

SS-4000 snow broom

Powered by a 160cc Honda GXV Series engine, the SS-4000 features a floating pivotal broom head with five angle settings to adjust the trajectory of snow and other materials. The 16-in.-diameter broom is centrally driven, allowing the unit to work against curbs, walls and other obstacles from either the left- or right-hand side. For heavier snow conditions, the operator can install a front-mounted blade attachment, which comes standard. The 40-in. blade uses an exclusive pin system for easy installation and removal.

SnowEx // SnowExProducts.com



DL300-3 and DL350-3 wheel loaders

Advancements to the Doosan DL300-3 and DL350-3 wheel loaders include improved lift capabilities, increased fuel efficiency and enhanced cab comfort, the company says. This interim Tier 4-compliant machine also delivers higher horsepower.

Doosan Infracore Construction Equipment America // DoosanEquipment.com



Skid-steer loaders

JCB skid-steer loaders feature an exclusive single-arm "PowerBoom" and side-entry door for safety. The spacious cab offers 270° visibility. They feature Tier 4 Final engines that use 16 percent less fuel, while meeting emission standards without diesel particulate filters (DPFs). More than 31 attachments are available, including snow blades, snow pushes, snow blowers and snow buckets

JCB // JCBVision.com

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UPCOMING PROGRAMS

DATE	SPECIAL GUEST	PROGRAM TOPIC	SPONSOR
5/7	Jan Johnsen , Contractor, <i>Johnsen Landscaping & Pools</i>	Serenity in the Garden	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>
5/14	Mike Caprio , Vendor, <i>Lawn Doctor</i>	Extend the Life of Your Equipment	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>
5/21	Mark Adamson , Vendor, <i>Douglas Dynamics, LLC</i>	How to Deal with Angry Customers	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>
5/28	Michael Deo , Contractor, <i>NatureScape Lighting</i>	My Lighting is Better Than Yours	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>
6/4	Jim Huston , Consultant, <i>J. R. Huston Consulting, Inc.</i>	Estimating the Right Way	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>
6/11	Demi Fortuna , Vendor/ Contractor, <i>Atlantic Watergardens</i>	Make Easy Profits With Waterscaping	<i>Sponsorship Available</i>

Remember: all shows are archived for later listening at FD2B.COM!

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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MARKETWATCH

SERVICE SEGMENT SNAPSHOTS

Irrigation pros hash out how to make service pricing profitable for themselves, fair for clients.

PAGE 34



PHOTO: ANDY'S SPRINKLER, DRAINAGE & LIGHTING

Keeping it fair

A look at how companies approach irrigation service pricing—with a flat rate or charging on time and materials—and why they favor their method. *By SARAH PFLEDDERER*

Only irrigation professionals had X-ray vision. It would eliminate that part of the service call that takes an inestimable amount of time. The part when they must dig up the yard to locate the underground glitch they were called to repair.

That might hearten more of them to charge on a flat rate for irrigation services like Colleen MacKinnon does.

While the co-owner of Able Irrigation in Vancouver, Canada, lost hope for X-ray vision a time ago, she has a hard stance on employees getting paid for every bit of time it takes to complete a job and giving customers no leeway to dispute it.

Flat-rate pricing accomplishes just that, MacKinnon says.

“Clients have a stopwatch mentality, but they like flat rates knowing what the cost is per repair,” she says. “Billable hours never amount to eight in a day,” she adds with mention that the average is five and a half billable hours per day, but you must account for “windshield time,” or travel to the job site, and allow employees some flexibility to locate buried problems, such as for pipe and wire repairs. “I’ll never go back to time and materials.”

FAIRNESS TO THE COMPANY

A 40-year-old company, Able Irrigation converted to flat-rate pricing five years ago and spent four years prior preparing for the switch.

“It’s not easy,” MacKinnon says. “I’ll tell you that from the start.”

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Some companies, like Able Irrigation, opt for flat rate service pricing to get paid for 8 billable hours per day.



The Ticker:

IRRIGATION

John Deere Landscapes (JDL) acquired **Eljay Irrigation**, located in Calgary, Alberta.

While JDL didn’t disclose terms of the deal, President Dave Werning said the company expects to make more acquisitions in 2014.

Netafim debuted its line of Netafim Landscape



Controllers. Developed by **Tucor**, the web-based smart controllers incorporate weather and soil moisture data to determine watering needs.

With the U.S. General Services Administration approving the U.S. Green Building Council’s **Leadership Energy & Environmental Design v4** (LEED) and the Green

Building Initiative’s **Green Globes** rating programs as standards for green buildings, the

Irrigation Association (IA) outlined the differences and overlaps of the programs, primarily regarding point allocations. Visit buff.ly/1jepvrh for specifics.





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the minutes and materials it took to complete the job.

“You’re going to lose some customers because your pricing is going up,” MacKinnon says. “It’s not an avenue to gouge the client. Really, what you’re doing is running your business so you can make a reasonable profit.”

Michael Oliveto uses a similar reasoning to justify why he charges on time and materials for service.

The vice president of operations at Rainfree Irrigation in Mt. Pleasant, S.C., says the company has used the structure for more than 25 years to “keep the customers honest” about the time employees are at the job site and to ensure employees are paid fairly for their time.

From their trucks, employees log in to a computerized network to report when they arrive and depart a job site. This way Oliveto always has an eye on them, and clients can’t dispute the time they’re charged for.

“When the guys get to a job I know they’re working constantly,” Oliveto says. “We get paid for almost all our time. I’m not losing money on hourly

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She enlisted the help of contractor consulting firm Grandy & Associates to create her model, which includes flat rates for basic repairs, primarily those above ground, and “custom flat rates” for more complex jobs. Technicians provide clients a “good case, bad case”

price for custom flat rates, meaning they estimate the bottom and top price for the job upfront and, when the job is complete, present the actual price that can’t exceed the “bad case” cost, which is calculated from

Josh DePauw (pictured) favors time-and-materials pricing for irrigation services.

The Goods: IRRIGATION

GROUNDSKEEPER TECH'S SPRINKLERMAPS

Designed for landscape and irrigation managers, this mapping software provides an alternative to paper landscape maps. Users can plot irrigation and utility systems with a live satellite map.

TOOL TIME

SprinklerMaps features a square footage estimator, sprinkler radius viewer and global precipitation measurement (GPM) tallies.

GET IT DONE

The program allows landscape managers to flag markers for repair, map out assigned tasks and track progress.



THINK BIG

Among those already using this product are major universities, golf courses and several pro sports teams.

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employees or jobs that take longer or are harder than they initially appear.”

The company includes travel time in its hourly rate, charging \$75 for the first hour on residential jobs and by 15-minute increments after that.

Still, Rainfree Irrigation gives customers an anticipated amount for a job before it begins work. Oliveto keeps clients in the know if a job will cost 10 percent or more than the estimate, informing them before they receive their invoice.

JUSTIFYING THE APPROACH

The downside to time and materials, Oliveto says, is the intricacies of the invoice because you “must justify your time” to the customer.

“What we constantly struggle with is getting the technicians to be as accurate and descriptive as possible,” he says. “That’s something we’re always trying to drive home is you have to be accurate in what you’re saying. You can’t leave things out.”

Josh DePauw is another advocate for time-and-materials pricing, but the regional manager for Andy’s Sprinkler, Drainage & Lighting can pinpoint some challenges to it, too.

“A lot of customers like to hear that upfront cost being less,” he says, and adds how Andy’s gets over the hurdle. “Our office staff is the frontline of that phone call. We have girls who explain what we do and why we do it real easily. That’s a big deal.”

The Dallas-based company charges \$109 for its first hour, including the travel time to the job site and, like Rainfree Irrigation, charges in 15-minute increments thereafter.

DePauw says he never sees the company going to a flat rate because the

time-and-materials approach is what’s most fair for the company and customer.

On the other hand, profitability partly drives Robin Luce’s decision on service pricing. By the yearend he plans to switch to flat-rate pricing versus charging on time and materials as he has for the past 11 years.

“*What it boils down to is what’s profitable for the company and what’s fair to the customer. Every time we get into an extended project, the hours can get high. (Clients) see that meter running and they’re freaking out.*”

—Robin Luce, JubileeScope

“What it boils down to is what’s profitable to the company and what’s fair to the customer,” says the president of JubileeScope in Mobile, Ala. “Every time we get into an extended project, the hours can get high,” he says. “They see that meter running, especially a job that goes on two to three days, and they’re freaking out. The customer starts seeing these high prices.”

Luce recognizes the advantage of time and materials is it’s accurate. On the downside, it can leave the customer surprised if you charge them more than expected. With a flat rate, he anticipates customers will feel at ease knowing the job cost up front; plus, employees can’t get skimped on their time.

No matter the approach, Oliveto says customers should be the top priority.

“We make sure we’re fair to the person we work for,” he says. “Nobody likes surprises. Unless you’re like my wife—the only surprises she likes come in little boxes.”



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Out with the old

A Washington firm streamlines operations with a marketing overhaul. *By EMILY SCHAPPACHER*

Thanks to a total revamp of his company’s marketing strategy, Rick Longnecker now knows his ideal clients are family-oriented homeowners in their late 30s to early 70s who have lived in their homes for at least 10 years. These clients aren’t looking for the best price but the best service and value they can get from trained professionals. Since uncovering this intel, life has been easier for the owner of Buds & Blades Landscape Co. in East Olympia, Wash.

“We were just beating our heads against the wall every spring,” Longnecker says. “We would have a flush of work come in to bid and we were either running around trying to do everything for everyone or we were taking work just to have work.”

“It started to become clear that by doing certain types of jobs and working with certain types of customers we deliver a better product more consistently, and that just makes good business sense.”

Longnecker began analyzing his company’s practices at the end of the busy season last year. He evaluated

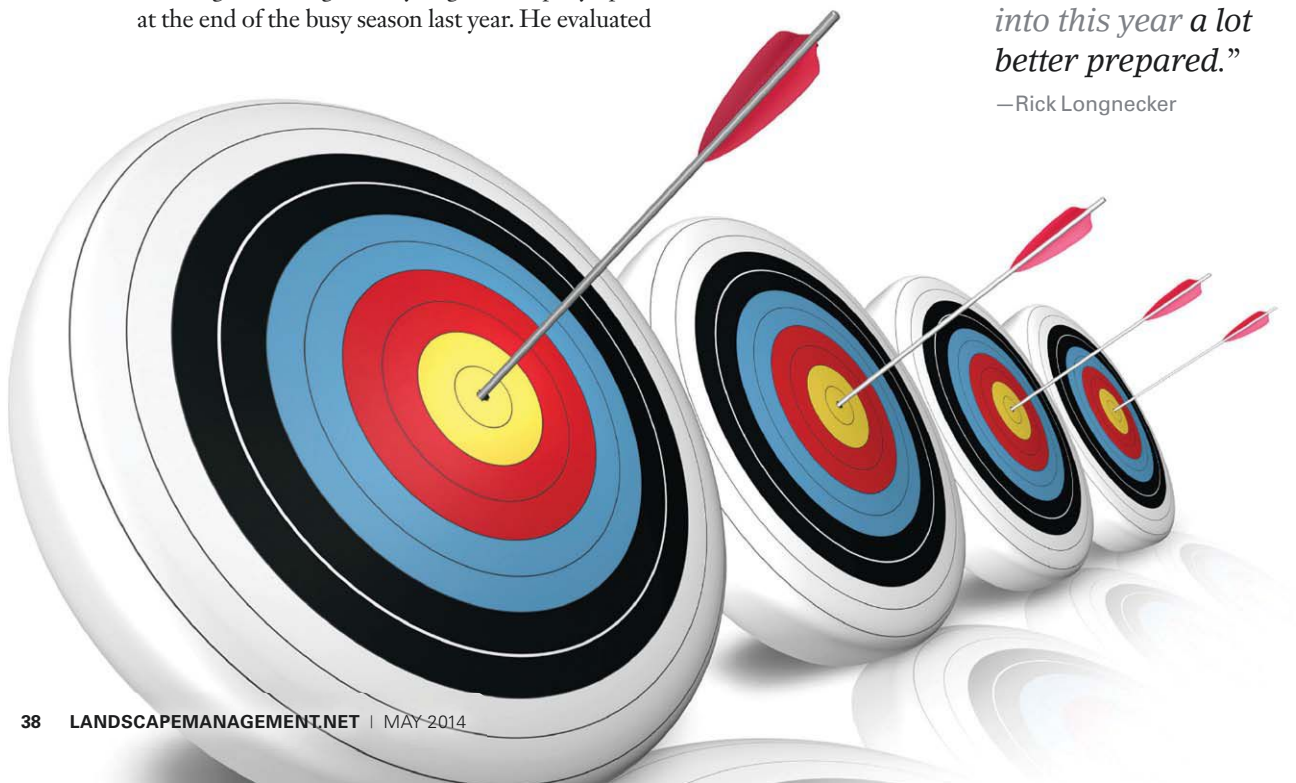
each step of his client interactions—from the initial phone call to collecting the check—and noticed similarities between accounts he thought were successful and accounts that weren’t. Longnecker also determined the design/build services his company offered did not make the best use of his crews’ time and skills, so he decided to strictly offer landscape maintenance to his 90 percent residential, 10 percent commercial clientele. Buds & Blades does about \$350,000 in annual revenue.

Once Longnecker had pinpointed the type of clients he wanted more of, he reworked his company’s messaging to speak directly to them. He spent a little more money on a fine-tuned direct



“It has allowed us to go into this year a lot better prepared.”

—Rick Longnecker



The Ticker: MAINTENANCE

Malvern, Pa.-based **Merit Service Solutions** acquired **SunTerra Landscape Services**, based in Austin, Texas. While terms of the deal weren't disclosed, SunTerra COO Judy McNew said the company hopes to expand nationally thanks to the acquisition. SunTerra, which is on track to hit \$14 million in 2014 revenue, hopes to jump to \$40 million annually within five years.

The **North American Equipment Dealers Association (NAEDA)** ranked **ECHO** and **Shindaiwa** at gold level status in its annual Manufacturer Relations Survey. The designation is determined by dealer

evaluation data exhibiting exceptional performances in product quality, technical support, parts availability, marketing and advertising support, among other categories.



Exmark published a new propane mower white paper, titled *Transitioning Mower Fleets to Propane*. Free for download at Exmark.com/propanepower, the white paper provides background on propane-fueled

equipment, including the progression of engine technology, and details existing options for landscape maintenance professionals to switch to propane.

Laytonsville, Md.-based **Ruppert Landscape** acquired **A R Star Services**, which services Baltimore. The transaction includes the purchase



of select commercial contracts and equipment for sweeping—a service Ruppert has been looking to expand, said President Phil Key.

mail list and was more selective about the areas he reached out to. The firm's direct mail pieces now promote the fact that the company is locally owned and operated, telling clients how it can save them time and explaining the type of customer it wants to work with.

"Before, we would have sent something out that said: 'Here we are. Here's what we do. Call us for a quote.' And we would have picked a geographic area, sent out several thousand pieces and hoped for the best," Longnecker says. "Now we have dialed it down and are sending our customers direct mailings that connect with them."

CUSTOMERS' VOICE

Longnecker then purchased memberships to Angie's List and Yelp to collect sales leads and see user-generated comments and reviews. He's testing both sites this season to determine which one works best for his company and will discontinue membership of the other at the end of the year.

"An unsolicited testimonial or review goes a long way, and fortunately

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for us the reviews have all been great so far,” Longnecker says. “I know sooner or later that bad review will come up. We will have to cross that bridge when we come to it.”

Buds & Blades also hired a marketing firm for help with sending email newsletters to a “tight and clean” list of about 500 current and potential customers six times a year.

Each email has two goals: to provide landscaping tips and to share company news. Longnecker says he often gets positive feedback on the emails, which have an average open rate of almost 60 percent, and even have helped recruit new clients.

“We have found this even works several months out,” Longnecker says. “It’s kind of like a drift effect—we keep sending information and, hopefully, we can eventually meet their needs.”

BREAKING IT DOWN

Longnecker says the cost of his new marketing strategy was “not as much as you’d think.” The company spends roughly \$1,500 a year on a direct mail list. On top of that cost, each mailing it sends to the list costs \$1,500 to \$2,000. The company sends three or four mailings per year. Longnecker spends \$5,000 on memberships for Angie’s List and Yelp—a cost that will be cut in half when he drops one service—and \$255 per email newsletter. The company still plans to invest about \$3,000 to redesign its website and \$500 to \$750 to create a professional marketing video that will include client testimonials.

While Longnecker says it’s too early to quantify the results of his efforts, he says so far gross margins per job have gone up 5 percent to 10 percent due to increased pricing and

reduced labor costs. Additionally, total profit margins have increased at least 5 percent. Longnecker also is seeing the benefits of simplifying his service offerings. By sending the same guys with the same trucks and equipment to do similar jobs each day, the crew is quicker and more efficient, providing a better customer experience.

“We have seen a return on the front end by working with people who are going to buy and use our services and return on the back end because it’s a lot easier to manage and execute each job,” Longnecker says. “It’s been really great that we got started while things were fresh in our minds from last year. It has allowed us to go into this year a lot better prepared.”

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Charlotte, N.C.

The Goods: MAINTENANCE

JOHN DEERE MULCH ON DEMAND MOWER DECK

The Mulch On Demand (MOD) mower deck is now available in John Deere’s 2014 QuikTrak commercial mower lineup, which includes the 652R MOD and 652R EFI MOD models. Previously, the MOD was only available in the John Deere ZTrak line.

QUICK SWITCH

Convert from wide-open-side-discharge mode to a full-chambered mulching mode or any position in-between by holding down the electric switch located on the dash.



SITTIGHT

MOD allows an operator to switch between mulching and side discharging without leaving the mower.

SPEC IT OUT

The 652R MOD and 652R EFI MOD are equipped with seven-gauge, 52-in. decks.