

WHAT'S A CTO? PG. 4 SEO AND MORE PG. 7 **PLUS:** THE SOFTWARE COMMITMENT PG. 10

JUNE 2020

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Leading business media for landscape contractors

## 2020 TECH REPORT



The industry  
continues  
to embrace  
technology, **while  
recognizing it's  
not an overnight  
solution.**

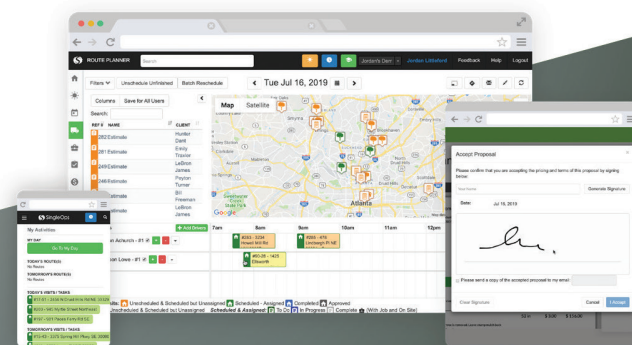




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**Sean McCormick**  
Founder and CEO  
SingleOps



**Our clients grow revenue, increase profitability and improve customer satisfaction.**



“Could you find (a chief technology officer) in another industry and bring them over? Yeah, probably so, but I think you’re well ahead of the game if you get someone who understands the industry and the business.”

Janet Davoli, chief technology officer, The Greenery

## THE RIGHT APPROACH

Three companies discuss how they are integrating technology in their companies.

By Brian Horn

## Tech’s in the title

Chief technology officers may be rare in the green industry, but that could be in title only. Companies have employees completing the tasks of the position but without the CTO label.

That was the case with Janet Davoli while serving as director of business development at The Greenery in South Carolina.

Davoli had been performing the duties of a CTO at the company before she officially had the title in September of last year. She says the title may be overwhelming for some because it may also bring along with it a leadership component.

“You could probably find a really great account manager who also loves technology and they’re managing a lot of this stuff for you,” she says. “It’s hard to find the person who can then make the leap to the next level of leadership.”

While the duties of a CTO will vary from

company to company, she says a sole CTO will not have IT duties, such as running a network or dealing with hardware. Those are the responsibilities of a chief information officer, while the CTO sticks to investigating new technologies to support operations.

“A chief technology officer typically is more outward, looking toward clients where you’re looking at what new products are out there, be it battery operated, be it auto mowers,” she says, adding the interaction with the operations side of the business is a differentiator between a CTO and a CIO.

“The person who’s going to do your networking isn’t really the same person who’s going to be really engaged with operations, looking at auto mowers, doing demos, seeking the feedback from the field. You have to have a different personality for that.”

Davoli says the industry has been slow to adapt to technology but is catching up.

Once a company does start investing in better technology, she says to take it slow. The Greenery took that approach when rolling out autonomous mowers, starting out with just one when they started two years ago and have 15 deployed now.

“There’s always going to be problems you don’t know exist until they hit,” she says. “If it’s rolled out really quickly, you have to react all over the place. So, we’re sometimes slow to implement because we’re feeling it out. And then once we’ll feel comfortable, then we ramp up faster.”

She adds if you are looking for a CTO, experience in the landscaping industry isn’t a must, but it is finding one with landscaping experience is a major advantage.

“It’s good to have a good strong operations understanding of landscaping,” she says. “Could you find someone in technology in another industry and bring them over? Yeah, probably so, but I think you’re well ahead of the game if you get someone who understands the industry and the business.”

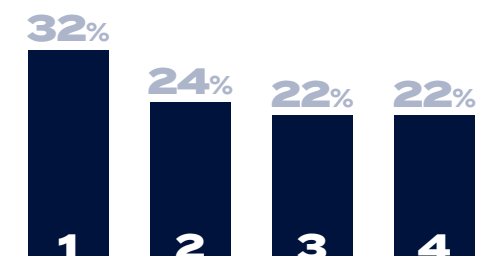
### Who on your staff has a company smart phone? (choose all that apply)

- 95% Owner
- 66% Management
- 65% Foremen
- 50% Crew members
- 44% Account managers
- 41% Sales team
- 41% Administrative staff (HR, office managers, etc.)

More than 200 people responded to Lawn & Landscape’s 2020 Technology survey, which was taken between April 30 and May 6, 2020.

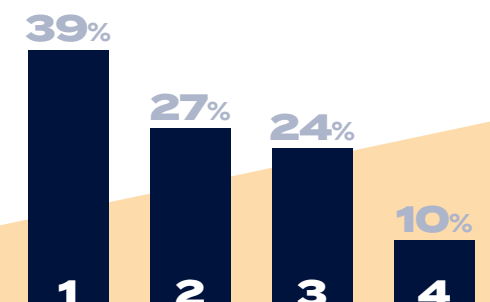
### What is your annual revenue?

- 1. Under \$300,000
- 2. \$300,000 - \$999,999
- 3. \$1 million - \$3.9 million
- 4. More than \$4 million



### How would you describe your company’s use of technology and software compared to your competition?

- 1. In line with my competition
- 2. Behind but catching up
- 3. Advanced
- 4. Behind and staying that way







**“Not having time is an excuse; not a problem. Because you’re just putting your time somewhere else.”**

**David Hartzell, general manager and sales manager, Best Property Maintenance Services**

## After the storm

It only took a catastrophic natural disaster for Best Property Maintenance Services to finally start using the technology it purchased.

The year was 2012 and Hurricane Sandy devastated the East Coast, leaving many without power and plenty to clean up. Wanting to avoid the bidding wars of clean-up work, the company added a mold and remediation service.

“Our office was actually shut down for two weeks with no power, but by the time the power came back on, we had a new business,” says David Hartzell, general manager and sales manager. “It was licensed with the state. We had rewrapped half our trucks in the company to be flood and mold remediation and bought all the equipment and trained all our salespeople to go out and sell mold remediation.”

As part of the service, workers would have to go from property to property with gas cans and make sure generators and pumps had fuel to keep the drying systems running.

“But the trick to doing it was having extremely tight routes,” he says. “So, we had to figure out a better way to route everything and that’s when I looked into it and realized this system does it itself. We don’t have to route anything. It does it all itself and we didn’t even know that it had a routing module.”

Hartzell says he didn’t become more

educated on the software before Hurricane Sandy because he didn’t make time for it.

“Not having time is an excuse; not a problem,” he says. “Because you’re just putting your time somewhere else.”

Now, Hartzell makes time every day to stay updated on the technologies the company is using.

“I probably spend on average two to three hours a day just going over training modules, online videos, online tutorials for things we do and that we want to go do going forward to stay abreast of it.”

The company is currently trying to improve its SEO and has brought an employee in house to specialize on that.

He now needs to become educated on SEO so he knows what that employee is talking about. He says those who are afraid to invest heavily in technology shouldn’t be afraid of spending the money.

“It’s not as complicated as you think,” he says. “It will save you a tremendous amount of time and does not matter how expensive it is. If it’s the right technology, it will pay for itself.”

The company sold the mold and remediation arm in 2015, but Hartzell says that year could have been a lot different if not for adding it and using technology to succeed.

“We would have probably been going out of business in 2015 instead if we hadn’t done that,” he says.

## Well equipped

It was mid-May and the forecast in Pennsylvania was calling for rain and, yes, snow the next day. So, Brian Cuccaro, vice president at New Castle Lawn & Landscape, hopped on his phone and through the app of New Castle software provider dispatched crews that finished early to properties other crews wouldn’t be able to get to because of the unseasonable rain/snow mix.

“From the job site that I’m at, I went onto my phone, went into the software that we use, which is web based, and I was able to find the job and dispatch it to the crews. That updates on their iPad,” he says

Four years ago, before the company invested in iPads for crews, that would have been a more difficult and less efficient process. Today, it was the click of a button and Cuccaro was back to what he was working on.

Instead of buying iPads new at a store where you may have to sign up for that provider’s service, Cuccaro buys them used on eBay.

“Then we can just add them to our plan without committing to a new contract,” he says.

He estimates the company spent about \$4,000 on the equipment and the data plan is about \$15 a month per unit.

Prior to the COVID-19 protocols, the iPads were returned to the office each night and charged.

“But this year, because of the social distancing, we don’t have the guys coming into the office. We have them keeping the devices in the trucks in the holders overnight,” he says, adding that the trucks are parked in the company’s secure lot.

Cuccaro says each iPad has a strong case for protection, but two to three a year still break, which is not docked from the employee’s pay.

The company has about 30 iPads, but not everyone has them. Cuccaro says some employees prefer to use their phones instead of toggling between two devices. He adds the company didn’t invest in phones instead of iPads because they’d have to buy a voice and data plan.

Cuccaro recommends to anyone investing in iPads that will be used in trucks to invest in adequate, higher amp vehicle chargers.

“Regular iPhone chargers will not always work with iPads,” he says, adding that Generation 1 iPads are outdated so he recommends buying Generation 3 or newer. **L&L**

**2020  
TECH  
REPORT**



## tackling TECH

Timberline Landscaping has been able to grow its business year after year by utilizing SEO and other technology.

**By Kim Lux**

Stephanie Early, chief of strategy at Timberline Landscaping, says the company has focused on SEO since she started seven years ago.





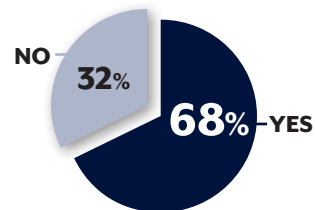
Timberline Landscaping has always embraced technology. They instituted mobile timekeeping about 10 years ago.

**S**tephanie Early, chief of strategy with Timberline Landscaping in Colorado Springs, says technology has always been an important element of the business and something they still focus on growing. “Timberline has been an early adopter of technology for quite some time,” she says. “We began mobile timekeeping almost 10 years ago. And, from what we’ve seen, we were one of the first companies to really dive into that. We’ve had mobile timekeeping, GPS, estimating software systems and accounting for many, many years.”

**KNOW SEO.** Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a crucial component of Timberline’s technology use. Early says she works with Timberline’s marketing coordinator to develop SEO and keyword research into the company’s strategy.

“I’ve been with the company for seven years and we’ve had an SEO focus since that point,” Early says. “We have continually worked on that. What I love is that we’re at the point now that we are continually ranking well organically for most of the search terms that we want.

### Can customers pay for your services online?



Early says Timberline, which has slightly more than 200 employees, targets a mix of short-tail and long-tail keywords. Examples of short-tail keywords would include “landscaping” or “lawn care,” and a long-tail keyword would be something along the lines of “Should I mow my lawn in the winter?”

She also suggests incorporating keywords into the title, image alt. text and headers of a post.

According to Early, ranking well in terms of SEO has boosted Timberline’s business.

“We’ve been able to create this free, organic pipeline of work, just based on search results, that is feeding a whole lot of business our way,” she says. “We measure our sales by marketing sources and internet search is our number three, just underneath current customers and referrals.”

Early attributes the company’s ranking to an aggressive in-bound marketing approach.

“Outbound is your cold calls, mailers and things of that nature,” she says. “In-bound is about creating content that people are already searching for and having that available on your site and giving them the opportunity to convert from there.”

Timberline’s website features blog posts and other gated content, where users must provide an email address to access it. Early says this content is rich in SEO keywords.

“When people sit down to do keyword research, they say, ‘Well I think people are searching this way.’ We actually plug it into a software and determine exactly how people are searching for each service and seeing what words they are using so we can make sure we are making our content rich in those keywords,” she says.

Early says the company determines the keywords internally but uses the software to determine which to go after. When choosing an SEO software, she suggests “looking for something that allows you to track performance analytics and plays nice with Google analytics and social media. Keyword traffic and ranking difficulty are great tools to have.”

It’s been an effective approach for Timberline, and Early says traffic to the website continues to increase.

“Our website traffic continues to rise year over year, every year,” she says.

Early adds there is one annual post that drives a large amount of traffic to the website every year.

“We do Christmas lighting as a service over the winter, so we prepare a Christmas lights map of the local area where people submit their house,” she says. “And that map drives 65,000 people in the month of December to our website. That amount of traffic helps our website authority for the rest of the year.”

The Christmas lights map, which you can view at [bit.ly/xmaslawn](https://bit.ly/xmaslawn), also keeps users on the web page for a while, which Early notes is important for improving SEO.

“On average, people are spending five minutes per unique view on that Christmas lights map,” she says.

**COMBINE COMPONENTS.** Early says the company recently purchased a new business management software to help consolidate all the technology they were using in hopes of streamlining operations.

“We found we were limited by our estimating, job costing and CRM system,” she says. “We were using items that were working decently but weren’t cloud-based. We wanted to make sure that all this software was available to our field staff. We wanted to keep things moving quickly without having to come into the office.”

The new software, which is designed specifically for landscape companies, has helped Timberline.

“It brought out CRM, estimating, job costing, timekeeping and billing all under one umbrella,” she says. “The only things that are still separate are our overhead and our balance sheets and income statements. But there’s a bridge to connect those.”

Early says getting all the software onto one platform was great, but getting everyone on board with the new software posed a challenge.

“Anytime you move people’s cheese, they will struggle a little bit. We had a lot of conversations with our team as we were vetting out new software,” she says. “As we were demoing software, we narrowed it down to two and then brought in a lot of our team to watch the demos and learn what was going on. There is a ton of setup that goes into it. People not only have to learn the new software but also adjust their workflows.”

Early says Timberline’s C-Suite business unit leaders and estimators were all involved in demoing the software options. While no formal vote was taken, a general consensus was made by all parties.

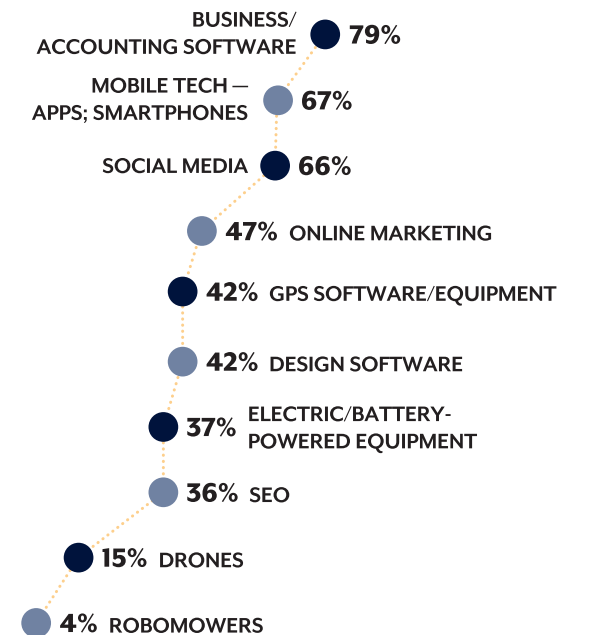
While it might have been difficult early on, Early says everyone is adjusted to it now and sees the benefits of the process.

“We pulled the trigger almost a year ago,” she says. “A couple of months in, people were still struggling, but by this point they say they get it and see why we made this change. We had to get used to taking the good, letting go of what we were used to do and just move forward.”

To help everyone transition, Early says Timberline took an employee who adapted to the new software early on and used him as a trainer for others.

“(He) helped train our team, setup the system and troubleshoot,” she

### Which of the following do you use at your company?



says. “He continues to help us in that role still and we could not have done it without him.”

**RESEARCH & REQUEST REFERRALS.** Early says any company looking to implement a new software or technology should make sure they do their homework.

“Make sure you do your due diligence,” she says. “Look at multiple options, talk to people who are using the software and take your time with the decision-making process.”

Early also suggests getting good, reliable referrals.

“If a company is not willing to give you referrals, then we would likely steer clear,” she says. “Those referrals make a huge difference.”

While software can be expensive, Early says it can be an investment worth making if it’ll improve business operations.

“You’re definitely going to have costs associated with these things, but you have to think about that return on investment over time,” she says. “For us, it’s been worth it.” **L&L**



# ON THE OFFENSIVE

Outback Landscape aggressively searches for technology that improves efficiency to help the company grow. **By Jimmy Miller**

**W**hen Outback Landscape acquired a company last fall, it completed a years-long process of ensuring the two companies had everything in place to finalize the deal.

Among those priorities for Outback, an Idaho-based company, was making sure the technological transition would be seamless. Well before the deal was finished, the company they acquired started training on the same software Outback had been using since 2012. This was so that once the 14 employees joining Outback's team were officially part of the company, they already had the experience of dealing with the same software for a year.

Outback's Tyler Washburn, the operations manager, says thinking of efficiency when using technology is a critical step many companies miss. While his company has watched its staff grow from eight employees to 70 in a decade, others find implementing technology is more of a hindrance than a tool for growth.

"We basically wanted to play offense with how we rolled the crews out in the morning rather than defense," he says. "We've been aggressive to see what's the next thing to help us."

**FINDING THE NEXT THING.** First, Washburn cautions landscapers from investing in new technology too quickly. He says nobody wants to wake up a year after buying software – or anything else – and have regrets. Company ownership should be fully committed to a software, he says, and putting in the time to do research on what fits your particular company could save you lots of consternation later.

"Look at what the core of your business this and find something that's going to grow as you grow," Washburn says. In other words, buyers should make sure the new technology will advance their company's missions and can be adapted over time.

For Washburn, they use two separate software providers: one of them is reserved for the company's maintenance division, and another software is for tracking bigger install projects that are primarily estimated by materials.



## What was the most effective way of training yourself and your team on software?

- 33%** In-house training
- 27%** We have never done software training
- 22%** Online courses
- 14%** In-person training from software companies
- 4%** Sending an employee to software training

## What do you use software for in your business? (choose all that apply)

- 76%** Payroll/accounting
- 65%** Job costing/estimating
- 56%** Property mapping
- 55%** Field service/scheduling
- 49%** CRM/sales management and tracking
- 44%** Landscape design/drawing
- 41%** GPS/fleet management
- 24%** Material inventory
- 12%** Water management

They use the software to send automated notifications to clients on when they might be coming, and they can even use it to upsell certain products or services. Washburn says one of his upselling tactics is to have a marketing email that essentially says something along the lines of, "We're starting our pruning season and coming to your house soon for regular maintenance. Do you want to also add on our pruning service?"

Internally, the software is also used to track time out in the field and cross-reference it with GPS data. Plus, foremen on the installation crews are supposed to fill out daily, short questionnaires that essentially tell Washburn and management what materials need to be ordered for the next day's services. And when managers leave the company – and they will leave at some point – the company still has each client's data stored on the same software.

But what Washburn uses the technology for could be entirely different than how another landscaping company conducts business. He advises buyers to really consider how the technology would actually make their company more efficient. If they can't come up with a good answer, the technology's probably not a good fit.

"Implementing (software) has helped us put fires out before they happen, and it has given us the tools to be able to grow," Washburn says.

**HOW TO APPROACH IT.** Washburn says that "there's growing pains in everything." Essentially, he urges landscapers to acknowledge that transitioning to a new technology won't be easy. He spent countless nights fiddling with the software, testing it out with dummy accounts and entries before finally feeling like he had a good grasp on how it worked.

He recommends handing the technology off to a select team of employees first before implementing company-wide. It can help them fine-tune how to use the technology first and troubleshoot with management as problems arise.

"With rolling it out to the employees and showing them the benefit of it, we started with a small segment of our employees first, ones we knew were sort of tech-savvy," Washburn says. "Getting a few of those key members on board... was a huge benefit."

Investing in a consultant is additionally worth "every penny" before finding a software that helps you best, he says. He adds that it's

prudent to make sure the technology providers are like partners and keep up consistent communicate. Whether it's general help questions or asking for advice on how to improve the product, Washburn says his company's relationship with their software providers has helped him tremendously over the years. If anybody ever had any questions, it's nice to have experts with the technology ready to help.

And speaking of ready to help, Washburn also says it's easier when someone on staff is specifically in charge of the technology, especially software. Outback Landscape promoted someone within the company already who had worked with the software out in the field to oversee everyone's use. And as more climb the company's career ladder, they are also able to easily track some of their long-standing client accounts.

"As we've grown, we've moved managers from the field to where they can look back and go, 'This is what's happened, these are the notes on this client's account,'" he says. "This way, training's a whole lot easier." **L&L**



**ABOVE:** The Outback Landscape foremen use software to track which materials need ordered. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The Outback Landscape team needed to implement technology to improve efficiency as its company grew from eight employees to 70 in just a decade.





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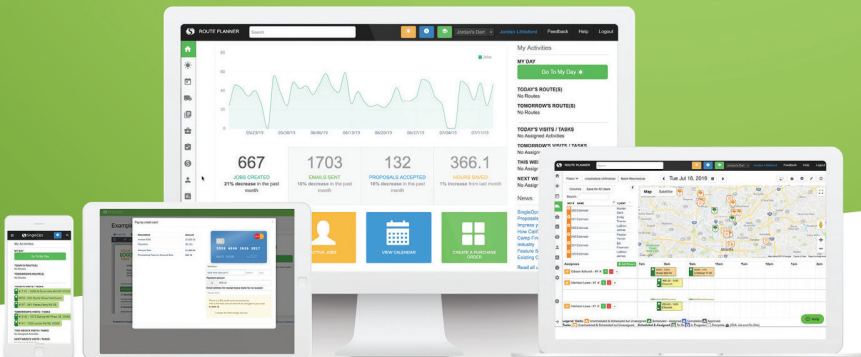
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