

Consistent marketing matters.

No. 100
Engledow Group
Carmel, Ind.

It's common for company marketing efforts to go in fits and starts, especially when there's multiple people manning the effort.

That's been the case for the 82-year-old Engledow Group, operated today by second- and third-generation Engledow family members.

There were periods where marketing played a big role, says Marketing Director Joe Judd, who joined the firm in 2012. For example, in the 1960s you could open a Central Indiana newspaper and see an Engledow advertisement. It's also held a strong brand position since the 1970s with its signature lime green trucks.

But by the 1980s and 1990s, marketing efforts tapered off. "At that time we considered ourselves the market leader since we'd been around for so long," Judd says. "We were comfortable with our reputation and other stuff took precedence. In a sense, we became complacent."

However, the increase in competition over the last two decades, plus thinning profit margins due to the Great Recession, prompted Engledow to reevaluate things.

The company hired a consultant in 2010 and 2011. One outcome from that process was to add a marketing person to implement and oversee a marketing strategy. Enter Judd, who'd worked for several ad agencies before Engledow.

"Consistent marketing would have helped us overcome a lot of challenges we're experiencing today," Judd says. "When margins are thin, it's tough to differentiate your products and services. We try to use marketing to show the value behind our services. In a sense, we're trying to take price out of the conversation."

When Judd came on board, he first addressed the website, which hadn't been updated in years. The new site, launched in December 2012, incorporates a blog and other search engine optimization tactics. It also uses an "inbound marketing" strategy. The goal is to draw customers and prospects to its site by providing useful content, such as a free landscaping calendar.

"It's not pushy or aggressive," Judd says. "The goal is to educate people and be the expert. When they're ready to make a decision, we'll be top of mind."

The company also renewed some of its community service efforts. Engledow has long partnered with

Lime green trucks (right) are part of Engledow's brand. Above, a truck from 1932.



nonprofits, but this new approach entailed choosing several that align with company values. Keep Indianapolis Beautiful is one example.

Additionally, the firm gets exposure through a partnership with the local CBS affiliate on a morning show called Indy Style. It's the second year Engledow, which does some digital advertising with the station, has participated in a monthly landscape tips and trends segment. It also posts the video clips on its website and shares them via social media.

The results of the two-year-old marketing revamp are good, Judd says. "It just seems like there's a lot of momentum building in all areas of our business," he says, citing nearly 1,400 Facebook followers (up from zero two years ago), excellent website metrics (a nearly 200 percent increase in traffic in the first year) and good feedback from clients. All this activity has resulted in more than 150 leads coming from the website since its relaunch—compared to none before. Some of those have turned into substantial contracts.



Joe Judd

For others looking to assemble a cohesive marketing strategy, Judd offers a few tips, starting with identifying the budget. From there, he'd focus on the website.

"If I was going to spend money anywhere I'd first look there," he says. Whether or not a customer can find you with a simple web search is the first hurdle. From there, he says to explore other advertising avenues, such as Google AdWords or local media advertising partnerships.

"There's no magic bullet when it comes to marketing," he says. "Sometimes people have the mindset that there is and try to make a video go viral, for example. You might get lucky, but I'd rather put energy and efforts into creating a thorough marketing strategy for our business."

—Marisa Palmieri

Embrace your mistakes. Plus, a few tips.

No. 22

NaturaLawn of America
Frederick, Md.

With 64 branches and sales nearing \$46 million, the NaturaLawn of America franchise system has a thing or two to share about growing a business. Phil Catron, president and founder, has been in the industry since the 1970s, working for large and small lawn care companies before starting NaturaLawn. That said, many of its obstacles are universal, such as regulations regarding material use, finances and more. The 27-year-old company strives to overcome these by making sound business decisions and operating more efficiently.



Phil Catron

What is it that would you do differently then, knowing what you know now?

Friends have asked that same question a couple of times in the past, and I tongue in cheek say if I knew then what I know now, I'd probably screw things up because I'd second guess myself. When you don't know you can't do some-

thing, it's amazing what you can do. But I do have a couple of suggestions, in hindsight, that I'd pass along.

OK, great. Let's hear them.

Trademark your logo and name. It's critical. In a company that's going to be expanding out of the general area and across state lines, it's even more critical that you get it filed through the federal patent and trademark office. You have to actually conduct business across state lines before doing so, and the sooner the better. We started in 1986 and incorporated in 1987. It was about 1990, several years after we began going over state lines, that I called up our attorneys and said, 'Shouldn't we trademark our logo?' From day one we made it known our goal was to franchise. Our attorney said, 'That's probably a good idea.' My jaw dropped. It cost us literally \$1 million in legal fees over the first 10 years we were in business.

When it comes to a trademark, don't rely on your accountant to tell you that you can use your name. Just because a name is available, it doesn't mean you can trade under it. For example, our name is NaturaLawn of America, but we have multiple trademarks. If someone



Focusing on what you do best—turf care, in NaturaLawn's case—is advice its President Phil Catron gives to other operators.

wanted to incorporate as NaturaLawn of Maryland, the state would let them because they're only worried about collecting taxes. But the minute they go to trade under that name, they'll get hit with our trademark letter. There's a difference between incorporating under a name and being able to trade under it. You need to do a LexisNexis search.

The other thing is with partnerships. Have an up-front buy-sell agreement. I had a marvelous partner until he retired. We didn't want our wives to be each others' partners if one of us died. We had a cross-purchase agreement funded by life insurance and stock. I suggest you update it every year. Ask: 'How has our business changed, and how does it affect this cross-purchase agreement? How would the payout be done? How would the business be valued?' There should be a way to evaluate the business so one partner doesn't say it's worth a million and the other says it's only worth \$200,000. It's kind of like doing your last will and testament. Nobody wants to do it, but you need to do it.

Do you have any other advice for small companies?

Never ever run out of cash. And don't confuse profit with cash. You can be very profitable and go out of business because you're out of cash. You can be not profitable and cash rich, which is going to keep you going.

Especially for new operators: Do what you do best and really focus in on that because there are a lot of opportunities to make money. Keeping your money is very hard. You might go out on a lawn and someone might come up to you and say, 'Do you do gutters?' You're looking at it as another \$100, but all of the sudden you find yourself doing odd jobs that don't focus in on the primary goal of your business.

—Interview by Marisa Palmieri

Ramp up maintenance sooner.

No. 64

McHale Landscape Design
Upper Marlboro, Md.



A self-defined “design/build snob,” Kevin McHale didn’t focus on bolstering a maintenance division when he and his brother Steve began McHale Landscape Design 33 years ago.

“We just didn’t see the value of maintenance,” says McHale, president. “We were all about building, designing and constructing things. Maintenance was something somebody else did.”

Which is why after poorly providing maintenance services for two years, the company ditched the segment and referred clients elsewhere.

“We didn’t have the right people in place,” McHale says. “Their background, experience and education were all design/build oriented, and we were asking them to manage maintenance.”

Fast-forward to 2014 and maintenance makes up a quarter of McHale Landscape Design’s \$20 million annual revenue. Today, the company values this service segment from multiple viewpoints: It’s a renewable quarterly and/or monthly revenue stream; it allows the company to be a “single source for residential clients;” it ensures the proper upkeep of a design/build project because the company oversees the overall property; and it’s an easy upsell—McHale estimates 92 percent of its maintenance clients began as design/build clients.

To get to that point required the willingness to learn from its mistakes.

It re-implemented its maintenance division 12 years ago, when it was doing \$8 million to \$9 million in annual revenue. The company used about a decade before

that—after it got rid of its first maintenance division—to reevaluate how to create a profitable recurring service.

Brothers Kevin McHale (left) and Steve McHale

The solution was to create a strategic plan with a focus on better recruiting. This approach included pinpointing colleges with strong landscape management programs rather than landscape architecture programs to onboard qualified maintenance managers. Pennsylvania State University was its prime target, McHale says.

“We personally didn’t have a passion for (maintenance), so we brought the people in that did,” McHale says. “The whole thing for us was to put the right people in the right places so they could succeed. It didn’t become a benefit for our company until we had the right people in place.”

After integrating the maintenance experts, the company learned from its prior mistake and segmented its maintenance and design/build staffs so it didn’t confuse employees’ mindsets and responsibilities.

With that, McHale deems the company’s second stab at the service a success. Maintenance has grown by 20 percent every year for the past five years.

“If we had understood the effect and benefits of a maintenance division earlier, we would have started one earlier,” McHale says. “Once we put together a strategic plan and recruited the right people for the right job, maintenance became a solid, well-functioning part of our business. We just learned that the hard way.” —Sarah Pflедderer

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP BUSINESS OBSTACLES AND HOW ARE YOU OVERCOMING THEM?

“We’re concerned about the impacts of the Affordable Care Act and minimum wage on our long-term contracts. We’re working with our brokers and finance team to determine the impact and our sales teams to determine how to incorporate into our sales price.”

Jon Georgio, CEO
Gothic Landscape

“The cost of fuel/insurance/operating overhead and promoting quality over lowest price. We’re a lean company in every way possible. We encourage clients to do an apples-to-apples comparison of quotes.”

David Frank, CEO/founder
David J. Frank Landscape Contracting

“Rising prices of ornamental trees and plants and an upcoming plant material shortage. We have to make sure we have partnerships with the right vendors to secure material on jobs we’ve already bid and won.”

Michel Sallin, president/CEO
LegacyScapes

Don't ignore attacks on the industry.

No. 113
Lawn Dawg
Nashua, N.H.

Seventeen years ago, Jim Campanella was ready to branch out on his own after working for various lawn care companies in New England. In late 1996, TruGreen acquired Barefoot Grass, where he was the New England regional manager. The company offered him a job in Portland, Maine, but that wasn't where he wanted to be, so in 1997 he started Lawn Dawg with a pickup truck and a telephone book.

Today, his company has 11 locations throughout the Northeast. It grew nearly 14 percent in 2013 over 2012, despite facing challenges due to the Affordable Care Act (it lost its health care plan), staffing shortages and legislative activity threatening use of neonicotinoids and limiting fertilizer inputs.

Thirty-one years ago when I first started in the industry, I'd get in a 600-gallon spray-tank truck and go down the street to spray lawns. People would be flagging us down saying, 'Please spray our lawns.' It was easy. We'd have thousands of leads in a couple days.

Back then, there were no other regulations than to have a license to spray pesticides. You didn't have to leave a flag or notify neighbors.

The industry got so big so fast, it piqued the interest of the activist community, the self-proclaimed environmentalists. Before we knew it, we started seeing legislative activity.

Organizing ourselves better and positioning ourselves as true environmentalists may have prevented much of the negative publicity and legislation we face today. We ignored the activist attacks on our industry thinking it would go away, largely because we were in such high demand.

The Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) was formed (in 1979) with the intent to help fight some of these attacks we were under, but we weren't well organized yet. We stood by our guns and said the products were scientifically tested and we're not hurting anybody. Meanwhile, our opponents were attacking us using emotion. You can't fight emotion with science. It doesn't matter how much



you're speaking the truth, **Jim Campanella**
emotion trumps science every time.

We should have done a better job positioning ourselves as providing cleaner air, cleaner groundwater and cooling effects through healthy turf.

The biggest compromise we made was the sign postings. We said, 'If that's the worst that's going to happen, we can live with it.' Today, that's still the No. 1 thing we hear, 'If what you're spraying is OK, why do you have to put up the signs?'

I think we're better organized today, but I still don't think we communicate to the general public as much as we should.

In 2010 there was legislation introduced in New Hampshire to ban all aesthetic use of pesticides, similar to what they have in Canada. We did a good job of defeating that bill because we had the science to prove everything was safe to use from chemical manufacturers and Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE). That allowed me as the local guy to appeal with the emotional argument. I could talk about my 25,000 customers that rely on me to manage their green spaces. It was a great team effort and we defeated that bill soundly.

The average operator who gets in this situation should call the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) right away. We can't watch everything because we're out there working every day, but we have an obligation to support the associations that stay in tune as the watchdogs for us. Too many people rely on them but aren't members and don't pay dues. If you're in a state with a state or regional association that can represent you, you have an obligation to be a member.

The other thing is to make sure your legislators know who you are, especially if they're your customers. Communicate with them. Make sure they know that if something comes up about lawn care, they can contact you as an expert."

—As told to Marisa Palmieri

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP BUSINESS OBSTACLES AND HOW ARE YOU OVERCOMING THEM?

"H-2B is probably the biggest uncertainty we face. It appears we'll be OK in 2014 but nothing is certain with this volatile program. We're doubling down our efforts to recruit more homegrown workers, supervisors in particular."

*Chris Clifton, president
Southview Design*

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4 Popular projects. Bathrooms and kitchens top renovation project lists again this year among those planning a project, with 26 percent of U.S. homeowners planning a bathroom remodel or addition and 22 percent planning a kitchen remodel or addition in the next two years. Seventeen percent of homeowners are planning landscape additions or renovations and 14 percent are planning deck/porch improvements.

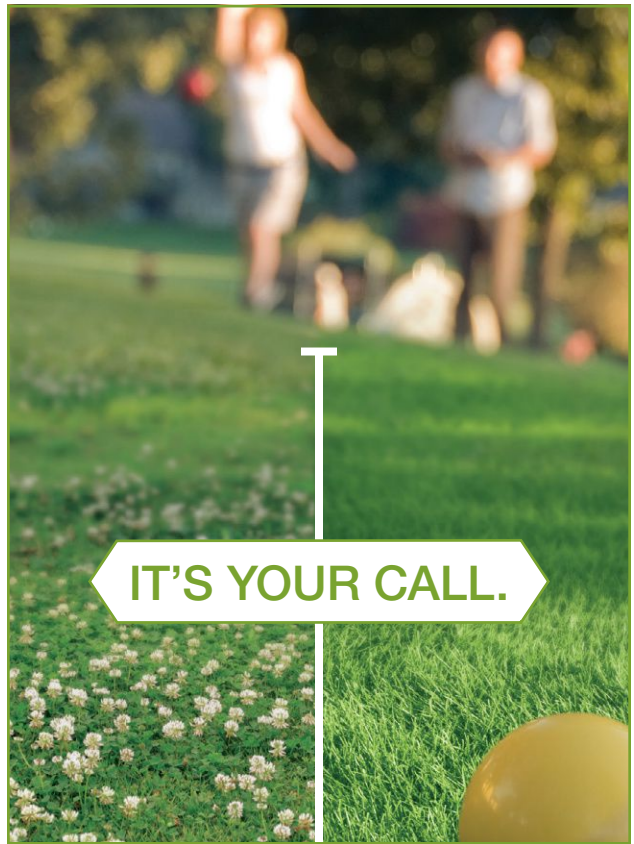
14% Percent of homeowners who are planning deck/porch upgrades.

The Ticker: DESIGN/BUILD

The New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Foundation unveiled its newly constructed Huey Helicopter Plaza in Holmdel, N.J., May 7. The memorial was made possible through the **EP Henry HeroScaping** program, which donated 1,000 square feet of pavers and 1,300 square feet of walls. It stands as a tribute to veterans who served during the Vietnam era.



Case Construction Equipment and **CNH Industrial** participated in the Victory Garden Blitz as part of the Victory Garden Initiative, installing 500 raised-bed gardens for people in the Greater Milwaukee area. In addition to financial sponsorship, Case donated the use of a SV300 skid-steer.



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The Goods: DESIGN/BUILD

BOBCAT CO. E32I AND E35I

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Going gray

California contractors turn loads of laundry into an irrigation source with the help of an incentive program.

By EMILY SCHAPPACHER

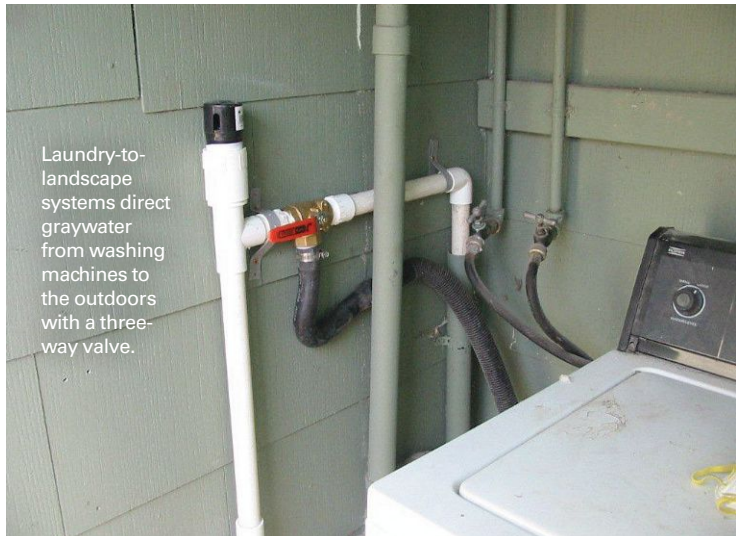
The first graywater systems installed by EarthCare Landscaping in Cupertino, Calif., were complex, messy projects. A decade ago in California, graywater—the wastewater generated from a home’s washing machines, sinks, dishwashers and showers—was deemed equivalent to sewage, and the state made sustainable-minded homeowners, who saw usable water quite literally going down the drain, jump through complicated hoops to make use of it. Permits, mandated 9 inches of underground tubing and upward of \$6,000 in material costs meant few homeowners could utilize their graywater as a way to irrigate their landscapes and save thousands of gallons of water each year.

“It looked like giant gophers had trashed someone’s yard,” says Deva Luna, EarthCare Landscaping’s horticulturist, manager and principal designer of these early projects. The company has done about a half dozen of them over the past 10 years. “It was kind of alarming how it had to be done.”

Since then, some states have come around to the benefits of graywater. After a series of droughts, California changed its graywater standards in 2009, allowing landscape companies to offer low-cost, low-maintenance systems to clients interested in saving water and, ultimately, money. Like with other “green” home improvements, such as solar panels or energy-efficient windows, municipalities even have started offering incentives for homeowners to invest in graywater. The Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) in San Jose, Calif., introduced its Laundry to Landscape Rebate Program earlier this year. Companies like EarthCare Landscaping, a \$1 million firm that offers landscape design, installation and maintenance services to residential clients, now have even more incentive to promote graywater conversions as a water-saving strategy.

“This is tremendous support for the whole process,” Luna says. “I’ve seen such a rise in public awareness.”

EarthCare Landscaping hasn’t installed a laundry-to-landscape system yet, though Luna is certified by Greywater Action in the installation process and says an average system would require \$100 to \$200 in materials and take a three-man



Laundry-to-landscape systems direct graywater from washing machines to the outdoors with a three-way valve.

crew about two days to complete using simple hand tools. The process is significantly easier than it used to be, Luna says, as laundry-to-landscape systems don’t require a permit and the tubing needs to be trenched just 2 inches underground. Pricing the service from the contractor standpoint varies, she says, based on the complexity of the job and the layout of the client’s home.

In a laundry-to-landscape system, graywater from a homeowner’s washing machine is directed to a specified portion of a landscape through a three-way valve and poly tubing. The graywater is collected in an underground basin filled with mulch; plants are watered using a flood irrigation technique.

Virginia O’Rourke, water conservation specialist for the SCVWD, recommends graywater systems for hardy plants such as fruit and ornamental trees, large shrubs and groundcover. She suggests homeowners use gentle detergents that won’t harm the plants.

So far this year, more than 100 homeowners have contacted the SCVWD for information about graywater, about 20 have applied for the \$200 Laundry to Landscape rebate, and more than 40 have signed up for the district’s graywater workshops. But regardless of the numbers, O’Rourke is most encouraged by the increased levels of interest and enthusiasm.

“The program will be viewed as successful as long as the district is able to help educate the public,” O’Rourke says. “(We) would like to help people understand what graywater is, how (it) can be used, and how to properly install a graywater system.”

One challenge of installing laundry-to-landscape systems is projects are site specific, based on a clients’ homes and water use. Sherri Osaka, owner of landscape design firm Sustainable Landscape Designs in San Jose, provides consultations to homeowners who are interested in graywater. For a fee of \$250 to \$500, Osaka goes to a client’s home and discusses factors such



Deva Luna