

# Landscaping Management

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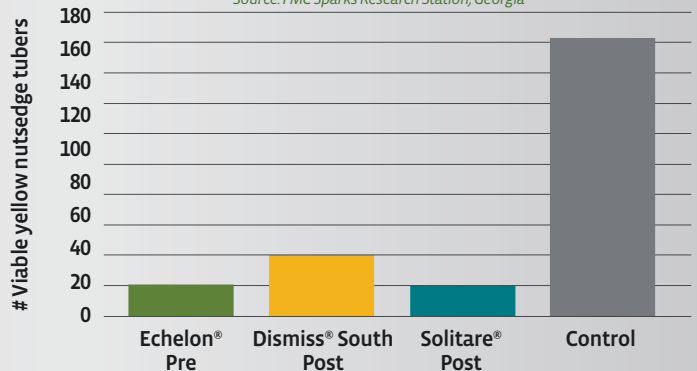
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# ONLINE NOW

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## NOW TRENDING: What a combined ValleyCrest, Brickman could mean for the landscape market

When word leaked of a potential ValleyCrest Cos. and Brickman Group merger, we took to social media to get the Green Industry's take on the possible deal and shared some of our own reporting on it ([buff.ly/1n2Py8n](http://buff.ly/1n2Py8n)). Stay tuned to [LandscapeManagement.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net) for breaking news on this story.



### LinkedIn reactions

- » **David Bonza:** They are the Home Depot of the landscape industry. Low prices for subpar work will hurt everyone.
- » **Dan Pestretto:** All things considered, this will bring, if it happens, more money, interest and recognition to our industry.
- » **Steven Cohen:** This will help reshape the attitude and thinking of how landscape services are procured by clients. Bigger doesn't mean better. (It's a) great opportunity for regionals and smaller companies to leverage market share.



## Facebook Feature QUESTION OF THE WEEK

*What are your thoughts on the potential Brickman/ValleyCrest merger?*

- » **Adam Linnemann:** They will be the Walmart of lawn care.
- » **Seth Ambrose:** I think it's great for smaller businesses. A large army moves slowly. (A) small army is more agile. Not to mention, look what happened to TruGreen.
- » **Mike Perrine:** I'm OK with it because I do a ton of subcontracting work for Brickman.
- » **Matt Dingeldein:** Hopefully the humble roots of these two firms will prevent them from making the same mistakes of those that have tried this before. Only time will tell.



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

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# People are talking

**A**re your ears ringing? They should be. People are talking about the collective landscape industry, and it's a good thing. Who do I mean?

▶ Investors at private equity firms like KKR, which bought the Brickman Group last year for \$1.6 billion. KKR also is reportedly in talks to acquire ValleyCrest Cos. for around a billion dollars.

▶ Readers of *Forbes*, which recently published a report online by financial information company Sageworks. According to the study, average landscape company sales were up 12 percent in 2013 with profit margins at 7 percent.

▶ Global management consulting firms (Bain & Co. and others) that occasionally ping us for information on the landscape market for research projects.

You might say, "I don't give a hoot." Here's why you should care.

**Image matters.** Industry members have said for years that they could charge more if only the public put their craft on the same plane as other specialized vocations, like plumbing and electrical work.

Some landscape pros have suggested professional licensing as a way to command higher prices. Of course, some industry licensing already exists. But is licensing for all a panacea? Probably not for the red tape it creates. Others point to certification. It's beneficial to those who go this route, but is a voluntary initiative a true market lifter? Again, probably not.

Yet, the awareness that comes from investors' attention seems like a PR boost that can only help. Not to mention, it requires no association efforts, government intervention or the like.

**Future of the market.** Don't forget, these investor-connected communities have spheres of influence. Within those are their children, some of whom may one day wake up and say, "I'd rather be outside, than behind this illuminated screen all day." They may ponder the jobs they can do outdoors and declare to their parents they'd like to pursue landscape design or construction management as a career. And maybe, just maybe, mom and dad will recognize the landscape industry as a serious business, so they won't talk them out of a career here in favor of teaching or accounting.

**Trickle-down effect.** Finally, more private equity interest could create a shift toward a seller's market for owners looking to exit. But it's no secret these types of buyers are looking to scoop up large commercial maintenance firms. If your company's in a sweet spot, geographically or size/service-wise, that's excellent news. If you're not, think about how you can leverage the trickle-down effect of these regional or larger local companies that will be grooming themselves for an acquisition. Are you a small maintenance provider with a mix of residential and commercial accounts? Maybe a regional player would like to buy up your accounts to add to its service area or top line. Are you a lawn care, design/build or irrigation firm? Maybe you could pursue a subcontracting agreement or formal referral partnership with a maintenance-driven company that often fields calls for work that's not in its wheelhouse.

In any case, listen to that ringing sound. It's telling you to think about how the light shining on the landscape industry is an opportunity for you.

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\*FMC recommends two applications of Dismiss turf herbicide or one application of Dismiss South herbicide for optimal control of purple nutsedge. Always read and follow label directions. FMC and Dismiss are trademarks of FMC Corporation. ©2014 FMC Corporation. All rights reserved.



## PLANET DOS 2014 spurs 90 project completions

Type #PLANETDOS into your Facebook or Twitter search bar and you'll see evidence the Green Industry was busy on Earth Day, April 22.

Off screen, the evidence was in the form of around 90 projects completed in 24 states at an estimated value of \$400,000 as part of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) Day of Service (DOS) 2014.

An initiative that encourages landscape professionals to plan, organize and do volunteer projects that benefit their communities on Earth Day, DOS 2014 drew 2,200 volunteers in its fifth year.

A couple of highlights include the following projects.

### For the children

GrowinGreen, based in Kernersville, N.C., provided landscape maintenance support to Victory Junction Gang Camp, a free camp for children with serious illnesses.

HighGrove Partners of Austell, Ga., completed a landscaping project at the Special Needs Schools of Gwinnett.

LawnAmerica, based in Tulsa, Okla., along with G&G Lawn & Landscape installed new landscaping at Will Rogers High School, of which LawnAmerica Owner Brad Johnson is an alumnus.

"The old school recently enjoyed some renovations," Johnson wrote in a blog post on the project. "We wanted to do our part in renovating a somewhat bare landscape in front of the building."

### A helping hand to nonprofits

New Milford, Conn.-based YardApes tackled multiple projects, including repairing walkways and a patio for H.O.R.S.E. of Connecticut, a nonprofit facility for abused and neglected horses. It also did spring cleanups for three homeowners and touched up the grounds at Northville Bap-



tist Church and the New Milford Bulls football and cheerleading field.

*Landscape Management* got its hands dirty, too, pairing up with Schill Grounds Management to work on McGregor, a nonprofit assisted living and retirement facility in Cleveland. (Visit [buff.ly/1n2LkNX](http://buff.ly/1n2LkNX) for more on the project.)

The National Hispanic Landscape Alliance (NHLA) and member companies provided a landscaping makeover to Good Shepherd Housing Foundation, a nonprofit housing facility for those who struggle with mental illness.

"The NHLA is proud our members are taking this opportunity to help an organization that cares for the often marginalized and underserved of our society by donating the manpower, equipment and plant material for this much-needed project," said Raul Berrios, NHLA president.

### Giving back to those who gave

Sposato Landscape Co. of Milton, Del., did landscaping for the Home of the Brave, a vacation facility for families of combat veterans. Additionally, it worked in the garden at Just Soup Ministry.



Photos of DOS projects, volunteers from Inside Out Design (left), Environmental Enhancements (center) and YardApes (right).

Also helping the armed forces was Professional Grounds, located in Lorton, Va. The company spruced up the property of a wounded veteran who served in Afghanistan in 2011 and was diagnosed with cancer.

Turf Appeal, based in Oklahoma City, joined forces with Balfour Beatty Communities, Full Circle Tree Service and John Deere Landscapes to work on Fort Sill National Memorial Cemetery. The group relandscaped the visitor's center and repaired trees and plants damaged by ice storms.

"We appreciate this opportunity to give back to those who have fallen for our freedom," Matt Doerr, president of Turf Appeal, wrote in the project description. He added it's the firm's fourth year to revamp the cemetery as part of DOS. "After year six, we will have completely refurbished one of our most sacred grounds in Oklahoma."

For a full listing of DOS projects, visit [PLANETDayofService.org](http://PLANETDayofService.org).



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## BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

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# Help production managers produce

**A**re you getting the most out of your investment in production supervisors? In many cases the answer is no. The position has evolved into more of a firefighter or a gofer for account managers. To be effective, the person in this position needs to focus primarily on improving the effectiveness of the crew leaders he or she supervises.

I believe this skill set is much different from being a crew leader, which is the position from which most production supervisors have been promoted. The management of production supervisors is generally inconsistent as a practice. In some cases it's lacking entirely.

In select companies, account managers are supposed to manage and train production managers. In other companies, branch or operations managers are responsible for this task. Unless the person managing the supervisors has a passion for operations, the supervisors are left pretty much on their own.

The primary responsibilities of a production supervisor should be: 1.) quality control; 2.) improving crew efficiency; and 3.) crew leader development. Owners frequently look at how many crews a production supervisor can oversee effectively. I hear numbers wavering from four to 10. That's a big variable. The company that has a 1-4 supervisor-crews ratio has a much higher cost for supervisors than a company that has one supervisor for 10 crews.

I believe the key to getting closer to a 1-10 ratio lies in training the production supervisor and developing great crew leaders to achieve less supervision. It sounds simple, but it isn't or it would be more common.

There are several important factors to consider to make sure this position pays for itself.

› The production management side of the business should have targeted goals for lowering costs and increasing gross margins on work.

› Companies must develop best practices and/or standard operating procedures for doing work efficiently. The production managers must buy into them and ensure the work is consistently performed that way.

› Production managers should work along with crews, training them on the right way to do things and correcting mistakes in the field.

› Production managers should be trained on how to manage production. It's common for a company to take a good foreman and make him a production supervisor or manager, assuming he will be a good manager. We all know how well that works.

› Measure crews for performance and for delivering the quality work you desire within target hour ranges.

› Companies must have a measurable quality control program.

› A key piece of the equation is hiring the right people. I believe companies need to spend more effort finding employees who have the right qualities to become crew leaders and supervisors. Compromising on hiring criteria can perpetuate problems, resulting in incompetency.

It's an over simplification to state that unless the production managers can save enough in labor costs to pay for themselves, you may be better off letting the crews go unsupervised. For this reason, it's essential the position have very specific goals for increasing efficiency and controlling quality.

Company owners must get out of the office and watch their crews work so they can see what they're actually doing and then coach and mentor them to reinforce best practices. Crews respond favorably to recognition and they covet the owner's approval of their work.

If your company is going to be successful, your production managers must be able to observe their crews with an eye for efficiency and wasted or nonproductive activities. Next, they need to retrain their crews to help them develop the right habits.



**They say money talks, and...**

As legal tender, I know quite a bit about where money goes. For instance, billions of dollars have gone straight into the pockets of PermaGreen owners over the last 15 years. That's because PermaGreens come closest to the money making goal of one machine, all properties, every day... and that's no B.S. (walking or otherwise)!

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# THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

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## How to be a grinder

**H**ow do you sell more work? Relationships certainly help. Luck is a good thing, too. But it's good habits consistently executed that create results. This is true of almost everything in life. Develop and practice good habits and good things usually follow—like great relationships and a fair bit of luck.

The first habit of successful salesmen is to keep the sales pitch simple (see my last column at [buff.ly/1hYh68M](http://buff.ly/1hYh68M)). The second habit is to be a grinder. This sounds awful, doesn't it? Yet of all the habits it may be the most essential. Selling is a process of rejection, rejection ... victory! It's long stretches of routine punctuated by moments of glory. In other words, it can be a grind. If your work plan does not take this into account, it's hard to achieve excellent results.

My favorite commercial landscape maintenance salesman in the industry is a grinder. He does *the math*, makes *a plan*, executes the plan and takes very little of the rejection personally. He doesn't rely on his good looks, boyish charm, relationships or luck. He gets up every day, makes his cold calls, keeps in touch with his referral sources, shows up for appointments, makes his presentations and asks for the order. If he gets it, he smiles. When he doesn't get it, he goes on to the next opportunity. Here's how he grinds it out.

### The math

My goal is to sell	<b>\$1,000,000</b>	annualized new contract sales.
My close rate is	<b>20%</b>	I win one for every four I lose.
My bid requirement is	<b>\$5,000,000</b>	Sales goal/close rate
My target job size is	<b>\$30,000</b>	This is a \$2,500 per month job.
My qualification rate is	<b>50%</b>	I turn this % of my leads into a bid.
I need this many leads/prospects	<b>333</b>	Bids/job size/qualification rate
I need to touch each prospect	<b>12</b>	times to get an answer (yes or no).
I need to have this many touches	<b>4,000</b>	Prospects * touches
I have	<b>46</b>	"real" selling weeks to do it.
I need to make this many touches	<b>87</b>	every week. I need a plan for every week.

*Touch = Phone call, email, qualification meeting or presentation meeting.*

### The plan

Vince Lombardi said the Green Bay Packers had only eight basic plays. There were many options on each of these plays, he said, but these options only became apparent as the play unfolded in real time. The key was to execute the basics flawlessly and take advantage of the opportunities the other guy provided you to run to daylight.

That's what it means to be a grinder: Execute the basics flawlessly and take advantage of the opportunities that arise naturally. Now, go do the math and make a plan.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
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AFTERNOON	Propose	Present	Present	Network	Propose
EVENING		Network		Network	

#### » WEB EXTRA

For an editable spreadsheet of "the math" explained here, visit [LandscapeManagement.net/downloads](http://LandscapeManagement.net/downloads). Plus, read Kehoe's November 2013 column outlining the "6 habits of successful salespeople" at [LandscapeManagement.net/6habits](http://LandscapeManagement.net/6habits).