



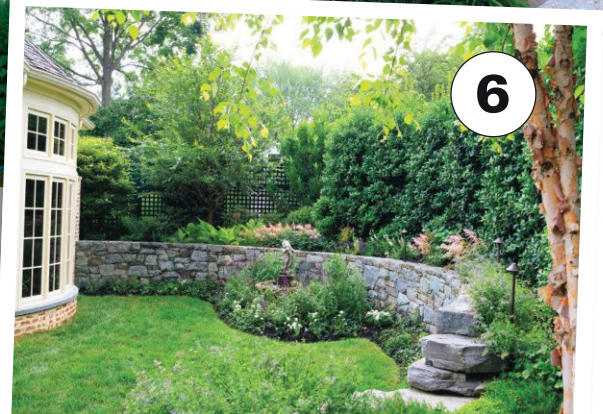
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4



5



6

THE WORK

- 1 | Nondescript and prone to problems.** This "before" shot illustrates the grade descending into the back of the house and the overgrown plantings.
- 2 | Elegant and approachable.** The finished project.
- 3 | Hospitality defined.** Jumbo cobblestone and exposed aggregate inlays compose a walkway to the rear of the house.
- 4 | Balance.** The garage's French doors and classic coachman lamps complement simple, clean plantings.
- 5 | Backyard entrance.** A custom-designed gate serves as an entryway to the backyard.
- 6 | Garden glitz.** The garden sits behind the pergola, backed by the retaining wall.

For more than 30 years, Botanical Decorators has offered custom residential landscaping services throughout the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. Learn more at BotDec.com.



Going dark

Recessionary circumstances prompted a new service offering for a Michigan contractor.

MICHAEL BEDELL MADE good on a bad situation when the Great Recession hit hard in Michigan, particularly his service area in Milford, Mich. Instead of altogether losing commercial clients who were cutting back or going idle, the owner, horticulturist and landscape designer with Bedell Property Management, developed a service for unoccupied properties or those not generating revenue, known as “dark property management.” The add-on assured clients that Bedell was willing to work with those who needed to scale back. He, in turn, retained them in the long run.

“In early spring 2009 my company began offering the dark property management service after a national management company wanted to continue our working relationship but had to reel in their expenses, per their client’s demands,” Bedell says. “There also was a regional banking firm that was taking possession by default of many larger foreclosed properties in the areas we serviced. We became a valued asset to them as they appreciated our suggestions and guidance with how to handle these unique sites.”

Bedell estimates 90 percent of the company’s commercial accounts would have qualified as a dark property during the recession. Currently, about 5 to 10 percent qualify.

While the service isn’t marketed beyond its mention as a commercial offering on the company’s website, Bedell says his firm discusses it with every commercial property manager it meets. It spreads by word-of-mouth referrals from there.

Job sites that receive the dark property treatment are serviced less frequently than other commercial properties. Still, the same crews and equipment are used on the dark properties, and the pricing structure is the same.

“Our direct costs per service generally didn’t change, so we used the same pricing structure,” Bedell says. “The reduced scope of work was what brought the numbers in line for our clients. We also did become much more aware of our

Michael Bedell began offering dark property management in 2009.



clients’ working budgets, especially in terms of landscaping, lawn care and snow plowing.”

At the heart of the service is the opportunity to work more closely with clients about budget and scaling services back accordingly.

For many accounts, scaling back simply has to do with frequency. How exactly to scale back differs by site. For the most part, property managers want the “bare minimum,” Bedell says. For example, if irrigation systems aren’t getting turned on, that equates to less mowing. In some cases, new mulch isn’t installed, but existing mulch can be turned over.

“Fertilization and weed control applications were minimal and annual flowers/mum installation work disappeared,” Bedell says. “Weeding, pruning and general landscape bed maintenance happened only a few times a year or not at all. Fall cleanups became a one-time occurrence or even pushed off to next year.”

While the term dark property management is a guise for service cutbacks, it makes the whole idea more approachable and opens the door for communication, Bedell says. It informs existing and potential clients Bedell Property Management is willing to work with their budget. Bedell suspects it even has earned him some jobs with smaller businesses that otherwise would have assumed the company was out of their budget range. Concurrently, those jobs helped keep his company afloat in some of the toughest times.

“We learned communication can lead to numerous opportunities for growth—even if it means, in this case, ‘doing less,’” Bedell says. “By listening to the needs of our clientele, we were able to find a way to continue to work together in a positive manner and alleviate the negative.”

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

>> SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY: Bedell Property Management

LOCATION: Milford, Mich.

SERVICE: Dark property management

WHY: The downturn in the economy made a scaled-back service package a necessity.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: “The negotiation process and crunching the numbers to come up with a win-win scenario, especially with new clients using this particular service,” Bedell says.

BEST TIP: “There’s adversity, what are you going to do with it? Are you going to turn it into a positive?” Bedell says, quoting Detroit Red Wings Coach Mike Babcock. “Having a positive attitude, being willing to work in niche markets and not being afraid of doing things differently can be your greatest asset.”

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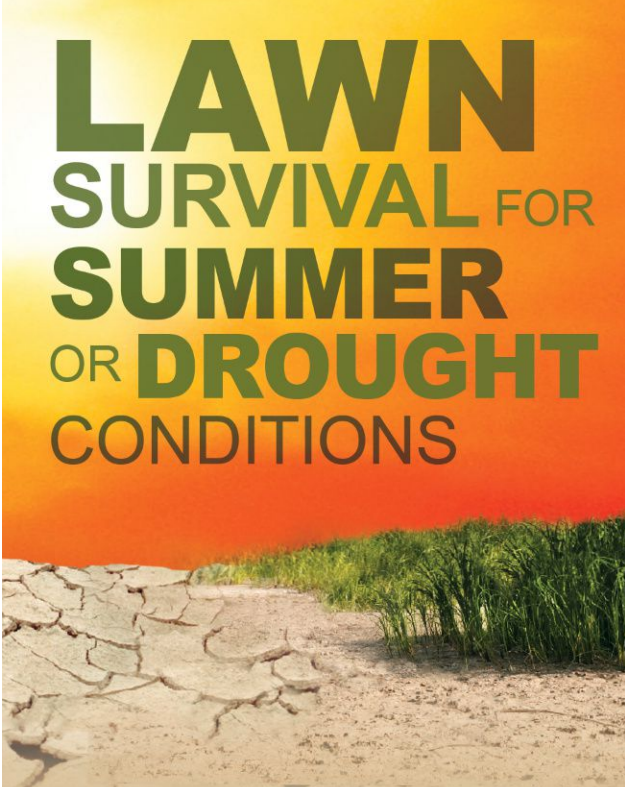


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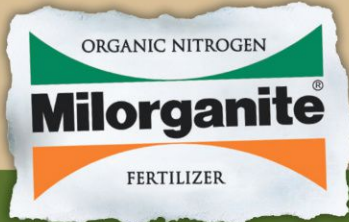
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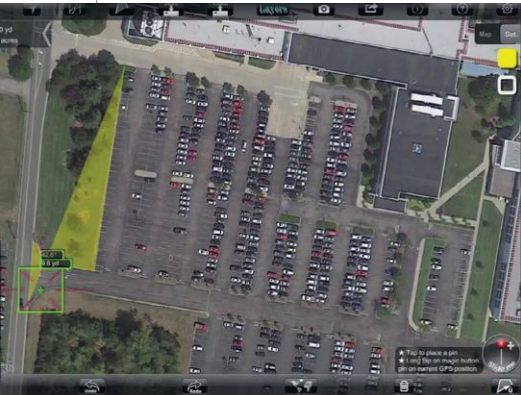
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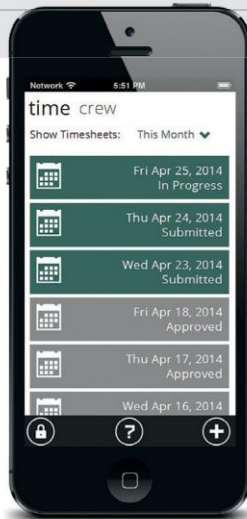
Landscape Layers cloud-based software integrates with the WheelitOff measuring tool app to let professionals create, measure, manage and track proposals in real time. Use the preloaded specifications included or customize your own. The average learning curve is less than an hour, the company says. A five-day free trial is available.

Landscape Layers // LandscapeLayers.com

Fleetmatics Reveal

Fleetmatics Reveal GPS vehicle-tracking offering is designed to drive savings and improve productivity for mobile workforces. It includes a comprehensive set of features, including native apps for iPhone and Android, designed to provide clear visibility into field activity as well as insight into driver behavior and workforce productivity metrics.

Fleetmatics // Fleetmatics.com



LMNTime

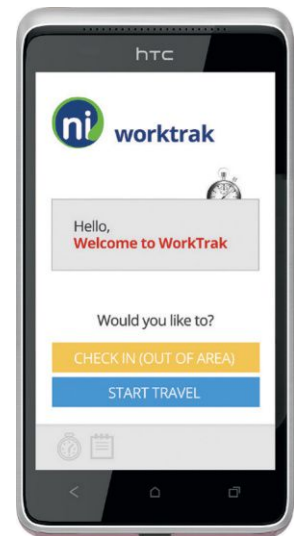
LMN's mobile timesheet software offers simple, easy-to-learn paperless timesheets; live, real-time job hours tracking; GPS-verified time records; and job, employee, billing and payroll reports. In addition, it syncs to QuickBooks for instant payroll and jobcosting data.

Landscape Management Network // GoLMN.com

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Supporting 40,000 professionals in more than 70,000 locations worldwide, Natural Insight provides cloud-based workforce management software. With HTML5 technology, employees are able to accept work assignments, check in and out with GPS, take surveys and provide visual verification of a job—all on their mobile devices.

Natural Insight // NaturalInsight.com



Xora StreetSmart

Xora StreetSmart features enhancements to the Mobile Forms and Mileage Manager apps. Managers can access all submitted form data from a single page, with filters for quickly narrowing in on the desired data, plus the ability to edit or complete partial form submissions. In addition, they can export a PDF of the User Route Map, which displays the actual route of a trip taken compared with the Google Maps suggested route.

Xora, a ClickSoftware Co. // Xora.com

QuickBooks Trends **intuit.**

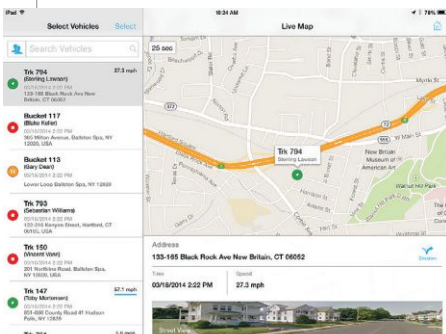
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Intuit // QuickBooks.intuit.com/trends

JobFLEX Android app

Based in Michigan and designed by contractors for contractors, JobFLEX released an app that's compatible with all Android 4.0 devices (phones and tablets). It includes a web portal with customer management, scheduling, digital file storage and data export features to keep the back office running as smoothly as the sales process. A free, live demo is available.

JobFLEX // Job-Flex.com



LANDSCAPE LIGHTING

LED-HL38

The weatherproof LED-HL38 floodlight saves energy while illuminating outdoor signage, architectural details and landscape designs. The 16W fixture replaces 100W incandescent lamps, and has a cool white 4700K color temperature with 800 lumens. The bronze-finish, bullet-shaped head is adjustable with sure-grip locks. It measures 9 in. by 5.5 in. and fits standard mounting units.

Orbit Industries // OrbitElectric.com

2106 Up & Accent Luminaire

Made in America and ideal for landscapes using reclaimed water or with high soil additives, the 2106 Up & Accent fixture combines heavy-gauge



brass and composite materials. Its robust composite knuckle is corrosion-resistant, featuring a polyester powder-painted finish to match the fixture and isolate the metal from the soil. An oversized silicone O-ring protects against dust and moisture.

Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting // VistaPro.com

LuxorWi-Fi

With the FX Luxor app users can control zoning and dimming with iOS and Android devices. The system consists of three parts: the Wi-Fi Module, which links Luxor ZD controllers to iOS and Android smartphones and tablets using the Luxor app; the Light Assignment Module (LAM), which allows smartphone or tablet group assignment of every fixture attached to a Luxor ZD system; and a new indoor mount that allows the Luxor ZD facepack to be remotely mounted inside a home or garage.

FX Luminaire // FXL.com



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UTVS & ACCESSORIES



Brutus

The four-model Polaris Brutus commercial side-by-side utility vehicle lineup offers front-end power take-off (PTO) capability. Using a multilink coil over De Dion rear suspension, the Brutus minimizes suspension sag when the 1,250-lb. capacity rear cargo box is fully loaded. It maintains excellent ground clearance when trailering with its 2,000-lb. towing capacity, the company says. All models feature Polaris' Lock & Ride cargo system and come with a 12-month standard warranty.

Polaris // Polaris.com/Brutus



OxCart

A utility cart designed to move heavy loads with a mower or UTV, OxCart is now available for turf, lawn and landscape professionals. It features an exclusive power-assist lift and reduces dumping effort by up to 90 percent, the company says. Run-flat tractor-grade turf tires move heavy loads rut-free across turf and lawns. The side dump rotates 110 degrees from either direction, making it easy to place heavy loads.

OxCart // OxCart.com

5600 and 5610 Toolcats

The Tier 4-compliant 5600 and 5610 (pictured) Toolcat utility work machines incorporate a non-diesel particulate filter engine solution. They feature a traction control system designed to provide operators with better mobility when ground conditions are conducive to traction loss or the machines' wheels encounter obstructions, such as rocks or debris. Towing capacity for both machines is 4,000 lbs., enabling the efficient transport of trailered supplies and light equipment up to a speed of 17 mph, the company says.

Bobcat Co. // Bobcat.com



Carryall

The Carryall utility vehicle series features 14-hp Subaru engines with electronic fuel injection—boosting horsepower by 30 percent and fuel efficiency by up to 50 percent over previous models, the company says. Rustproof aluminum frames increase durability. An optional track-based bed attachment system accommodates tool holders, water cooler and bucket holders, backpack blowers, tool boxes, etc. Most electric models come with an exclusive combination of an on-board, high-frequency charger with integrated cord retractor.

Club Car // ClubCar.com



Gator

The 2014 John Deere Gator lineup features updates that focus on operator side retention (OSR), winch enhancements and specific performance tweaks to each model category. A net OSR is part of the base configuration for the HPX, XUV heavy-duty and mid-duty models. Stylized poly doors can be ordered in lieu of nets for certain models.

John Deere // JohnDeere.com/Gator



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Chuck Carr

*Business development manager, commercial maintenance
Pierre Landscape, Simi Valley, Calif.*



Who's your mentor? The first guy I worked for in the landscape industry, Mark Jordan. That was 21 years ago when I started with Jordan Landscape in North Hills, Calif. From him I learned basically everything about the business. I went in doing sales and marketing, but I learned the ins and the outs of the landscape maintenance business and about all about the plants in Southern California.

How did you make your way to the landscape industry? My background was sales and marketing; I was director of marketing for the franchisor PIP Printing. We went through a leveraged buyout, and I changed careers. Somebody had told me Mark Jordan was looking for somebody to do sales. After a year I became general manager, and then I became president and CEO. I was there for five years.

Then I went to Environmental Care (now ValleyCrest Landscape Cos.). I was there for two years, and then I left to start my own business, Carr Landscape Management. I did that for 11 years and went back to ValleyCrest for two and a quarter years. I just started this month with Pierre Landscape.

You're president of the California Landscape Contractors Association (CLCA). How long have you been involved there? Back when I was at Jordan Landscape, Mark Jordan sent me up to Lake Tahoe to pick up a state Trophy Award for maintenance. I liked the guys I met there because I was still new to the industry and they were willing to sit down with them and tell me what they knew. The next year I got involved. Then when I started my own business the first two checks I wrote were for my CLCA membership and my workers' comp insurance. In those days, a lot of people used to join just for the insurance. Once you get in you realize the value of networking and referrals.

What are the pressing issues on the West Coast? Water is the primary thing. The new normal in landscaping here isn't big green lawns. It's native plants and sustainability. Gov. Jerry Brown announced recently he wants to take watering down to two days a week from three. For some plants, that's not a problem. For turfgrass, it is. Once you turn off the water, you'll have the unintended consequences of losing major shade trees—that brings fire hazards. And once those are gone, we'll have the heat island effect.

Immigration reform is important for us, being a border state. CLCA efforts are concentrated in the state because the federal level is such an expensive stage to play on. For example, in California they decided giving driver's licenses to illegal immigrants is OK. You can't discriminate against someone who has a driver's license that says he's an illegal immigrant. But it's against federal law to hire him. That's the position business owners are being put in here, and CLCA is working to try to get some type of safe harbor through in Sacramento.



OFF THE CLOCK

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FAMILY.

I have two daughters. My 22-year-old daughter is a dancer/choreographer and my 19-year daughter is a freshman at American Musical and Dramatic Academy (AMDA) in Hollywood. She's also a dance major. A big part of my social life is going to their shows.

WHERE ARE YOU FROM ORIGINALLY?

I was born in Minnesota. My mom was a retail nursery manager when I was a little kid. They're intense gardeners up there. My father worked for Hilton Hotels. When I was 14 we transferred to Indianapolis, and I went to high school there. Then I went to Ball State University. After college I moved out to California, the land of opportunity.

NOW THAT YOU'RE A CALIFORNIA GUY, MOUNTAINS OR OCEAN?

I love the mountains the best. The beach is so congested and crowded in Southern California.

HOW ABOUT FAVORITE TV SHOWS?

I love the comedies "How I Met Your Mother" and "The Big Bang Theory." And "Criminal Minds." Those are the only shows I watch.

