

IRRIGATION &

MARCH 2018

green industry

THE BUSINESS MAGAZINE FOR LANDSCAPE, IRRIGATION AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACTORS - WWW.IGIN.COM

SHOULD YOU **MOW OR PLOW** ON DEMAND?

What you need to know before putting your business at your customers' fingertips.

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Why drip irrigation works, p. 28

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CIRCLE 102 ON THE READER RESPONSE CARD

IRRIGATION & green industry

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CIRCLE 103 ON THE READER RESPONSE CARD



“While you’ll experience a more modern design with more article callouts, references and links, you’ll also realize that the quality of the content has remained intact.”

KRISTIN SMITH-ELY

Before and after

I used to watch talk shows with my mother when I would get home from school. You know, the ones with the studio audience and the compassionate host who would get her guests to share their personal, sometimes painful stories. Guests would pour their emotions out on the stage, and the studio audience would applaud for their bravery.

Every so often a guest would appear on the show who looked like she had never gone to a mall or salon. Her wardrobe was outdated and she was donning the same hairdo she had worn since her now grown children were in diapers. The woman looked 20 years older than she actually was.

Then she was whisked backstage, and like magic, while the show continued, she was being transformed by hairstylists, makeup artists and fashion experts.

In less than an hour, the guest would emerge looking like a completely different person. A little makeup, a haircut and color, and some new clothes and the haggard old housewife was transformed into a beauty queen.

You almost wouldn’t even recognize her. Then a “before and after” side-by-side picture

would appear on the TV screen. You’d have to admit, that it was indeed the same person.

A similar transformation has taken place with this month’s *Irrigation & Green Industry* magazine. While you were busy reading your February issue, we, too, were busy behind the scenes undergoing a face-lift that we have unveiled with this March issue.

But rest assured, as you flip through the pages of this magazine, you will realize that just like the woman who received the makeover, we too, are still the same magazine.

While you’ll experience a more modern design with more article callouts, references and links, you’ll also realize that the quality of the content has remained intact.

Like you will read in the cover story about whether you should mow or plow on demand, it is important to adapt with and evolve. You must be prepared as a business owner to respond to the trends. For *Irrigation & Green Industry*, this is just the beginning.

You’ll notice a few new names to the right of this page. Now fully owned and operated by the Irrigation Association, our team is committed to providing high quality in the information we present. We hope you like it. 🌱

IRRIGATION & green industry

The business magazine for landscape, irrigation and maintenance contractors

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CIRCLE 104 ON THE READER RESPONSE CARD

INVESTORS CORNER

Monsanto, Bayer merger progresses

As progress continues for the merger with Leverkusen, Germany-based Bayer, Monsanto Co., St. Louis, announced strong results for the first quarter of its fiscal year 2018, growing as-reported earnings per share to \$0.38. The company says early indicators from the first three months, such as volume and pricing growth for Intacta RR2 Pro soybeans in South America; improved pricing in glyphosate; and more than \$85 million in gains from asset sales, signal that

optimize opportunities with less land, energy and water. This marks the fifth consecutive year of more than 20 research projects advancing.

The company expects growth in its pretax income for fiscal year 2018, but did not provide specific financial guidance in light of the pending combination with Bayer.

In its annual Research & Development Pipeline Showcase, Monsanto highlighted how new technologies will help growers combat threats in the field and optimize opportunities with less land, energy and water.

the company is well positioned to deliver on its business goals.

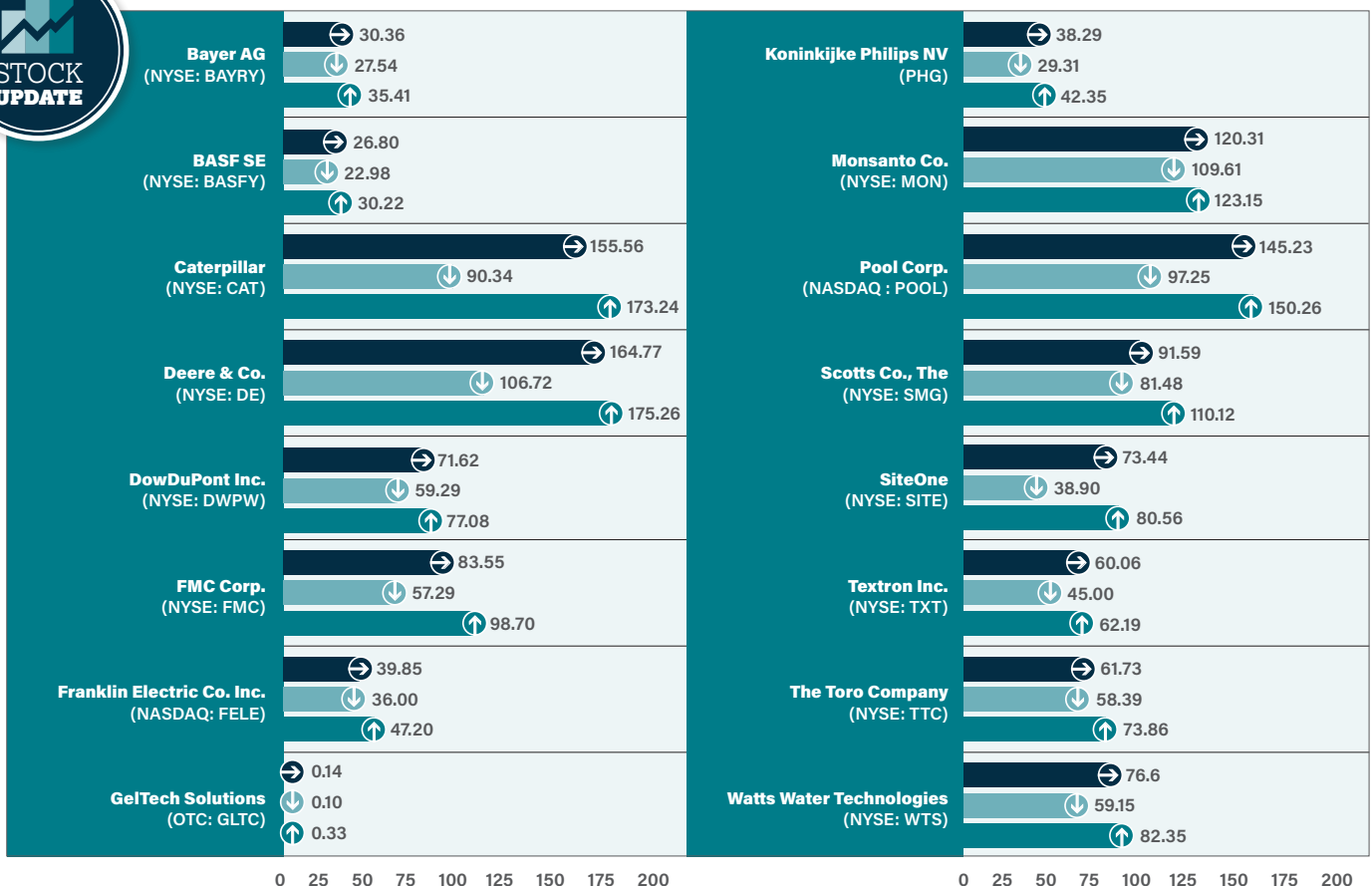
In its annual Research & Development Pipeline Showcase in early January, Monsanto highlighted how new technologies will help growers combat threats in the field and

The expected growth drivers for Monsanto's business are continued improvements in pricing for glyphosate, plus the adoption of new technologies in seeds and genomics such as Intacta RR2 Pro soybeans, Roundup Ready 2 Xtend soybeans, Bollgard II Xtend-



Flex cotton, and new corn hybrids around the world. Gains from recent asset sales are also contributing to growth. The company says it will remain disciplined as it monitors the evolution of U.S. corn and soybean plantings through the spring.

Volumes of XtendiMax Herbicide with VaporGrip Technology are expected to expand. The company continues to invest in the construction of its dicamba manufacturing plant in Luling, Louisiana, slated for completion in 2020. 🌱



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CIRCLE 105 ON THE READER RESPONSE CARD

Disney creates self-sustaining ecosystem

After much landscaping, routine planting and some flora replacing, the Jungle Cruise attraction at the Disneyland Resort in Anaheim, California, has reached an equilibrium that mimics a true jungle look, according to an article on www.tvovermind.com.

The attraction requires reportedly little landscape maintenance. Fallen leaves are allowed to decompose and provide nutrients for the soil. The attraction has developed a canopy from tree growth that is nearly 100 feet high, and traps heat so that nothing below it freezes.

This attraction is considered to be one of the most natural and authentic experiences in the park.



Opportunity for landscapers to receive financial assistance

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service has announced a new program to assist landowners in conserving monarch butterflies. The program will allow landscapers, nursery owners and gardeners to receive financial assistance for creating or improving the habitat of the monarchs, a declining population, under consideration for listing as a threatened or endangered species.



Starting in 2018, the NRCS will offer financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program Monarch Habitat

Initiative for implementing practices that create or improve monarch habitat.

Local NRCS conservationists will work with private landowners to create habitat in nurseries, farms, orchards and in forests. Payment is provided after the practices have been installed and determined to meet NRCS standards.

Aside from the economic incentive from the NRCS, monarch habitats will also support other pollinators, including the honey bees and wild bees necessary for pollinating fruit and vegetable crops. These habitats also support important predatory and parasitic insects that help suppress landscape pests. Finally, creating monarch habitat may be a great public relations tool for landscape retailers who have visibility with the public.

MORE NEWS ONLINE

For the latest news between issues, visit the *Irrigation & Green Industry* website at www.igin.com. You can also join the conversation on **Twitter**, **Facebook** and **LinkedIn**. In addition to news, you can find helpful articles on many irrigation and landscaping topics.



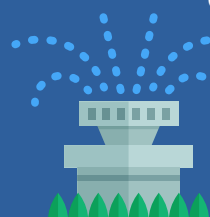
CONSERVA IRRIGATION CONTINUES ITS GROWTH

Conserva Irrigation, a Richmond, Virginia-based national outdoor irrigation company, founded on the concept of water conservation, announced it has experienced strong growth in 2017, and continues its aggressive national expansion into 2018 with the signing of six new franchise agreements.

Conserva signed a total of 35 new franchise agreements since beginning franchising in June of 2017, and expanded into new markets including Houston; Lexington, Kentucky; Richmond, Virginia; and Scottsdale, Arizona. Additionally, Conserva franchisees donated \$17,500 to the Wyland Foundation in 2017, an organization dedicated to helping children and families around the nation rediscover the importance of healthy oceans and waterways.

Conserva started 2018 off strong, with signed franchise agreements for territories in Fort Worth, Texas; St. Louis; Long Island, New York; Palm Beach; and Fort Lauderdale, Florida; and another in Richmond.

As Conserva continues its expansion in 2018, the brand is targeting markets such as Southern and Northern California, Seattle, and Denver for growth.



'Roomba for grass' maintaining city hall lawn

The landscaping team for the city of Newport Beach, California, is testing an autonomous robotic lawn mower on its Civic Center green that the *LA Times* is describing as "a Roomba for grass."

According to the article, the mower being used is a Husqvarna Automower 450X. Newport City Hall staff call it "Mow-ana," a play on the movie "Moana."

The self-guided mower, all 2-by-2 feet and 30 pounds of it,

knows its perimeter, established by guide wires in the dirt at the edges of the lawn between City Hall and the parking garage, and its own built-in GPS.

The Automower 450X is self-guided and moves at random. It creates smaller cuts that are better for creating healthy lawns,

according to the article.

A lithium-ion battery lets the Automower buzz around for about five hours, covering about 1.25 acres at a whisper-quiet 59 decibels before it takes itself back to its charging port. It's reported likely to become a permanent fixture for the city.



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BY JEFF CAROWITZ



Growth looks easy, but are you really ready?

There's something in the air. I call it a feeling of "peak excitement." Green industry leaders can't wait for the season to start!

And who can blame them? It's going to be a great year. A booming economy, rising housing prices and a record stock market are certain to drive sales gains.

Many are preparing for their companies to grow by 15 percent or more. I love this positive outlook!

However, my cautious side reminds me that growth is easy to talk about but hard to achieve. There



Developing a brand takes more than a single year. Beware of "hockey stick" forecasts that show a fast break-even after only a short burst of advertising. It can take many repetitive efforts before customers will buy.

are many obstacles, even in a booming market. Our biases and blind spots can get in the way of success.

Here are some common ways we get tricked into growth-killing behaviors — and, some ideas for avoiding them.

1 Doing the same things but expecting improved results. A 15 percent sales gain won't happen with "rinse-and-repeat" sales-and-marketing efforts. Ask yourself honestly, "What are we doing differently that will support our growth goals?" If it's the same thing as last year, plus a few minor adjustments, you're putting those goals at risk.

2 Overconfidence. Bring together a team of like-minded individuals who see the world in the same way, and "groupthink" quickly sets in. Positive data and rosy forecasts get emphasized, while potential pitfalls get ignored. I've observed this with many inventors and small business owners who listen only to the comforting feedback of those who tell them they have a "better mousetrap." Solicit honest client reactions, both positive and negative, to improve your plans.

3 The one-year ramp-up. Developing a brand takes more than a single year. Beware of "hockey stick" forecasts that show a fast break-even after only a short burst of advertising. It can take many repetitive efforts before customers will buy. Don't trim your marketing push too soon.

4 Managers who play games. Beware of these common sales manager stratagems. One, "sandbagging," setting easy-to-hit targets, already secured with work in the pipeline. Two, "playing the short game," milking past performance and avoiding

major effort ahead of retirement or taking another job. And three, "relying on dumb luck," posting average results despite an all-around lousy effort.

5 Supplier over-promises. Ever said "yes" to a salesperson, stocked up on a new product, and then watched it just sit there? Sometimes, that's the fault of the supplier, who didn't follow through on training and marketing. Or, it's the result of a mutual lack of time and focus. Be clear about expectations up front. Ask for a "guaranteed sale" clause (where you can return or exchange goods that don't sell within a certain window). In turn, the supplier will want to see a mutual commitment of time and effort from you.

6 Not getting good advice. When we were young, we got guidance from teachers and coaches who wanted to help us succeed. Seek out trusted advisors who can give you unbiased, objective feedback on your business and life challenges. Outside perspectives can be game-changers, helping you recognize opportunities that you would otherwise miss out on. Similarly, seek out opinions from customers who buy from your competitors, rather than only listening to your own raving fan base.

2018 has the potential to be your best year ever. Don't get derailed before you get started. 🍀



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CIRCLE 107 ON THE READER RESPONSE CARD



What you need to know before putting your business at your customers' fingertips.

SHOULD YOU **MOW OR PLOW** ON DEMAND?

Almost like a magic wand, a smart phone app can make just about anything appear very quickly. A consumer can summon a grocery delivery from Instacart, a dog walker from Wag! or a ride from Uber or Lyft.

And now, too, he can use a number of app-based services such as Plowz and Mowz, Lawnly, Green Pal, LawnGuru, YardLove, Lawn Love, Cuttly, Mowdo, LawnStarter and others to have someone come in minutes to mow a lawn or plow a driveway.

On-demand, app-based companies all work in a similar way. A contractor signs up for free. He is then offered jobs through the app, which he can accept or not. The company decides how much to charge. When the contractor completes the job, he gets paid within 24 hours.

The app company takes anywhere from 15 to 30 percent of the gross. That percentage pays for the cost of booking and dealing with the customers. If there is a problem, the app company handles it. All the contractor has to do is the work. He doesn't have to worry about advertising, accounting or other overhead costs.

However, he's using his own equipment and vehicles and must supply his own fuel. He must have a business license and all the requisite liability and workers comp insurance. The

app companies pay for none of that.

Whether these companies prove to be as disruptive to the green industry as Uber and Lyft have been to the taxi industry remains to be seen. But people, especially younger ones, have become accustomed to using their smartphones to get everything they want, right now.

The wave of the future

On-demand does seem to be the wave of the future. The Harvard Business Review recently reported that the on-demand economy is attracting more than 22.4 million consumers annually and \$57.6 billion in spending.

The on-demand entrepreneurs for the most part come from the tech world, not the green industry, although a couple of them mowed lawns as teenagers. Like Mike Fingado, founder of Mowdo. He and his brother paid for college through the landscape company they started in their home state of Michigan.

In 2014, after college, he began working with a program at the University of Nebraska that helped student athletes who didn't make it into the pros find work with startup companies or start their own. While there, he met a woman from Berkshire Hathaway Home Services. She wanted to know if he knew of any startups that could help her realtors keep up the curb appeal of homes for sale.

BY MARY ELIZABETH WILLIAMS-VILLANO

“New guys just starting out don’t really know what their costs are yet, and often think they’re way lower than they actually are. And asking 20 or 30 percent off the top makes it awfully cheap work.”

— LEBO NEWMAN,
SIGNATURE
LANDSCAPES AND
COAST LANDSCAPE
MANAGEMENT

“I did some research but couldn’t find anything. So I said, ‘I’ll work with a couple of athletes to see if we can’t pilot something.’” Mowdo was the result. “We got our first hundred customers within that first month. That’s when I realized there was a business case for this,” Fingado says.

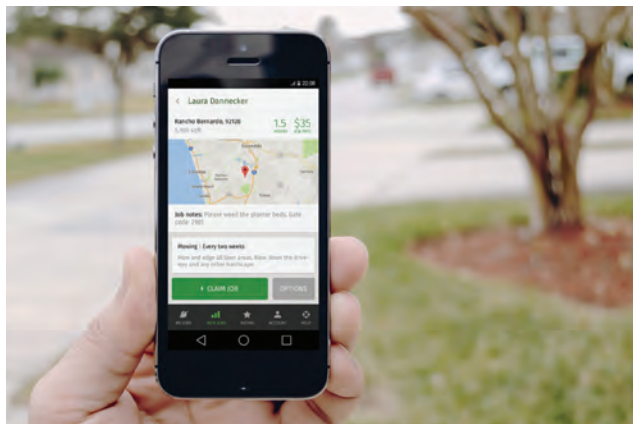
After moving to Seattle, Fingado raised money to build out Mowdo’s app and launch it across the country. Fingado was approached by Amazon when it launched a Home Services division and the company as absorbed into it.

Jeremy Yamaguchi, the CEO and founder of Lawn Love Lawn Care Inc., started the San Diego-based company in 2014. He had spent the three years leading up to the company’s founding creating software for home services startups, a career he began at age 16. “I saw an opportunity to bring technology to a market that really hadn’t had it before and make it easier for homeowners to find lawn care services,” he says.

“Instead of having to call a bunch of contractors after finding them on Craigslist, Yelp or through a Google search, and then wait for them to come to his property and give him a quote, he can take out his smartphone and use the app,” he explains.

Yamaguchi says it solves a lot of problems for lawn care professionals as well. “They can find a lot more work immediately, instead of running around trying to drum up new business by leaving flyers on people’s porches or purchasing leads. When they sign up with us, they immediately see a huge list of customers who are looking for their services.”

2014 is also the year that Wills Mahoney co-founded Plowz and Mowz in Syracuse, New York. The app originally offered snowplowing on demand, then moved into lawn mowing and landscape services on demand. To date, more than 3,000 landscaping companies have signed up.



On-demand mowing apps like Lawn Love connect lawn care professionals with potential customers.

Working with on-demand services can be a good way for a new contractor to get a jump-start in finding clients. David Bowen started GreenUp Landscapes in Indianapolis in 2012, after having worked for a number of different landscape companies. Be-

sides grass cutting, he provides sod and landscape installation, lawn fertilization, gutter cleaning and builds hardscapes and patios.

“Before I joined Plowz and Mowz in the middle of 2015, I was hitting the streets and putting out fliers and talking to people at their homes,” he says.

Work and clients trickled in. “But after I started working with the app, jobs started coming in left and right. This gave me the opportunity to buy better equipment, and make sure the bills were paid.”

Jesse Perez, a snow plowing contractor in Syracuse, New York, also works with for Plowz and Mowz. “The app means that there’s never any down time. If I’m out plowing a driveway for my own residential clients, and I see a job pop up on the app that’s right down the street, I’ll jump on it.”

Does it pay?

It has for Bowen. “When I first started doing lawn care with my own business, things were slow. By my third year, I was probably averaging something like \$30,000 a year. I’ve made much more money since 2015, when I joined Plowz and Mowz, averaging \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year. 2017 was my best year ever — I broke the \$100,000 mark.”

Perez is planning to expand as fast as he can, adding lawn mowing this spring, finding those jobs, too, through the Plowz and Mowz app. He says his success with the app is the main reason he’ll be able to grow his business. He’s even thinking of hiring another person to handle his own clients, while he focuses on the app customers.

Bowen says, “If they required me to do every job they sent me, I wouldn’t work with these apps (he works with more than one). But because I’m able to pick my own jobs and get 70 percent for them, I think that’s pretty smart business.”

But is it “smart business” for established contractors? Mahoney says yes. “Although a lot of new companies did start out with us, we also work with many established landscaping companies. The average contractor who works with us has been in business for about 10 years.”

A contractor since 1979, Lebo Newman, owner and CEO of Signature Landscapes, Reno, Nevada, and Coast Landscape Management, Napa, California, is wary. “New guys just starting out don’t yet know what their costs are yet and often think they’re way lower than they actually are. And asking 20 or 30 percent off the top makes it awfully cheap work.”

But he concedes that getting paid up-front with these apps does take away the receivables problem.

Todd Tindel, co-owner of Cutting Edge Lawn Care in Austin, Texas, says on-demand work is not for him. “We’re more of a full-service outfit, we don’t just do mow-and-blow. That’s not the kind of client we’re looking for.”

His main objection echoes the famous quote from Forrest Gump. “With mow-on-demand, you

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A way to fill downtime



App gets a share of the profits



The project size can be underestimated



No signed contracts for repeat business

never know what you're going to get.”

Newman, who has looked at some of these apps, agrees. “Most people really have no clue how big their yards really are. They also often don't tell the truth about how high their grass is.”

This puts the contractor in an awkward position. “When you tell somebody it's going to be \$40, but then, it takes three man-hours or whatever to cut it, and now the bill needs to be over \$100, well, it's hard to go back to them to get approval,” says Tindel.

Uber and Lyft drivers have it hard enough. They buy the gas and pay for the license, registration, repairs, insurance, and the car itself. Can the fares really offset those costs, not to mention the wear and tear on their own vehicles?

Multiply those factors for a contractor, whose expenses run even higher. On the other hand, he'd have similar expenses working for himself. Perez and Bowen both say the 30 percent Plowz and Mowz takes off the top is reasonable. They figure it's about equivalent to what they'd be paying out in overhead.

Advanced technology

One advantage the on-demand companies have is their cutting-edge software. Newman has tried to fix the estimating problem by having his staff pull up a client's property on Google Pro and verify the square footage. “Unfortunately, you can't see every yard that well, because of tree cover or other things in the way.”

“That's Lawn Love's secret sauce,” says Yamaguchi. “Through a combination of our proprietary software and recording algorithms, plus satellite imagery, machine learning and human mapping, we are able to give the customer a price quote in two minutes, sight unseen.”

While a contractor has the right to requote any job that is too far off the mark, this rarely happens, according to Yamaguchi, who claims the technology produces quotes with a 95 percent accuracy rate.

“What's really exciting is that when we get enough density in certain geographies, we can employ sophisticated job routing and job costing optimization, and that's powerful. We can create much denser routes, so lawn pros don't have to spend as much time and fuel.”

What about repeat business?

The on-demand business model can sound strange to the ears of a contractor. Someone calls to have his lawn cut right now — fine. But what about next week, or next month? Won't it need cutting again?

On-demand contractors do get repeat business, but without a contract. Bowen says, “As long as I keep getting high ratings from people, they keep giving me the same yards, over and over again.”

This can be troubling. That's what a conventional maintenance contractor offers, plus mulching, trimming, fertilization, aeration and weeding, which on-demand companies are also starting to offer.



Lawn care professionals should understand their costs before committing to an on-demand service.

The looming question is, why don't these contractors simply convert their repeat on-demand customers to their own regular clients and keep 100 percent of the gross? The companies call this “disintermediation,” and they have different ways of handling it.

“We just ask them not to do it,” says Yamaguchi. “If it happens a lot, then we may delist them from our platform. But contractors have a super incentive to stick with us, because they ultimately make so much more money with us than without us. The thing that prevents disintermediation for us isn't so much the stick as it is the carrot.”

Bowen, for his part, is happy to keep things as they are. “When customers ask me to become their permanent contractor, I tell them to keep going through the app. It just makes the scheduling and everything else easier for me.”

Should you be worried?

“The only thing I see as a threat is that a lot of those companies are charging really cheap rates,” says Tindel. “But at the same time, I'm not too concerned about them. It's more of a speed thing. The cut isn't nearly as good. If people want that, that's fine.” Newman isn't afraid of the on-demands siphoning off his maintenance business, either.

But there's one more thing that might put a chill down a contractor's spine. “We've been watching demonstrations of these robotic mowers that work kind of like Roombas for lawn cutting,” says Fingado.

“You'll eventually see these apps integrating them,” Fingado predicts. “The partners will focus on doing the edging, irrigation and other things that go with maintaining a lawn, and the robot will do the mowing.”

Things are changing fast, and not just for the green industry — technology is rocking everyone's world. It's going to be fascinating to see how all of this shakes out. 🌿

The author is senior editor of *Irrigation & Green Industry* magazine and can be reached at maryvillano@igin.com.



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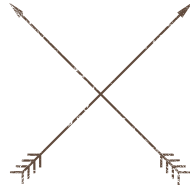
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CIRCLE 109 ON THE READER RESPONSE CARD



BOB LIVINGSTON

PERFECTING HIS ART

FROM ARTIST TO PROBLEM SOLVER TO CONSERVATIONIST, BOB LIVINGSTON HAS MANY TALENTS THAT GIVE HIM A “CREATIVE EDGE” IN HIS LANDSCAPING AND RELATED BUSINESSES.

BY KRISTIN SMITH-ELY

It only takes a few minutes of chatting with Bob Livingston to feel the sense of passion he has for what he does — it radiates from him. The owner of Creative Edge Landscapes in Twin Lakes, Wisconsin, throws himself into his work like many artists do, and his efforts show in his many creations and inventions.

His first job at the age of 12 was working at a local nursery alongside relatives and friends. They spent their summers trimming plants and weeding rows in the fields. But Livingston never had any intention of making a career in the green industry. What he wanted was to become “the next Norman Rockwell.” He pursued that dream by going to art school to become an illustrator, but little did he know, his early education working with plants would end up becoming his inspiration and his livelihood.

Of course, he didn’t know that the advertising industry was going to go through a major change in the early 1990s, and that illustrators were going to be replaced with graphic designers and Macintosh computers. He kept at it for a couple of years, trying to build a career in advertising, but he says, “I found myself doing what I didn’t really like to do.”

That’s when Livingston decided to go back to his roots in the green industry. What had always been a part-time summer-and-holiday job throughout his life became a way to earn a steady income. He learned all aspects of the trade, from the field to construction, and eventually design. He began creating three-dimensional drawings of landscapes as a way help customers visualize what was being proposed.

Blending experience with love

Livingston’s formal art education, combined with his green industry background, gives him a rare skill set that he can use to his advantage. “My background in the arts gives me the ability to see three-dimensionally in color, and problem-solve,” he says.

Livingston maintains a passion for the outdoors, no doubt nurtured by the time he spent at his family’s central Wisconsin



Bob Livingston is more than your typical landscape designer. His business includes a millworks division that creates stairs, including the ones he is sitting on, and other home furnishings from cut down trees that would otherwise have been turned into firewood. Photos: Nick Parisi



Bob Livingston, owner of Creative Edge Landscapes, designs natural looking landscapes in the Twin Lakes, Wisconsin, area like the ones you see here.

SPREADING THE JOY

Bob Livingston, owner of Creative Edge Landscapes in Twin Lakes, Wisconsin, says the biggest joy of his chosen field is the joy he brings to others through his creations.

After a stressful week of work, clients often retreat to their lake houses where he has designed the landscape. They'll call and thank him for creating a relaxing environment.

"The biggest joy is when customers say how much they love the place, and I did their landscape 10 years ago," he says.

Feedback like that "makes it worthwhile that I am doing the right thing and that I have chosen the right profession," Livingston says.

Christmas tree farm. A deeper appreciation of wild-life and forestry developed from those experiences. The notion of creating natural landscapes began to take shape, and in late 1990s Wisconsin, no one else was doing it.

"I learned this natural landscape idea was something I had in my head that was not being practiced by the company I worked for, nor any of the companies that were our competitors," Livingston says. "They were pretty much cookie-cutter-type landscape operations, and they were very successful at it."

But Livingston had an eye for the more natural look. At a time when other landscape designers were planting spirea, juniper or yews, he was "passionate about perennials." But perennials weren't a part of mainstream landscaping back then, with the exception of hosta and pachysandra.

"I thought they were a neat addition to a landscape," he says of perennials.

That wasn't his only departure from the day's normal styles. Instead of the dry-setting method of constructing rock/boulder walls to retain a slope, he developed "boulder cropping." This new technique achieved a similar result but with less material, and looked more natural.

He left the company he was working for and began working for a son of the owner. He perfected his art during this time, learning how to better create scale drawings and also how to sell and design.

Livingston started his first company in 1997 with a partner. This person managed the day-to-day business aspects of the company, while Livingston oversaw production.

Bob Livingston gets his inspiration from natural surroundings and incorporates it into his designs for outdoor living spaces.

He began to travel to places like Japan and China and was inspired by the landscapes he saw there. "I like the Asian design style, because it's more natural, but also, very manicured," he says.

Traveling to these countries exposed him to other cultures, allowing him to see things from a different perspective. "Then I'd come back to Wisconsin and figure out, 'how do I mold these ideas and principles into basic forms and blend them into a natural aesthetic?'"

Back to his roots

When Livingston's partnership dissolved after nine years, he decided to go out on his own. That is when Creative Edge Landscapes was born.

"I was already established as a brand, but I was able to move my customers, clients and employees with me, and things turned on very quickly again." Livingston reinvented himself and refined his ideas. He also began conservation work.

While the mainstay of the company's work is hardscape and softscape ideas, Livingston says, "I've



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CIRCLE 110 ON THE READER RESPONSE CARD



Bob Livingston, pictured above, started Creative Edge Landscapes' millworks division in 2011, and he's been creating masterpieces with trees ever since.

been able to bring these high-quality construction techniques with me and create a really good service, and it's [helped sustain us]. I have been able to grow the business from there."

The added services are also how Livingston has been able to increase the size of the company and its presence, while not growing too large. "I never wanted to be a very big company," he says. "I just wanted to be very, very good. And that's where we've gone to."

Livingston credits his art background with giving him the skill set to be flexible in response to change, to accept different ideas and to try new things. "That's given us a broader perspective on our market than most companies will entertain; they keep to a very narrow footprint. But our open mindset has helped us grow."

Weathering the storms

Winters can be tough for business when you own a landscaping company in the Midwest. Livingston says the conservation work his company does is what keeps the lights on during the colder months. "The conservation work has given me the ability to extend my season," he says.

While the summer months are spent on ornamental landscaping jobs with up to 15 employees, once the ice freezes on the lakes, it's time to stabilize the shorelines with the year-round crew of six. This winter, the company is involved with 10 shoreline restoration jobs for residents with lake houses.

Crew members break the ice open with a small excavator and attachment, and work from the bank. No surprise — it's cold work! Often, it's Livingston himself who gets into the freezing water and removes the concrete, trash and debris. The crew then rein-

forces the shoreline with Wisconsin granite.

"Morale is built by my being in there," he says. "If the boss is in the water, then the guys are willing to keep working alongside me."

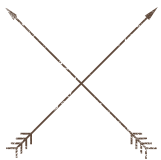
Livingston is always coming up with some new idea or project. He owns two utility patents related to an idea he had back in the early 2000s when he was doing erosion control work for homeowners. Bob thought it would be useful for the state's department of transportation.

He began doing some tests in the 9,000-square-foot greenhouse portion of the 3-acre-plus facility he was renting for his business. He was successfully able to propagate native plant seedlings in an erosion control blanket. That led to the formation of his second company, Greenline Synergy.

"Growing that portion of my business meant looking outside the normal confines of what we do and solving problems with keeping water clean and preventing erosion," Livingston explains. In six weeks, the pre-vegetated blanket is grown to about 2-4 inches in height and shipped on a tray to keep it flat and protect the plants from damage. The prairie blanket is installed, and the roots bind to the soil in about a week and a half. "I can grow just about any native plant mix in the Midwest with this process," he adds.

Livingston further diversified his business when he opened the millworks division of Creative Edge Landscapes in 2011, a time when the economy was not doing so well. Livingston said he'd considered hanging up his hat on the entire business, but he'd acquired a saw mill and wanted to see if he could do something with it.

He also hates to see trees that are cut down for



"I never wanted to be a very big company. I just wanted to be very, very good. And that's where we've gone to."

- Bob Livingston

various reasons being turned into firewood, instead of something that shows off the wood grain. "I see [the beauty in] trees that some people don't see," he says.

It was an uncertain endeavor, he says, "but I knew if I was busy landscaping, I would have never taken the risk to try it." He built a kiln to dry the wood, put in some equipment and hired some skilled craftsmen to make customized flooring and furniture. Some of his millworks division customers are also his landscaping clients. "When a landscape customer wants a tree to come down, I tell them, 'Let's put some elements of the tree back into your home. It's your tree.'"

He also says that, in the age of laminate flooring, "we've lost the aesthetic of real wood. Let's get back to what our roots are. That's where my art comes back in, designing furniture."

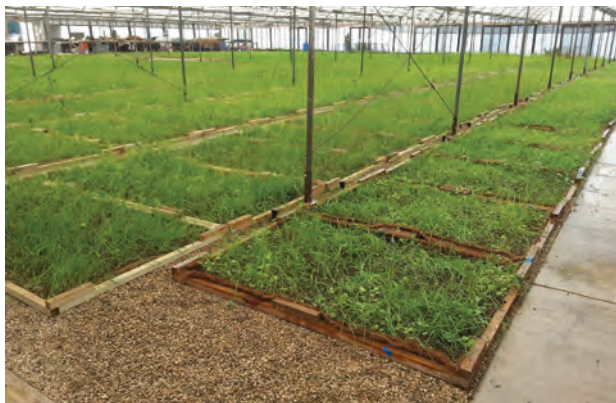
Livingston may have branched out beyond landscaping, but his businesses are all interconnected. "There is a lot of continuity," he says. "It's not leaving the bounds of what we do, it's just using my equipment and knowledge in a more horizontal manner."

Livingston, 49, is living out his dream, albeit not the way he originally expected. But, he says he wouldn't change a thing. He realizes the model

he's built "gives us more depth and diversity to help weather an up-and-down economy."

And, like the artist he is, Livingston wants to be original in the way he expresses himself. "I don't have to do what everyone else does; I can do something unique and interesting and, make it last." 🌿

The author is editor-in-chief of *Irrigation & Green Industry* and can be reached at kristinsmithely@igin.com.



Bob Livingston's company, Green-line Synergy, grows native plants on erosion control blankets that can be shipped and replanted.



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CIRCLE 111 ON THE READER RESPONSE CARD



Thank You!

We all know the old saying that you can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar. “Thank you” can be a powerful phrase that can help you attract and retain the type of customer and employee you want. And understanding when to say it can lead to positive results.

// BY KATE ZABRISKIE

USING THE **POWER** OF THANK YOU

Most of us like to be thanked, especially when the sentiment is sincere. For that reason, “thank you” is one of the most powerful phrases in the English language.

In addition to using it to recognize past acts, you can also say thank you to influence people and steer them toward a desired behavior.

A supervisor at a landscape company might say to

his employees, “I really appreciate how when you use the blowers, you always make sure all the leaves are cleared off lawns and walkways. You leave them in a nice pile for bagging up — and not all over the adjacent neighbors’ driveway. Your commitment to providing excellent service is really evident.”

Why bother?

Some people will argue that thanking people for doing what they are “supposed to do” is a waste of time. Chances

are, however, those same people find themselves frustrated by customers, clients, and coworkers who don't behave the way they should.

For nonbelievers, the thank-you-in-advance method of influence is certainly worth a shot.

Why thank you in advance works

Thanking people in advance works for a few reasons.

The first has to do with a sense of obligation many people feel to reciprocate after they've received something.

The second explanation for the technique's effectiveness has to do with people wanting to conform to a positive image of themselves. In other words, "I'm going to act like a good employee because I am a good employee."

A third explanation for the thank-you method's power has to do with instruction. Often, we assume people intuitively know what they are supposed to do. Guess what? Many don't. They've forgotten, they're preoccupied, or they're simply not thinking. Offered in the right way, many people will follow a suggested course of action because it's the path of least resistance.

The structure of an advanced thank you

To plan an advanced thank you, Use the following framework:

1 First, think about the desired result. "I want my employees to show up on time."

2 Second, identify the type of people who typically demonstrate that behavior. "Responsible and accountable people show up on time."

3 Third, craft a statement that identifies the people you are addressing as that group, and be specific about what you want to see.

I want to thank you in advance for being such a terrific, hard-working group all season long. Every one of you gives 110 percent, every single day, even at 3:00 p.m. on Fridays. I also want to thank all of you for clocking in right on time or a bit early all this week. I like that I can always count on you guys being in the trucks, ready to go by 7:15 every morning. You guys are the best.

Tips and cautions

Thanking people in advance is part science and part art. The framework offered provides a method for constructing the basics of a message. The specific words you choose, the tone in which you deliver them, and your timing are the components in the process that are more subjective. The following tips and cautions should help you get the most from the method.

1 Thanking people for good behavior should be done before you've observed anything particularly egregious. For example, imagine a chaotic scene where customers are pushing and shoving each other. It's more difficult to thank them into a reverse course after they've gone wild. However, a little advanced gratitude offered earlier could have helped avoid mayhem.

2 Thanking people is not a substitute for confronting inappropriate behavior. For example, if an employee comes to work

dressed improperly, you can't thank your way around addressing the problem. However, you can use thank you as part of the corrective conversation. "Joe, I appreciate you listening to me this morning, and I want to thank you in advance for taking the conversation seriously. I know you have what it takes to represent our company well. I look forward to seeing you be successful here."

3 Thanking people for everything dilutes the method's effectiveness. "Bill, I want to thank you for coming in on time today. I know how important punctuality is to you, so thank you for parking in the employee lot and not taking a visitor's space...." Too much of that, and Bill's going to think you've got a screw or two loose. Worse still, he's not going to believe a word you say.

4 Finally, there are some people with whom this method falls flat. They weren't behaving in a way we wanted before we tried it, and they're not behaving after the fact either. Fortunately, this group is small.

Perfecting the science and art of the advanced thank you takes time. The more you practice, the easier it is, and the more likely it will become a strategy your brain launches on autopilot.

I know you'll eventually be successful in getting this to work, and I want to thank you in advance for giving the method a try. Who are you going to influence first? 🍀

PERFECTING THE SCIENCE AND ART OF THE ADVANCED THANK YOU TAKES TIME. THE MORE YOU PRACTICE, THE EASIER IT IS, AND THE MORE LIKELY IT WILL BECOME A STRATEGY YOUR BRAIN LAUNCHES ON AUTOPILOT.



Kate Zabriskie is the president of Business Training Works Inc., a Maryland-based talent development firm. She and her team help businesses establish customer service strategies and train their people to live up to what's promised. For more information, visit www.businesstrainingworks.com.



Drip irrigation allows ultimate control over how much water plants receive.

BY SARAH TRESSLER

drip TECHNOLOGY

withstands the test of time

LANDSCAPERS HAVE BEEN WELL SERVED BY USING DRIP IRRIGATION OVER THE YEARS, AND THE TECHNOLOGY CONTINUES TO BE A SOLID OPTION TODAY.

The March 1979 issue of *Popular Mechanics* laid out the basics for a do-it-yourself irrigation system with the headline, “How a drip can save you some bucks.” An illustration showed rows of plants irrigated by a rudimentary drip system.

The diagram depicts how an outdoor faucet is connected to “antisiphon (sic) device,” which is connected to a “mainline water hose or half-inch diameter black plastic pipe,” which is connected to a pressure-control valve that leads to a header line with five feeder tubes attached to emitting hoses.

Almost 40 years later, the basic layout of a drip ir-

rigation system has not changed all that much. That’s a sign of an effective design that’s withstood the test of time.

Greg Stuhl, owner of Chip-n-Dale’s Landscaping in Las Vegas, has been installing drip systems since he first opened the doors back in 1994. He still uses the same products now that he did back then.

“A drip system is just a very efficient way to deliver water to plants,” Stuhl says. “By changing the emitter flow and having different valves and different stations, it allows you to really be water-efficient and deliver just the right amount of water to each individual type of species.”

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“Drip allows us to really use a wide variety of plant material in our designs and still make sure those plants are being maintained the proper way with the proper amount of water.”

– Greg Stuhl,
Chip-n-Dale’s
Landscaping

a good thing. But too much of that good thing can cause problems. Fungus and disease can take out carefully placed plants, and high alkalinity can cause damage to hardscaping, home siding and patio furniture. These are not things you want to pass on to your customers. Nor can we afford to be inefficient or wasteful in the deployment of one of our most valuable resources. Watering restrictions and local ordinances can help keep that in check, but those restrictions can also put constraints on how landscapes are maintained.

Not a new concept

Drip irrigation solves all of these problems. The concept isn’t new, but it’s as if the people who invented it foresaw the future. It remains one of the most effective ways to maintain an ideal moisture level in the soil while virtually eliminating runoff and overspray. It puts the water right where it’s needed, at a plant’s root zone, preventing fungus from developing and preventing damage to hardscaping. It’s precise, effective and efficient.

Besides satisfying these practical concerns, drip irrigation may also bestow some perks. In some areas, a home or business may be exempt from watering restrictions when using drip or have some enticing incentives available for installing it.

For example, the city of Goleta, California will rebate 50 percent of the cost of drip irrigation equipment, up to \$2,000. In the city of San Bernardino, California, customers purchasing and installing drip

systems in their landscapes may qualify for a 50 percent rebate, up to \$150. Your local water district can tell you if your clients qualify for exemptions, incentives or rebates.

Anatomy of a drip system

A drip system is composed of valves, pressure regulators, filters, a backflow preventer, a header line, lateral lines and emitters. Professional-grade kits designed for contractors are available that include all the needed components. The dripline can be installed a few inches below ground, or above ground, covered by mulch.

There are two types of dripline. One type comes with the emitters already embedded in the line, spaced at regular intervals.

“The emitters are pre-installed inside the tubing,” says Mike Baron, a national specifications manager for The Toro Company, Bloomington, Minnesota. “You get a consistent discharge of water every 12, 18 or 24 inches. They’re purchased in coils and configured in grids.” This type of dripline tubing is very popular, because it’s easy to install.

Point-source dripline uses punch-in emitters that can be placed anywhere on the line, so they can be aimed precisely and directly at a particular plant’s root zone. This type of dripline is more customizable than the inline type, but also more labor-intensive since emitters must be inserted manually.

Porous pipe, also known as soaker hose or drip hose, is tubing that has been drilled with very fine

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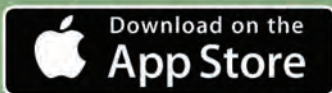
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DRIP IRRIGATION

holes or made out of a porous material. But these may not be the best option for landscape contractors.

“Most sales are to homeowners that need to isolate areas to keep shrubs, trees and groundcover alive,” says Mike Facon, regional sales manager for Landscape Products Inc., Tolleson, Arizona. “The application is not efficient and is not recommended for urban gardens.”

Drip drawbacks

For all its benefits, drip irrigation systems do have some issues. Filtration and pressure regulation at the water source is an absolute must, or debris and high water pressure will damage the emitters. Most of the problems these systems have revolve around those two things.

Emitter clogging can come from a couple of different sources. One source is the plants themselves, especially if the dripline is buried underground, as with SDI, or sub-surface drip systems. Roots may eventually find their way into the emitters.

However, methods to circumvent that problem have been developed. Some emitters are treated with copper oxide particles to inhibit root penetration. “Copper is toxic to plant life when found in excess,” says Baron. “In this case, a very small amount is needed to discourage root penetration.” Another way is to pretreat emitters with an herbicide, which is a method some manufacturers use.

Clogging can be caused by the water itself, or, more precisely, what’s in it. Small orifices and narrow tubing mean there’s less

water is high in emitter-clogging sediment, so drip isn’t ideal for his operation.

Drip system filters work well, though, for most low-sediment water sources. They’ll keep the water flowing, providing optimal performance for all the emitters. Different types of filters are all widely available.

A hose-end filter can be used for a specific watering area, without having to filter an entire system. Pressure-regulating filters combine two components into one. You’ll need to determine which type of filter makes sense for the system you’re installing.

Another drawback involves nutrition. “The biggest challenge that we have with low-volume drip irrigation is the lack of nutrients,” says Facon. “Most fertilizer is granular and applied via a spreader — that’s why spray irrigation is preferred by a lot of people.”

This can be solved by attaching a fertigation tank. When installed at or near the point of connection to the water source, it will spoon-feed liquid fertilizer into the line, to be dispersed with the water through the emitters to the plants.

Under pressure

Drip irrigation systems are generally designed to operate in the pressure range of 10 to 30 pounds per square inch, but domestic water is usually delivered to households at pressures above 30 psi. Pressure must be reduced with a regulator, or the emitters may pop off.

A 2011 study from New Mexico State University titled, “Low-Pressure Drip Ir-

Customers may need selling on the need to set up and control separate, multiple drip zones around their homes or businesses because of the various conditions involved.

space for the water to pass through. If that water has a high sediment load, filtration becomes absolutely critical.

Even with filtration, some types of irrigation water aren’t very compatible with drip systems. Recycled water — water that’s partially treated but not potable — is one.

“A lot of the things I design recycle water over and over again,” says Paul Giacomantonio, the owner of MicroFarm Living Systems in Half Moon Bay, California, a grower of nutritional algae for the natural-foods market. The systems he designs often draw from fish ponds, or use water containing organic nutrients. This recycled

irrigation for Small Plots and Urban Landscapes” explained it this way: “The flow rate of individual line-source emitters is usually one gallon per hour or less, but flow rate is often expressed as gph per 100 feet, in which case the flow rate per emitter is determined by dividing the flow rate per 100 feet by the number of emitters per 100 feet.”

Here is an example: 15 gph per 100 feet divided by 30 emitters equals 0.5 gph per emitter.

Plan to use 2-gph emitters in sandy soils, and 1-gph emitters if your soil is mostly loam. Identifying your emitter flow

rate is part of a planning process that will help you set up a system that is effective and efficient.

Once you make a plan for your system and get it successfully installed, microclimates can be created, which Stuhl says is one of the perks of drip systems.

“Being in Las Vegas, we create a lot of microclimates,” Stuhl says. “We have rose gardens, cactus gardens, tropical gardens, Mediterranean gardens, and ‘fusion’ gardens, which have agaves, roses, palms and cactus in them. Drip allows us to really use a wide variety of plant material in our designs but still make sure those plants are being maintained the proper way with the proper amounts of water.”

Getting in the zone

Customers may need selling on the need to set up and control separate, multiple drip zones around their homes or businesses, because of the various conditions involved. Stuhl says that can be a struggle.

Going with the flow

The New Mexico University study, “Low-Pressure Drip Irrigation for Small Plots And Urban Landscapes” gives the following formula for determining pressure. The full report can be found at: http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/research/agmech_eng/RR773.pdf.



Flow rate per 100 feet
÷
The number of emitters per 100 feet

“Educating my clients about the benefits of having multiple zones is the biggest snag I face,” Stuhl says. “A lot of them want to cut corners and put everything on one zone. But if a yard is getting both northern and southern sun exposures, and there’s also a side yard that gets minimal sunlight, it’s really important to spend that little bit of extra money to have a professionally designed system that understands the different microclimates that exist in a yard that contains both sunny and shady areas.”

Start your planning process with list of plants and where they’re located, and review it with your client so he understands why the different zones are needed. If

you’ve also designed his landscape with interesting and colorful plant combinations, now you need to convince him of the need to irrigate them efficiently and effectively to keep having pleasing results.

The drumbeat telling us about the need to conserve water grows louder every day; think of Cape Town. Drip irrigation systems are going to become more and more important in the future. Learning how to successfully install these systems now will keep you and your business marching toward that future, and thriving in it. 🌱

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CIRCLE 115 ON THE READER RESPONSE CARD



DEALING WITH PROBLEM EMPLOYEES

An appropriate response can keep a personnel issue in check.



If this were a perfect world, made up of perfect people, everyone would do their jobs happily and efficiently. No one would ever show up late, waste time, slack off, or sleep on the job.

But this isn't a perfect world filled with perfect people, as you may have noticed. If you've been in business as a landscape contractor for any length of time, you've hired a number of people to work for you — some good, some not so good.

Dealing with the less-than-stellar employees on your staff is never fun. But there may be some ways to make it less painful for everyone involved — you, your other employees and the employee causing you problems. There may even be a way to turn a bad worker into a good one.

As president and CEO of Grunder Landscaping Co., and Marty Grunder Inc., a green industry consulting firm based in Miamisburg, Ohio, Marty Grunder has seen the

problem-employee conundrum from both sides. "The most common issues with green industry employees usually involve them not doing what they're supposed to," he says. "It could be tardiness, incomplete work, a safety issue or a customer-service issue — a multitude of things."

Jorge Donapetry is human resources manager at Stay Green, Valencia, California, a large operation with 360 employees. "We tell people at our new hire orientation that if it's a small thing, like you have your hat on backwards, we're going to talk to you first."

"But if it happens again, you'll get a written warning, after that, a suspension, and finally, if you keep breaking the rule, we'll terminate you." Something more serious, such as stealing equipment, or a safety infraction such as zip-tying a throttle down on a mower, would result in immediate termination.

Mostly, Grunder says, what's needed are good, solid crew leaders who know how to

BY MARY ELIZABETH WILLIAMS-VILLANO

manage people. At times, that's easier said than done. Crew leaders usually start out as crew members. But a great crew member may not necessarily be a great leader.

Very often, inexperienced or new supervisors may be loath to confront fellow employees because they want to be everyone's pal. They need to learn how to be approachable, but still be the boss.

"That's the hardest part," says Grunder, "teaching team leaders how to lead and manage. Because many of them haven't done that before."

Simon Durocher is a production supervisor in the landscape maintenance department of David J. Frank Landscape Contracting Inc. in Milwaukee. Having led and managed landscape workers for 17

years, he says, "A lot of little things that are kind of in the gray area — like someone mumbling something under his breath as he walks away — you let that incident fly, and another one, but then these little things can start to snowball until they really do become a big issue."

When he was younger, he says it was much more difficult for him to pick up on those subtle things. But now that he's older and has many years of supervisory experience under his belt, he realizes he has to handle a problem with a worker as soon as it arises.

Most of all, says Grunder, employees need a map — and the more inexperienced they are, the more detailed the map needs to be. "If people aren't doing what you want and need them to do, ask yourself if you've trained them well enough. Nine times out of 10, the reason the employee didn't perform well was that you didn't train him properly."

Be specific

Of course, not every employee problem has to do with lack of training. A lot of it stems from the person's attitude toward work.

When it's necessary to talk to an employee about his behavior, the language you choose is very important. "I'll often get a call from a contractor who says, 'I have this employee with a bad attitude and I'm sick of it,'" says green industry business consultant Jean Seawright. "I'm going to document him and get rid of him."

"But just telling someone 'you have a bad attitude' is too subjective. What does that mean? You need to describe exactly what it is they're doing, or not doing, that makes you think that."

Describe precisely what has occurred, and what will happen if the behavior doesn't change. "A lot of times, a management person's intent to help someone correct his behavior really just starts him down the path to termination," Seawright says, "because he hasn't learned how to effectively coach people and help them understand what they've done wrong. It's kind of an art. If you can't get an employee to agree that there's a problem, he's less likely to solve it."

Durocher relates this story. "With this one employee, every week, there was something keeping him from coming in. It was, 'My daughter is sick,' or 'my tires got slashed.' These things on their own aren't that big a deal, but red flags were really



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starting to wave.”

Before he called the worker in, he made sure he'd done his homework. All of the man's absences and his excuses for them were laid out in front of him. "I said, 'I want to be the kind of manager you feel comfortable coming to if your child gets sick. I want to believe you, but with the frequency of your no-shows, it's getting harder. I think you're taking advantage of my good nature.'"

He adds, "There wasn't any yelling; that doesn't solve anything, it just puts people on the defensive, and makes things worse. No one really wins."

Durocher's calm, fact-based yet empathetic approach paid off. "The employee didn't try to argue back at all, and after that his attitude turned around."

When there is a serious situation, like the time someone didn't want to do something that his crew leader asked him to do and instead, "got in his face" and shoved him, he never deals with it right on the spot. "Just for my own personal sanity, I won't deal with it until the next morning. I need time to calm down and think clearly about the situation."



"NINE TIMES OUT OF TEN, THE REASON THE EMPLOYEE DIDN'T PERFORM WELL WAS THAT YOU DIDN'T TRAIN HIM PROPERLY."

— MARTY GRUNDER,
GRUNDER LANDSCAPING CO. AND
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"A lot of times a problem with someone can be resolved by just talking to the employee," says an operations manager at CurbSide Landscape and Irrigation, Savage, Minnesota, who did not want to be identified. "If it's attendance or performance, it often stems from something that has nothing to do with them not being happy at work. It might be something at home that's not going right. The labor pool that we're hiring from typically lives pay-

check to paycheck, and all the stress with money and family stuff can really show up at work."

You might be able to head some problems off at the pass; after all, it's better to avoid the flu than to treat it. Grunder prefers the preventative approach, using the mantra, "Hire slow, fire fast."

"We do background checks and drug

screens at our company," he says. "We won't hire just anyone. If someone has a felony conviction, he's out. Or, if he doesn't have a valid driver's license, because then, we'd be relying on two people to get one person to work in the morning."

Have an employee handbook

Having written-down policies that every-



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WORKFORCE ISSUES

one can refer to is essential, says Seawright. "We advise companies of all sizes, no matter how small, to have an employee handbook. There are certain policies that need to be spelled out, regardless of the number of employees you have. Sexual harassment is a good example."

But, she cautions, be careful how you write this manual. Gone are the days of fancy tables that listed all of the possible infractions and all of the disciplinary actions that would result. She doesn't recommend that any company spell out precisely what kinds of disciplinary action will be taken for whatever infraction occurs.

That's because most companies operate under employment-at-will laws, which state that an employer has the right to terminate an employee at a moment's notice, with or without cause.

"But, if you have a process in place that says, 'I must issue you three warnings before you're terminated,' or, 'if you engage in this infraction, you will be terminated,' we've now eroded that right to terminate at will, because we're locking ourselves into certain steps ahead of time." Leave room in the policy for making judgments on a case-by-case basis.

Malingering millennials?

Many contractors complain about younger employees, saying they're not like the entry-level applicants they used to get in years past. Every generation has its work ethic questioned by members of the previous ones. Currently, it's the millennials' turn.



"IF YOU CAN'T GET AN EMPLOYEE TO AGREE THAT THERE'S A PROBLEM, HE'S LESS LIKELY TO SOLVE IT."

— JEAN SEAWRIGHT, CONSULTANT

"With the 20-somethings, we're almost having to reparent them, in a way. It seems as if their parents never sat them down and told them the requirements of having and

Technology to tackle employee problems

Before GPS devices became commonplace, a contractor would send a crew off and trust that its members were at Ms. Wilson's house trimming her roses, and not at a movie, or at home taking a nap. When employees know they're being monitored, it tends to keep them from stopping at the 7-Eleven and other unauthorized places.

Many app-based check-in systems available today such as ExacTime, LaborSync, TSheets, Employee Time Clock, Timr and others use GPS tracking or "geofencing."

These programs use smartphones to eliminate two problems: one, the problem of people and vehicles not being where they're supposed to be; and two, the practice of "buddy clocking," where one employee fraudulently clocks in for another.

Some of these apps will take an employee's picture when he clocks in at a job site and record the exact time and location that picture was taken. Most employees today accept things like GPS tracking as part of today's workplace.

"Ten years ago, people objected to it," says Jean Seawright, a green industry business consultant. "But today, everyone understands, because we all have it on our phones. We rarely get questions from employees regarding that anymore."

The ExacTime app, pictured here, allows workers to clock in from their mobile device and uses cost codes and GPS timestamps to ensure they are only paid for time worked.



keeping a job," Durocher says,.

"These youngsters, they're on their cell phones all the time, and they don't know how to work," said Rolland Kuhr, owner of Naturescape Designs, a full-service design/build company in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. "They're not reliable, and they don't want to be corrected. They'll say, 'If you're going to criticize me, then I'm just going to walk away right now.'"

Seawright says the millennials indeed behave differently than older generations. "They need to talk about everything — their lives, their work, their relationships. But what they need most of all is someone to act as a 'millennial mentor,' to show them what it takes to succeed on the job."

Older workers can have their own set of problems like a sense of entitlement. "It can be tricky dealing with the older guys," says Durocher. "They're more entrenched and secure in the company, and they do push back."

Drugs, legal and otherwise

Drug and alcohol use on the job is a serious problem in a profession where sharp and powerful tools are being used, and vehicles are being driven. The topic itself warrants a whole article, but it is important to mention in the broader context of problem employees.

There are many resources for help in

developing a drug and alcohol policy if you don't already have one. With the opioid crisis, and the many states legalizing medical and recreational marijuana use, you can't afford to be without one.

The National Association of Landscape Professionals, Fairfax, Virginia, offers its members sample drug-free workplace policies and guidance regarding testing protocols. Companies such as Working Partners of Canal Winchester, Ohio, also help set up drug-free workplaces for green industry employers.

Finally, problem employees may be caused by problem bosses. A hardline, do-as-I-say-and-don't-question-it management style may work in the military, but not in the modern workplace. Seawright says, "Today, things are more collaborative and educational. We involve employees more in decision-making."

There are solutions short of showing someone the door. If you need help in this area, get advice from NALP, your state landscape association, a trade association, a consultant or another contractor — one that's been in business longer than you. With some good advice, today's problem employee might even become tomorrow's superstar. 🌱

The author is senior editor of *Irrigation & Green Industry* and can be reached at maryvillano@igin.com.

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Sunset Revival

Designscapes Colorado
Centennial, Colorado
www.designscapescolorado.com

The client wanted to highlight the dramatic elevation change of the yard as seen from the road — call it “nighttime curb appeal.” In addition, he wanted to safely entertain friends after dark and protect his pets from curious wildlife. The lighting system also allows him to emphasize any aspect of his landscape at any time or create a seasonal lighting scheme with just a touch to his smartphone’s Light Logic app.

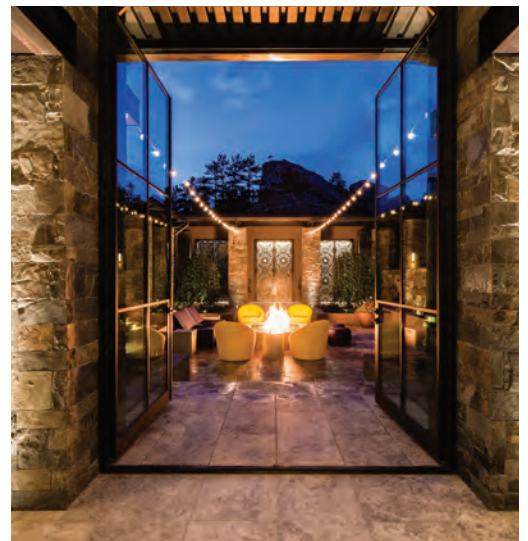




After Sundown

Designs by Sundown
Littleton, Colorado
www.designsbysundown.com

The client wanted a year-round outdoor oasis that was also suitable for entertaining large parties. Designs by Sundown, with Vertical Arts Architecture, installed step lights, making it easy for the homeowners and their guests to navigate the property and safely find their way to the outdoor spa in the courtyard. Bistro lights in the main fire pit area add a fun and festive flair. All the outdoor lighting is managed through an app, which allows the owner to change the color and intensity of the lights and turn zones off and on.



WATERSCAPES & OUTDOOR LIVING



Old Town Oasis

Lindgren Landscape & Irrigation Inc.
Fort Collins, Colorado
www.lindgrenlandscape.com

The lighting for this property was designed to give it a completely private and secluded feel, despite the home's location right in the middle of town. The lighting's design emphasizes specific outdoor features and creates a safe and inviting ambiance for the living space. Path lights guide circulation throughout the property. Under cap lights illuminate masonry planters, the outdoor kitchen and fire pit. Dimming and zoning can be easily adjusted. 🌿

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The Irrigation Foundation provides faculty, students and professionals opportunities to grow



Established in 1980, the mission of the Irrigation Foundation is to attract professionals to our industry by promoting careers in irrigation. Whether you work in irrigation design manufacturing, distribution, consulting, contracting or water management, the biggest challenge today isn't finding new business — it's finding good people!

The Foundation is continuously looking for ways to attract talent and promote careers in our industry. The progress that has been made since the establishment of the Foundation would not have been possible without the support of our sustaining sponsors Ewing Irrigation and Landscape Supply, Hunter Industries, the Rain Bird Corporation and The Toro Company. Without their support of our initiatives, our programs would not exist today. Big or small, every donation helps. The full list of the companies, organizations and individuals that contributed financially in 2017 can be found at www.irrigationfoundation.org.



The Irrigation Foundation, its Board of Trustees and volunteers continue to promote and develop the following key initiatives.

Faculty academy

The number of educators that attend the agriculture and landscape faculty academies each year continues to grow. These events give educators the opportunity to network with peers and learn about the newest technologies and techniques to better educate their students.

Last year's landscape Faculty Academy was hosted at Walt Disney World Horticulture Services in Orlando and was attended by 40 landscape irrigation educators. The Irrigation Foundation would like to thank Hunter Industries, Rain Bird Corporation, Irrrometer Co. Inc., Bright-View Landscape Services and Walt Disney Horticulture Services for sponsoring the 2017 event. The 2018 landscape Faculty Academy will be June 21-22, 2018, at Front Range Community College in Westminster, Colorado.

Registration for both the landscape and agriculture faculty academies opened in February. The events are open to instructors teaching at high schools and two- and four-year institutions. Both events are free to attend, and grant assistance to help with travel expenses is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Visit our website for details on registration, this year's schedule of events and more.



Excellence in education award

Each year, the Irrigation Foundation recognizes a person who is actively teaching or has formerly taught irrigation, water management and/or water conservation at a two- or four-year institution. The recipient receives education classes at the Irrigation Show and Education Conference and travel expenses. Claire Ehrlinger, CIT, LEED Green Associate, QWEL, of Mira Costa College was the 2017 winner. She joins the prestigious list of past awardees, recognized for having educated countless students who have become professionals focused on providing efficient irrigation solutions. Nominations for 2018 have closed; the winner will be announced this summer. Thank you to Hunter Industries for sponsoring the 2017 and 2018 Excellence in Education Award.

Did you know? The Irrigation Foundation hosted its two largest Faculty Academy groups yet in 2017, with 65 attendees, 46 of whom were first-time attendees.



Online career pathways **NEW!**

One of the new ways the Foundation is working to attract people to the irrigation industry is by creating awareness. In 2017, the Foundation launched the irrigation career pathways portion of its website, which can be found at www.irrigationcareers.org. The purpose of the career pathways is to inform prospective candidates of the different careers available in both agriculture and landscape irrigation. If a student, young professional or someone looking to change career paths is interested in a career where they can impact the environment through efficient irrigation solutions, the career pathways provide an excellent detailed description of the wide array of career opportunities our industry has to offer. The site also provides compensation data as a resource for prospective candidates.



Foundation scholarship program

The Irrigation Foundation scholarship program was established in 2017 to promote the study of and careers in the irrigation field. The program provides financial support for the education of worthy scholarship candidates. Ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,500, the scholarships are awarded based on the student's letter of intent, financial need, reference letters, resume and list of irrigation-related courses taken or enrolled in.

In the program's first year, the Foundation awarded 16 scholarships, 15 to students from four-year universities and one to a student from a technical college. Ten of the winners were in agriculture-focused programs and six were in landscape-focused programs, while 13 of the winners were undergraduate students and three were graduate students.

A full list of the 2017 scholarship recipients, as well as the program requirements and application details, can be found on the Foundation's website. The scholarship program accepts applications annually November through February, and the winners are announced in April.



www.irrigationfoundation.org

Irrigation E3 - exposure, experience & education

The E3 program continues to be a flourishing and growing initiative. The program is open to students (E3 learners) and educators (E3 leaders). E3 applicants have the opportunity to be selected to attend the Irrigation Show and Education Conference to gain exposure to our industry, experience attending a trade show and take educational courses.

Last year, 30 applicants, 28 learners and two leaders were selected to attend the Irrigation Show and Education Conference in Orlando, Florida. Winners received hotel and travel accommodations, met with the program's lead sponsors and had the opportunity to take Irrigation Association education classes offered during the show. Thank you to lead sponsors of the 2017 program — The Toro Company and Ewing Irrigation and Landscape Supply, as well as supporting sponsors Hunter Industries and the Carolina's Irrigation Association.

The number of E3 applicants continues to grow each year along with the caliber of attendees. Having the opportunity to speak to the bright winners was a pleasure and a very humbling experience. It is truly amazing to see the talented level of intellectuals that this program and its sponsors bring to the Irrigation Show each year! To learn more about the Irrigation E3 program and see the list of last year's winners, visit the Foundation's website.

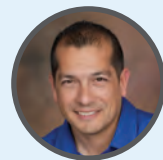
Irrigation career link

The Irrigation Career Link continues to be a great resource for employers to post irrigation employment opportunities. For anyone seeking employment opportunities in irrigation, the career link also continues to be one of the best spots to post a resume. There is no fee for job seekers to post resumes or for employers to browse the resume bank. Companies can post job openings for a low fee to connect to candidates. Browse job postings, post your resume or post your company's open positions at www.jobs.irrigation.org.

As we move forward in 2018, the Irrigation Foundation plans to continue growing these programs, while looking for ways to increase irrigation career awareness at the high school level.

I had the opportunity to meet and speak to some of our 2017 award recipients, and it's amazing to witness the vast number of young adults who want to help our environment and conserve water through the promotion of efficient irrigation solutions.

It is with your support that the Foundation can continue to promote career opportunities at the high school, college and career levels. Thank you to the Irrigation Foundation Board of Trustees, Foundation volunteers and, most importantly, to the sponsors that have made our programs possible! For more information on the Foundation and its programs, visit www.irrigationfoundation.org.



Eric Santos

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VERDANT VOICE



BY JUDITH GUIDO

How to cultivate a great team

The key to growing a successful company is the result of mastering four essential steps. They are attracting, retaining, training and rewarding awesome people; developing a clearly differentiated strategy; having the cash to handle the ebb and flow that comes with growth; and being able to execute flawlessly. Easy to write, but a bit more difficult to achieve!

Since it's the people side of business, the finding and managing of the folks who work for you, that currently draws the most questions and causes the greatest angst, I'll focus on that.

So how do you get and keep awesome people, provide them with training that strengthens and rewards, and makes them feel productive and fulfilled?

Cultivating a great team requires viewing employees as people and not as resources we consume. Let's start by using the term "human relations" instead of "human resources" to define the people side of your company. Understanding what motivates and retains employees is imperative, so be certain you have an effective process that captures these motivators and drivers. Ensure that they're built into your company's DNA.

Where and how do you find these people? Remember, the other key to success is a clearly differentiated strategy (doing things differently, and doing different things). Do you have a unique strategy for finding people, or are you fishing for folks in the same pond with everybody else? Don't recruit – engage, with the potential for advancement always in mind.

What about creating clever ads and videos (think Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and your company's website) starring your team? They can, in their own words, promote the variety of cool and interesting careers available to people who come to work for you. Let your employees share how your company's culture is built upon equality, empowerment and entrepreneurship. And, explain how your company's leadership invests in their training, and that rewards are based on "the more you learn, the more you earn."

If you can have your employees and customers tell your story, exposing others to your incredible community and culture, you'll attract the best and the brightest. If you can't do this, ask yourself, "Why not?" Remember that ROP (return on people) is the most important metric of all. 🌱



Judith M. Guido is chairwoman of Guido & Associates, a business management company. She can be reached at judy@guidoassoc.com.

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NIGHT LIGHTING



BY KEVIN SMITH

The value of continuing education

A wise woman once told me “learn at least one new fact every day.” Over time, I’ve come to realize how right my mom always was! I have tried to follow this advice every day. Staying informed and up-to-date in an ever-changing industry is imperative if you aim to run a successful landscape lighting business.

You may think you don’t have time for education in your busy schedule, but it’s critical that you make the time. Many training opportunities are available in the winter and spring months.

Trade shows. Going to these is a great way to get “up-close and personal” with new lighting products and reacquaint yourself with your favorite lighting manufacturers. Manufacturer’s reps will be available to answer questions. Some notable trade shows include the annual Irrigation Show and GIE+Expo.

Distributor training events. Many distributors will host manufacturer talks on a variety of lighting topics, such as nighttime photography, LED specifics and project bidding. Distributors will also host manufacturer-sponsored training seminars, usually held at a distributor’s local branch or in a hotel conference room. This type of seminar normally includes some hands-on learning.

Factory-direct training. Many lighting manufacturers have training facilities at their factories with live demonstration areas to show and teach proper application and installation techniques. During a factory visit, you may also be able to tour the manufacturing area to see how the products you install are produced and assembled. Some manufacturers will come to you, especially if they have training specialists with field experience who can provide product training to your service techs and sales staff at your location, or at job sites.

Local contractor associations. Many local and state landscape contractor associations offer continuing-education classes, usually held at the association’s office or at a sponsored location.

The AOLE The Association of Outdoor Lighting Professionals offers training to become a certified low voltage lighting tech as well as a certified outdoor lighting designer. The instructors are among the top lighting contractors in North America.

Educational opportunities are everywhere. Challenge yourself and others. Your business will keep growing if you do. 🌱



Kevin Smith is the national technical support and trainer at Brilliance LED LLC, Carefree, Arizona, and can be reached at kevin.smith@brillianceled.com.

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1 Dumper/hauler. Generac, Waukesha, Wisconsin, is introducing its new Powerwagon dumper/hauler, capable of transporting loads up to 800 pounds. It's driven by an electric-start Generac G-Force engine that delivers 8 foot-pounds of torque. The gear-driven transmission has three forward speeds and one reverse. It features an 8-cubic-foot, high-density polyethylene bed, attached to a thick, 1.5-inch diameter, 12-gauge tubular steel frame.

A hand-actuated disc brake allows an operator to control the machine's speed on slopes and can be locked to hold the unit in place for safety while loading or unloading. The pushbutton-powered actuator tilts the cargo bed up to 60 degrees for easy, thorough dumping. The company says it should be available in the summer.

CIRCLE 127 ON THE READER RESPONSE CARD



2 Tree hydration bag. The TreeDiaper's patented, multifunctional watering system slowly releases moisture to tree and plant roots to maintain proper hydration levels. Available from Ecoturf, the TreeDiaper is an upgrade over a traditional tree bag. It is designed to substantially reduce the total amount of water needed to keep a plant or tree healthy, even when drip irrigation is used. Each unit can also work as a standalone. As long as there's 1 inch or more of rainfall per month, it may never need to be manually refilled, the company says.

The system may be hidden under mulch, reducing the risk of tree theft. The unit acts as a weed barrier and insulator against the overheating that new roots can experience on extremely hot days, minimizing maintenance costs and loss of plant materials due to drought or extreme weather conditions. The TreeDiaper is available in 24, 36 and 48 inches.

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3 Top dresser attachment. The ECO 600 top dresser attachment, one of the newest offerings from Ecolawn Applicator, incorporates precise zero-turn technology and a power take-off drive. It's quick and easy to adjust in the field and has great visibility with frontal discharge, says the company. Lightweight, at just 800 pounds, it's highly maneuverable. Counterweight mechanisms give it better weight distribution and stability, making handling heavier products feasible without sacrificing maneuverability or ease of operation.

The unit features a larger-capacity, 22-cubic-foot hopper. The out-front design and dual-reverse spinner mechanism allows an operator to broadcast bulk material such as compost, sand, soil, crumb rubber, pelletized products or a custom mulch blend quickly, smoothly and evenly over a 10 to 20-foot spread, in a 180-degree arc, with a thickness up to 0.25 inch.

CIRCLE 129 ON THE READER RESPONSE CARD



SUPPLIER IN THE NEWS

Toro invests in drone mapping technology

The Toro Company, Bloomington, Minnesota, has announced a strategic minority equity investment in GreenSight Agronomics, a Boston-based provider of automated, agronomic intelligence technologies for turfgrass and agricultural markets.

"As the golf industry expands its efforts to improve play and more efficiently use water, the application and advancement of technology will play a vital role," says Philip Burkart, vice president of The Toro Company's irrigation and lighting businesses.

GreenSight's patent-pending system, which combines automated drones and sensors, provides thermal mapping and detection analytics to help golf course professionals improve turf health with less labor. The technology is designed to enable customers to identify issues before they become visible, and achieve better outcomes with less water, fertilizer and pesticide use.

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4 Utility vehicles. The new Hauler 800 and 800X are the latest additions to Cushman's line of utility vehicles. Both models offer sound-dampening 8.4-cubic-foot cargo beds with integrated divider slots that can be customized for a contractor's storage needs.

Also new are some useful options, such as a floor-mount attachment that allows users to transport and secure equipment such as spreaders in the passenger area and interior hooks for stashing moisture meters and other valuable tools. An independent clip for a two-way radio, ergonomically designed for easy reach within the vehicle, is another.

Both the 800 and the 800X come in electric versions with energy-efficient 48-volt AC powertrains. Buyers who prefer gas power will find reliable 13.5-horsepower Kawasaki engines that deliver fuel economy, but still offer plenty of torque for hill climbing. The 800X includes a standard lifted suspension for improved performance on more rugged terrain.

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 **Cushman**
www.textron.com



5 Premium oils. Husqvarna USA, Charlotte, North Carolina, has reformulated its line of machine oils to increase performance and product longevity. Made specifically for the company's products, the improved formulations deliver lower operating temperatures and greater detergency inside engines. The new bar and chain oils reduce friction on cutting equipment.

Each of the improved two-stroke oils has Verified Engine Formula certification, denoting that they have been designed, tested and approved specifically for use in Husqvarna engines.

X-Guard Premium Bar and Chain oil has been reformulated with unique anti-wear properties to greatly reduce friction and welding of metal parts under high loads. They're available in all season, low temperature and biodegradable formulations.

The Four-Stroke oils are premium oil blends designed for tough commercial use, but ideal for all of the company's wheeled products.

CIRCLE 134 ON THE READER RESPONSE CARD

 **Husqvarna**
www.husqvarna.com



6 Compact excavator. Kubota's new KX033-4 is a 3-ton compact excavator with the reach and dig depth of a much heavier unit. It's capable of digging 12 feet, 2 inches down with a reach of 18 feet, 3 inches, expandable to 31 inches with the inclusion of an optional extendable dipper arm.

A direct-injection Kubota diesel engine gives it plenty of digging and lifting power while minimizing noise, vibration and fuel consumption. An auto-downshift automatically adjusts to traction and terrain for smoother dozing and turning. When engaged, a standard auto-idling system reacts immediately when an operator moves any lever if the transmission has been in neutral for more than four seconds.

The spacious air-conditioned interior provides increased leg room, easy-open front glass windows, a deluxe suspension seat, cup holder and wrist rest. The digital display panel has simple settings and push-button operation. Numerous access points allow easier maintenance.

CIRCLE 135 ON THE READER RESPONSE CARD

 **Kubota**
www.kubotausa.com

SUPPLIER IN THE NEWS

Ferris recognized for third straight year

For the third consecutive year, the Equipment Dealers Association, Clayton, Missouri, awarded its Gold Level Award to Briggs and Stratton Corp., Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, for its Ferris commercial mower products.

This year, 2,371 dealers participated in EDA's detailed dealer-manufacturer relations survey. EDA members noted improvement in Ferris' warranty procedures and say they're satisfied with warranty payments, in part because the company introduced a flexible limited warranty for all commercial riding mowers.

In the first two years, Ferris riding mowers have an unlimited hour warranty. After that, the mowers have a 500-hour or four-year warranty, whichever comes first. Ferris walk-behind mowers have an unlimited-hour warranty for the first two years.

Respondents also reported higher satisfaction product technical support.



From left to right: Harold Redman, senior vice president and president, Global Turf and Consumer Products Group, Briggs and Stratton; Kim Rominger, Equipment Dealer Association CEO and president; and Phil Wenzel, vice president commercial turf, Briggs and Stratton

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Top landscape trends for 2018

Trending topics



The National Association of Landscape Professionals, Fairfax, Virginia, predicts these five trends to influence residential and commercial landscape planning and design:

1 Experiential landscape design. More residential landscapes feature designated areas for cooking, dining, relaxing and even working outdoors, armed with fully integrated outdoor lighting and audio/visual systems for a multisensory and multi-use experience. Office landscapes include walking and bicycle paths, dining areas or gardens.

2 Climate-cognizant landscaping. More landscapes are planned with the unexpected in mind, such as pergolas with retractable canopies that can protect outdoor areas in wind, rain and snow; outdoor heaters for patios on chillier nights; and harder hardscape materials that can handle drastic temperature fluctuations.

3 Emphasis on water management and conservation. The integration of eco-friendly watering practices are expected to continue to take off in 2018, including the use of plants native to a region, xeriscaping and smarter irrigation technology.

4 Enhanced equipment and technology. The latest yard tools on the market consider ease of use and storage while incorporating more eco-friendly innovations. Professionals are also integrating more technology such as mobile apps, 3D modeling and drones, into landscape planning.

5 Plants in playful colors and patterns. Landscape professionals expect to integrate more violets, verbena, clematis, iris and other purple flowers into landscapes. “Patterned” plants are also getting their time in the garden spotlight, as these unique plants are revered for their intricate details, such as striped leaves or brightly colored veins.

IRRIGATION TECH TIP

Field personnel should not make changes to equipment without performing a site evaluation and communicating with the water manager.

WORDS OF WISDOM

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A photograph showing the interior of an Ewing store. The store is well-lit with large windows on the left. Aisles are lined with shelves stocked with various irrigation and landscape supplies, including bags of mulch, boxes of plants, and other gardening materials. The floor is polished and reflects the overhead lights.

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