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## BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

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# The long view on customer loyalty

It's easy to say that we go the extra mile for our customers. But do we? Driving business forward often means more than just bending over backward. It can often require making compromises that don't make sense financially but pay off in the long run.

Throughout my career I've based my customer relationship philosophy on the value of my worth, not the worth of my value. What this means is that I don't let the relationship get lost in the fine print. When that happens, the relationship stops being worthwhile.

To achieve this, I've had to take the long view—which often means making a little less over a longer time. It's required that I bend with the winds of change and adapt to shifting preferences. This approach has served me well. Making strategic adjustments over the course of my relationships has rewarded me with “customers for life” and relationships built on a foundation of appreciation and trust.

If you're in service to a company, you're a partner who must also share in the ebb and flow of your customer's business cycles. You need to maneuver around potential deal breakers to win on consistency, even when budgets are tight or when the weather affects production.

Doing more for less can seem counterintuitive to ambitious companies wanting to grow their business faster and increase profit. The prevailing theory is to leverage and use market variables as opportunities to make money. Unfortunately, this can backfire and put companies on a win-lose path.

Consider this winter. Many companies are benefitting from the snow bonanza. As a snow/ice contractor, you have a chance to stick it to your customers. Or, you have a chance to feel their pain. What should you do? Make a bundle now or have them as customers next year when there's no snow to plow?

In the maintenance business, it's best to measure actions against long-term priorities. Choose your actions carefully with an empathetic ear

toward your customer's pain and an eye on keeping their trust. Consider these best practices:

- ▶ Remember the customer is still king and his or her point of view matters. To quote my partner, Tom Oyler, you need to “crawl behind the eyes of your customer.” Develop the skill of seeing things through the eyes of others and you are better able to develop your solutions for their problems.

- ▶ Learn to hear what the customer is not saying. Active listening is like reading between the lines. Sometimes you can learn more from what they're not telling you.

- ▶ Ask better questions. A weak answer comes from a weak question. Eliminate ambiguity by being direct, clear and avoiding ill-conceived messages. Ask important questions in person, not email. You can't read their body language in email.

- ▶ Customer eccentricities are part of the deal. Work with and around them to build trust.

- ▶ Develop listening posts at multiple levels. Have relationships at different levels in your customer's organization, such as owner to owner, account manager to facility manager, etc.

- ▶ Never overpromise. If you under deliver, it's a trust buster.

- ▶ When you have a service glitch—every company has them—admit it, fix it and move on.

- ▶ Hire employees with values that match yours. If you want to have your customers treated with respect and be treated honestly and fairly you must build a team of employees that does the same.

- ▶ Cost is not everything. Know where to skimp and where to spend. Customer loyalty is built around the total customer experience from the sale, quality of service, knowing what the customer might like, the ability to deliver and trust.

- ▶ Build a sense of urgency in your organization. Most customers today expect you to have a sense of urgency about their problems and their issues when it comes to their service providers. If their budget cutbacks are top priority, this has to be your priority. Work together for a win-win.

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## THE BENCHMARK

JEFF HARKNESS

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# Getting to page one

**C**ompanies are being “pitched” daily to spend money on web marketing, and there are many confusing options. Ask yourself this question: “Is my company even on the grid?” If I’m a prospect and I don’t know your name or company, can I find you if I’m searching for a resource? If you’re not on page one as one of the top five listings of the major search engines’ results pages, then you’re simply losing.

Getting noticed takes a great deal of effort and you must make an investment as part of your monthly budget. The good news is if you choose your marketing sources wisely, you’ll earn a positive return.

### » WEB EXTRA

Visit the Web Extras section of [Landscape Management.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net) for Jeff Harkness’s take on Facebook and LinkedIn advertising.

## A word about keywords

It’s important to have the right keywords on your site. Otherwise, people won’t find your site via search. Make sure to include your city and state as keywords. You also need to include location keywords to ensure the right people—people who actually are able to patronize your business—find your site.

## Google AdWords

Google has nearly an 80 percent share of the search engine market, so it makes sense you’d want to use it to advertise. Fortunately, Google advertising is made easy through a popular service called Google AdWords. With Google AdWords, you can use video, image and text ads to advertise your services on a platform that boasts millions of searches per day. Once your campaign is all set up, your ads will display to people who search using the keywords you added to your account. When using contextual ads, you can further qualify the people who click your ads by including action keywords, like “buy,” “service,” “emergency,” etc. This means the clicks you receive will have a very good chance to turn into an actual sale. With no long-term commitments, very little money down (\$20) and access to one of the largest segments of the Internet population, AdWords is an extremely powerful tool.

*The Good:* AdWords represents the largest segment of your customers in one place, and your ads

show based on their search intent. This creates a powerful combination that can lead to a staggering amount of clicks and potential business.

*The Bad:* Everyone else knows this, so you have a lot of competition. Prices per click are higher than Bing due to more competition.

*Expert Tips:* Turn off Google partners to only show ads to Google.com users to get the highest quality clicks. Also keep a close eye on your budget—you can spend literally thousands of dollars a day if you don’t have your budget settings correct.

## Bing Ads

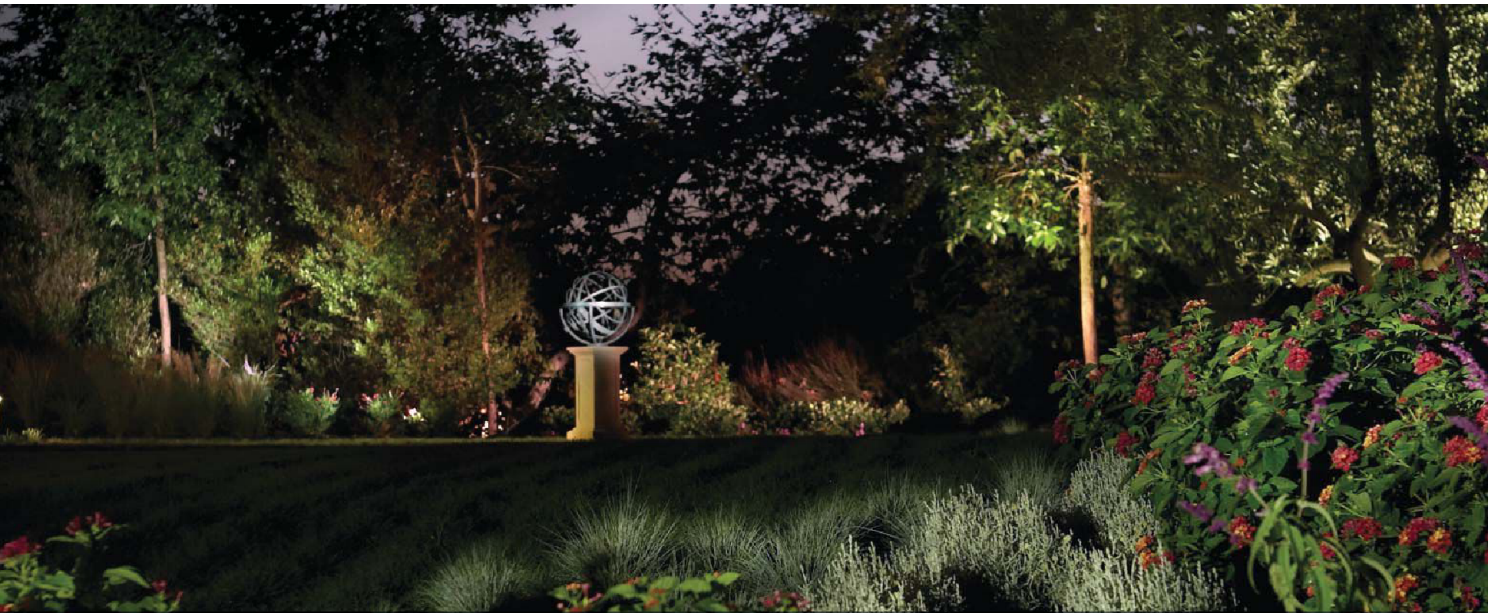
Microsoft’s search engine Bing offers another option: Bing Ads. Bing Ads combines Bing with Yahoo to create the second largest search engine segment, at about 15 percent of web searches. Options are similar to Google’s and you can import your Google campaign directly into Bing, so the cost of moving your campaign to Bing is very low.

*The Good:* Bing is typically cheaper and converts better than Google, probably due to less competition. For instance, I see Bing traffic is about 20 percent cheaper than Google and that visitor has a 10 percent to 20 percent higher chance of calling or emailing us.

*The Bad:* You’ll get great traffic that converts to customers, but the numbers are too low to focus entirely on Bing.

*Expert Tips:* It’s very important to exclude website partners, so make sure you’re only advertising on Bing.com and Yahoo.com. Keep a close eye on your traffic. If you’re not converting at or better than Google, you need to evaluate your account. There are many fraudulent clicks on this network, so be on top of it by reviewing your numbers frequently. Bing’s customer service is good; call if anything looks strange.

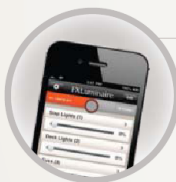
Remember, these are “measurable” items. Tracking leads is a must. If you’re not generating more money than you’re spending, it’s time to reevaluate your marketing efforts and relationships. Prospects are looking for services daily by using their handheld devices. I ask you again. Are you on the grid? That means page one.



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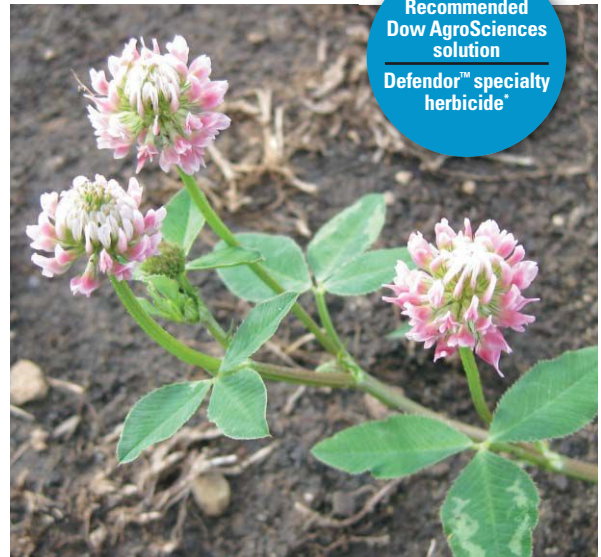
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## ANNUALS

Annual weeds germinate from seed, grow, mature and die in less than 12 months. Preemergent herbicides containing isoxaben or dithiopyr are excellent control agents for winter and summer annual weeds. Apply several weeks prior to germination.

### WINTER ANNUALS

- ▶ Germinate in fall through early spring, when soil temperatures and moisture levels are favorable.
- ▶ Mature and flower in the spring and early summer.
- ▶ Set seed and die at the onset of high summer temperatures.

- ▶ Broadleaf winter annuals include henbit, lawn burweed and speedwell.
- ▶ Grassy winter annuals include annual bluegrass and downy brome.

### SUMMER ANNUALS

- ▶ Germinate in spring through summer, as temperatures rise and soil moisture is adequate.
- ▶ Mature, set seed and die in the fall.
- ▶ Broadleaf summer annuals include common lespedeza (pictured), black medic and spurge.
- ▶ Grassy summer annuals include crabgrass, goosegrass and green foxtail.

## PERENNIALS/BIENNIALS

Postemergent herbicides containing florasulam or clopyralid can provide excellent control of many perennial and biennial weeds.

### PERENNIALS

- ▶ Perennials, such as white clover (pictured), live for three or more years.
- ▶ Most perennial weeds reproduce from seed and/or vegetative structures, such as roots or tubers.
- ▶ Simple perennials spread by seed. However, if cut, pieces may produce new plants.
- ▶ Dandelion, curly dock and plantain are simple perennials that can grow

actively during cool and warm weather.

### BIENNIALS

- ▶ Biennials complete their life cycle within two years.
- ▶ Biennial plants bloom, set seed and die in their second year. The first year of development is mainly to grow food stores in the roots.
- ▶ Common biennial weeds include bull thistle, musk thistle and wild carrot.
- ▶ Many biennials are sometimes listed as short-lived perennials because, under certain environmental conditions, they do not complete their life cycle in the second year.

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For more information regarding these and other turf weeds — and related control technologies and tips — please visit [www.DowProvesIt.com](http://www.DowProvesIt.com) or call 800/255-3726.

BY ANITA ALEXANDER, DOW AGROSCIENCES FIELD SCIENTIST

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# SAME TREE,



Brothers Roscoe (left) and Brook Klausing started maintaining landscapes at a young age alongside their father, Bob, who was a city landscape supervisor. Right: A young Brook Klausing assists his father with pruning.



# different branches

**T**alking to the Klausing brothers is like addressing two sides of the same brain.

On the left is the oldest, Roscoe Klausing, 37, president and CEO of Klausing Group, a \$2.8 million commercial grounds maintenance firm in Lexington, Ky. He's genuine.

Logical. A planner. On the right side younger brother Brook Klausing, 36, owner of \$1.5 million, New York City-based Brook Landscape, is an artistic risk taker.

Their mutual passion for beautifying environments and business success sprouted from the same seed. It's rooted in the same soil in Lexington, where they grew up the sons of a city landscape supervisor and a registered nurse. They cultivated it together as young men, first to earn spending money and then as a true business. But today, the branch each brother has chosen is very different.

"Even though Brook has the design/build company and I've got the grounds management company, we both are really big fans of design," Roscoe Klausing says. "It inspires us both and it comes out in different ways."

## → GETTING THERE

It's fall 1997 and 20-year-old Roscoe Klausing hits the road in his 1992 Honda Accord to head back to Earlham College in Richmond, Ind., from Lexington.

He just spent the long, fall-break weekend of his first year of college in his hometown, helping his younger brother with the landscape business the pair built steadily since they

were in tenth and eighth grades, respectively. In fact, they'd been cutting grass and doing jobs around their neighborhood for much longer than that.

"I'm driving back, and I'd just worked 50 or 60 hours helping Brook get caught up because he was so behind," Roscoe Klausing recalls. "I said to myself, 'What am I doing?' I should be back there with Brook and the business."

On that very car ride he decided he was done with school.

He completed the semester, but before it was over began negotiating a lease for an office and warehouse so the budding company, Klausing Lawn Mowing, could move out of the family garage.

By summertime, the co-owners joined the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA), now part of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). They attended the annual meeting in Baltimore in 1999, the predecessor to today's Green Industry Conference.

"It was there I saw what was possible," Roscoe Klausing says. "I was introduced to people who were entrepreneurs first and who happened to be in the world of landscape contracting."

Soon after the brothers began working on—and executing—a business plan. By 2001 they replaced all of their residential maintenance, design/build and bid/build work for commercial maintenance contracts. At the time they were doing about \$400,000 in revenue. They also rebranded the company to Klausing Group.

"Because we only had about a dozen people at the most, we chose Klausing Group," Roscoe Klausing says. "We realized we needed to project an image to give

people confidence, so we came out with a very, I think, classic-looking logo and a name that might lead people to believe we were much larger than we were."

The move to 100 percent maintenance was a better fit for the older Klausing, though.

"Commercial grounds maintenance suited me better than Brook," Roscoe Klausing says. "This wasn't the sexy side of the industry or it wasn't the one everyone wanted to be in, like it is today."

That same year, just before Sept. 11, Brook Klausing went on a week-long vacation to New York.

"There was an energy here that blew me away that I didn't ever feel in Kentucky," Brook Klausing says of New York. Upon his return home, his mind was made up that he'd move. The brothers immediately began planning to transition him out of the business. He relocated to New York the following year.

## → RIGHT BRAIN

Soon after arriving in New York, Brook Klausing landed landscape maintenance work for a short time and then quit the

*continued on page 22*

*What started as a sibling lawn mowing endeavor for the Klausing brothers has grown into two distinct and thriving landscape businesses.*

BY **MARISA PALMIERI**





**CUTTING EDGE.  
COMMERCIAL GRADE.**