somebody with experience and contacts in the multifamily market is even smarter.

Once you've completed your companywide account planning, develop specific, clear and customized action plans for each account the salespeople are serving or new customers they've acquired. Sales isn't a one-size-fits-all game, so it's a must to have a strategic account selling methodology with specific tactics identified for each customer. Customers demand you understand them and only them.

Next, focus on sales-channel management. Make it easy for your customers to buy from you by providing them with the most accessible, efficient and convenient sales channels available. Sales channels may include external independent sales reps, web-based sales channels—such as social media networks—or strategic sales partnerships with people who share the same customer targets (think janitorial, pest management or security companies).

Develop a replicable, sales process (mirror your high-performer methodologies and processes) focusing on winning opportunities. Have your salespeople shadow your best performers and make sure those stars share best practices regularly. Ensure your salespeople know how to work their sales

funnel and focus on high-value activities, such as identifying and qualifying leads, conducting site audits and reviews, performing competitive analyses, setting up meetings with decision makers, presenting solutions and asking for the sale. Identify drivers of high sales performance.

Just as your field operators need their equipment to be successful, your salespeople need their tools. Provide them with the most effective mobile sales force automation and customer relationship management technologies possible. Many low-cost smartphones, sales force automation and customer relationship management software packages, templates and dashboards are available.

One of the primal keys for sales success is providing your staff with an experienced sales manager who's capable of aligning the company's sales goal with important metrics, such as:

- › revenue;
- › retention;
- › increased wallet share;
- › market share;
- › gross margin;
- › referrals;
- › win ratio; and
- › sales cycle time.

An effective sales manager also helps set strategy, coaches the staff, manages the numbers, provides leadership, conducts training and assists with presentations when necessary. Less than 9 percent of Green Industry professionals conduct sufficient sales training and 93 percent of sales forces are managed by owners who, as aforementioned, are unqualified and unhappy in their roles as sales manager. Sales training saves time and money and increases revenue, retention and value.

Additionally, provide salespeople with the necessary administrative resources they need. Salespeople should be selling, not spending the majority of their time performing administrative tasks. Hiring efficient administrative help, even part time, is paramount in building an excellent team. It also saves money while increasing the sales usefulness and revenue.

Don't forget to clearly align your marketing with your sales goals. Effective marketing makes it easier for your sales staff to sell. If you plainly spell out your sales goals, roles, responsibilities and metrics, and you hire, train and reward your staff based on those success metrics, you'll build and retain a world-class sales team. **LM**

Planning pointer

The four building blocks of sales success are: strategy and process, talent and training, customer relationship management and sales management.



Guido, chairwoman and founder of Guido & Associates, helps contractors grow their people and profits. Reach her at jmguido@sbcglobal.net.



HOW CAN I GET MORE SALES?

BY **ANDREW POTOTSCHNIK**

A In describing the process companies go through to generate new customers, I refer to a big old sales funnel. You pour leads in the top and sales come out the bottom. All sales funnels leak leads, though, letting them escape before you can turn them into sales. By patching your funnel, you can improve marketing effectiveness and boost sales. And in any funnel, it takes four steps to gently nudge prospects to a sale.

Each step is a potential lost sale waiting to happen, so the goal should be to improve your ability to move prospects through the steps.

Sadly, most companies put all their effort into getting attention and very little into the rest. You won't make a sale if you never guide them through the other steps.

With every hole you patch, you'll exponentially increase the percentage of leads that become sales because improvements throughout the funnel have a multiplying effect on the sales coming out the bottom. For example, increasing the attention your company receives allows more chance for prospects to become interested.

More interested prospects increases the number of them engaging with your company; and the more engaging, the more opportunities you have to sell.

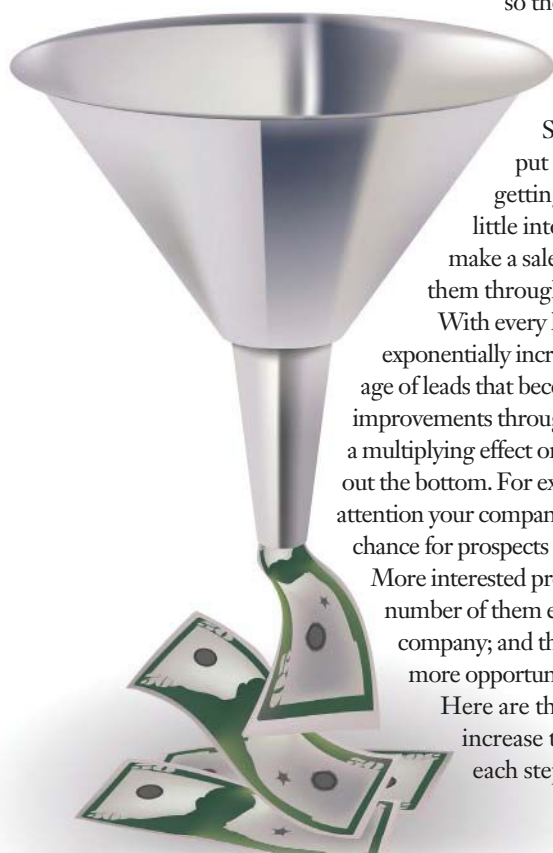
Here are the ways you can increase the effectiveness of each step.

STEP 1: Get their attention.

If you can't get a prospect's attention, you've already lost the sale. Do you have fanatical referrers? Are you everywhere prospects are looking for your services? Does your business appear in search results, pay-per-click ads, their door, their mailbox or on your truck in their area? Most leaks occurring in this stage are a result of nonexistent or poorly executed marketing. Your prospective customers simply don't know you exist or choose a company they think is larger because it's more visible in the marketplace.

It seems every landscape company uses the same tired fleet of generic white trucks with little green lettering on the door; however, companies could turn their fleets into attention-grabbing, mobile billboards with the use of neon colors, graphics and a bold, easy-to-remember phone number and website. Get noticed, then listen to prospects say, "I see your trucks everywhere," even when your fleet is only two trucks. Most online marketing programs lack similar market exposure.

Many companies have an old website that naturally shows up somewhere on the first page of Google for one key phrase. And that's it. They think they have the web thing covered. They don't, though. Prospects search thousands of key phrases to find you or your competitors. A high-ranking, properly optimized, content-rich site, supplemented by pay-per-click advertising and a presence on all of the most popular local search sites—such as Google+ Local and Yelp—will give you the largest online presence possible. This allows you to be everywhere online potential customers are looking for your services.



continued on page 96



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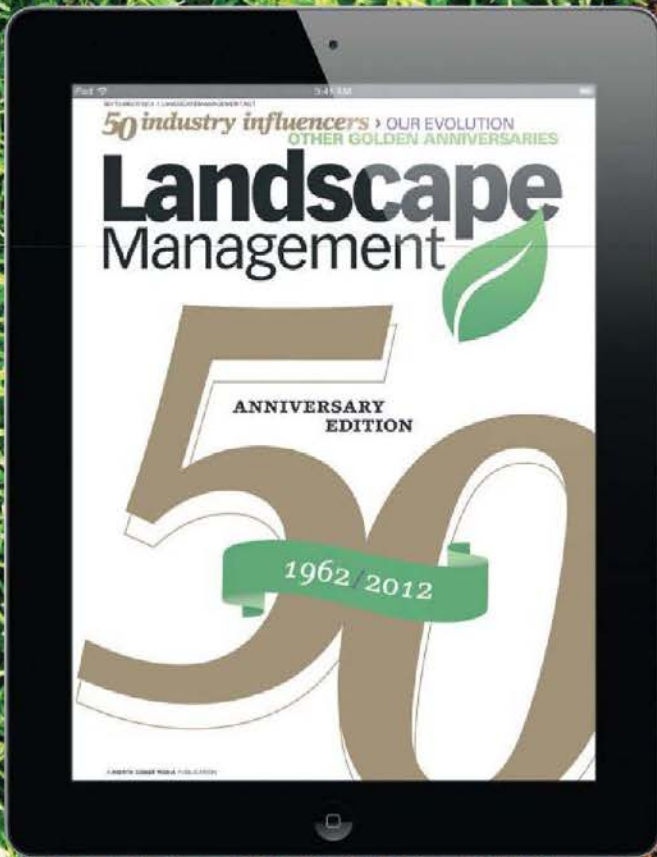
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continued from page 94

STEP 2: Get them interested.

If you don't look or sound different from other companies, you probably aren't. Try this quick exercise: Collect several competitors' direct mail pieces or door hangers. Cover the names, logos and any other identifying information, then compare your own marketing piece. Chances are your message is identical to everyone else's: "We cut lawns. We cut trees. We do beautiful landscapes. We're the best. We're professional. Call us for a free estimate."

This is a big problem. If you look and sound the same as everyone else, the only difference left is your price. Start by determining the unique selling points that set you apart from your competitors. Highlight the ones prospects care about. Saying you do great work is meaningless when everyone else says the same thing. Do you have 50 letters from ecstatic customers prospects can read online? Do you have before-and-after videos demonstrating without a doubt you do the most beautiful landscape lighting installs in Midland, Texas? Don't be the company saying, "Just take our word for it." Marketing is all about distinguishing yourself from your competitors. Look different, sound different and be better. After that, you can charge more.

STEP 3: Get them to engage with you.

Now that potential customers are interested, how easy have you made it for them to raise their hand and say, "Yes, I am interested! Tell me more! Sign me up!"? Merely answering your phone instead of letting calls go to voicemail will increase your sales. Sounds crazy, right? Sadly, this is normal for our industry and it's what you're competing against. If you're more responsive than your competitors, you'll sell more.

Most prospects visit your website before they call, so a lead-generating website should be at the center of any landscape marketing campaign to support and increase the effectiveness of all other marketing efforts. Some designers are great at making pretty websites. Pretty on its own doesn't sell, though. A website exists for two reasons: to get visitors to call or email you. Your website design determines this outcome. The images and text, where forms and contact info are positioned and even the color of buttons affects the percent of visitors who will contact you. If prospects don't know exactly what you do and in what service area, they're hitting the back button in 20 seconds or less. And they're not going to call if your website looks like you're about to go out of business. This is where companies shoot themselves in the foot.

Invest in a professional, lead-generating website engineered to convert visitors into paying customers. Spend more than \$5. Stop using crummy free sites, generic templates or Facebook to save money because you'll end up costing yourself money in lost sales. A website designed by a conversion

expert pays for itself multiple times over. Test it and engineer it to get new customers. You can spend nothing on a poorly designed, free site that converts one of 1,000 visitors into a customer, or you can spend \$5,000 on a website that converts 100 of 1,000 visitors.

STEP 4: Get them to act.

At some point, a prospect has to speak with you or your staff face to face or over the phone to make a sale. All that time and money you've spent leading up to this moment is thrown away in an instant if you can't close the sale. Your staff should be fully trained on how to sell. It's shocking how many business owners can't list 10 unique selling points about their own company. If you don't know why someone should buy from you, why would they?

The same is true with your staff members. They must be able to highlight your strengths and overcome every objection a prospect has to signing up for your service, especially your higher prices. You'll never have a 100-percent close rate, but you can capture a sale with one simple thing: following up. Ninety percent of companies never do this. They don't call, they don't email, they don't put prospects on a special mailing list. They quote a price and let them disappear to buy from competitors. Why not give them a second-chance offer? Why not send them a personal note the next day? Extra effort lets prospects know you care about having them as a customer. And if you care about doing business with them, you'll probably do a better job than the competitors who let their calls go to voicemail. A follow-up can capture an additional 20 percent of residential lawn care business that would've been lost otherwise.

It's easy for business owners to get caught up chasing a never-ending procession of buzzwords to generate more business. Stop chasing the buzzwords and become really good at what you're already doing. Instead of adding more halfhearted marketing, make your existing sales and marketing perform at the highest level possible. Then anything else you add to the mix will be much more effective and profitable. **L.M.**

Planning
pointer

Marketing is all about distinguishing yourself from your competitors. Look different, sound different and be better. After that, you can charge more.

Pototschnik is owner of Lawn Care Marketing Expert. Reach him at andrew@lawncaresmarketingexpert.com or download a free report at GetMoreLawnClientsNow.com.



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HOW CAN I GENERATE BUZZ?

BY JON GOLDMAN

A How can we get prospects to chase us instead of us chasing them? For most landscaping companies, marketing is difficult. You need to get noticed, but you can't afford to break the bank on big-name celebrity endorsements and Super Bowl ads. It is possible, however, to promote your company without a big-time budget and generate powerful marketing buzz.

YOU CAN USE YOUR **BACKGROUND, PROFESSIONALISM AND EXPERTISE TO TURN YOURSELF FROM "ANOTHER COMPANY" INTO A TRUSTED RESOURCE YOUR CUSTOMERS TURN TO.**

No matter the size of your company, you can use your background, professionalism and expertise to turn yourself from "another company" into a trusted resource your customers turn to. Do this by transforming from a design/build, landscape maintenance, snow removal or whatever kind of vendor into a design/build, landscape maintenance or snow removal expert. The key is vendor to expert.

Generating leads is one of the most difficult challenges any business faces, so any strategy that accomplishes lead generation is a competitive advantage you don't want to ignore. Positioning yourself as an expert accomplishes that.

MAKING THE SHIFT

Here's the secret to becoming an expert: You probably already are an expert. Think about it. Do you know much more than your customers about their lawns, irrigation systems, weeds or the pool, patio or fire pit of their dreams? Chances are, you know an

enormous amount your customers would love to know.

As an aside, this underscores the need to stay on top of the ever-changing trends and best practices in the industry. Whatever your niche is, stay current. That's why participating in your local landscape association, attending national events, and reading constantly is mission critical to the success of your business.

PUBLISH OR PERISH

The first step to becoming an expert is being published. The phrase "publish or perish" comes from academia, but it's not just stuffy professors who stand to benefit from being published. Whether it's a book, e-book or article, being published shows you know what you're talking about. Being published creates a level of credibility that attracts potential clients to you. That's especially true if you offer specific solutions to prospects with specific problems.

Most businesses chase prospects, but when you chase prospects, they often run in the opposite direction. Becoming an authority makes potential clients seek you. Suddenly, instead of chasing customers, you have customers chasing you.



USING VENDOR TO EXPERT

Often, you'll face competitors ready to undercut and underbid you. Becoming the expert can help you avoid impossible-to-win bid situations. Take a page out of the book of Chris and Craig Zeigler, owners of Agronomic Lawn Management (ALM) in Virginia Beach, Va. They were competing with a national player who could beat anybody's price. ALM needed a way to position itself with prospects in a way that was more than just about a lower price.

The Zeiglers used their personal and professional activities to create a compelling story. They published an advertorial (see image, above right) that positioned the company as a local hero. The first paragraph describes their involvement with a local organization. Autism is a cause personally meaningful to the Zeiglers because they have a nephew diagnosed with it. They give a portion of their company's profits to a nonprofit organization called F.A.C.T. (Families of Autistic Children of Tidewater). The Zeiglers' write-up showed how ALM wasn't just another landscaping company, but a devoted part of the community that takes from its bottom line to help neighborhood children in need.

The Zeiglers went on to share their expertise, talking about Craig's background—N.C. State and Penn State University with a degree in turfgrass management—and discussing landscaping topics such as agronomics, weed control and turf fertility. By sharing their knowledge, they positioned themselves as experts. The transition from vendor to expert worked. This small landscaping company experienced dramatic results. In four months, it increased the number of customers from 864 to 1,050, and ALM's annual projected sales rose from \$426,000 to \$612,000.

CLAIMING YOUR EXPERTISE

The first step to becoming an expert is identifying your audience, which I call your hungry fish. Go deep and narrow and focus on the prospects your business targets. Where do they live? What kinds of homes do they have? Which outdoor living problems do they face?



Visit brandlauncher.com/ALMadvertorial to see a full-size version of the advertorial.

The next step is to create what I call irresistible bait—the published material you'll be offering. Your materials should help prospective customers gain a deeper understanding of the problems they face and the available solutions. The ideas don't have to

be new or original. The key is that they're available to your audience in a clear, useful format.

Once you've decided what you want to publish, determine how you'll present the material. Once again, think about your audience. What format do they prefer? Can you give a seminar to a local group? Are you able to publish an article in a local paper? Should you offer audio or video material on your website? One of my favorite formats, when appropriate, is an e-book. It's long enough to deal satisfyingly with a specific subject but short enough to write and self-publish quickly. The format isn't as critical as getting your irresistible bait created and in the hands of your prospects. You can always start with one format and then repurpose the material into others.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Your customers are less trusting, have more choices and have access to more information than ever. But much of your competition is still stuck in the model of limited choice and information. Using the vendor-to-expert approach will elevate you above the other choices and position you right where you need to be: top of mind for your customers and prospects. **LM**

Goldman is a marketing expert, entrepreneur and president of the business strategy company Brand Launcher. Reach him or download his free e-book, "The Secret of the Watermelon," via brandlauncher.com.

Planning pointer

The first step to becoming an expert is being published. Whether it's a book, e-book or article, being published shows you know what you're talking about. Being published creates a level of credibility that attracts potential clients to you.

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10/23	Visit the LM Booth at GIE+EXPO	Live from GIE+EXPO
10/30	Shelly Hewson , Contractor, <i>Hewson Landscape</i>	Married to Your Business
11/6	AJ Davis , Contractor, <i>Davis Outdoor Jobs</i>	Young Guns of the Green Industry
11/13	Chris Heiler , Consultant, <i>Landscape Leadership</i>	It's Time for a Website Redesign

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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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