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Lawn & Landscape

A GIE Media publication
Volume 45, Number 7



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LAWN & LANDSCAPE

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▶ WITH ENVU

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Brian Horn
Editor, Lawn & Landscape

“You and your employees will answer any questions as thoroughly as possible and leave the property better than ever, and you will make your customer feel important because they are important.”

Don't sell services

I write this coming to you from a hotel room in between baseball games in what will be a long six days of watching 12-year-olds play America's Pastime. It's called the Cooperstown Dreams Tournament, or something like that, but I question whose dreams are actually being fulfilled.

Sure, it's fun to say our little suburban Ohio community team will get to play powerhouses from Michigan, Texas, Florida, California and even Hawaii (Aloha means goodbye!) But outside of the baseball, there's a lot of long, hot days. There's stress for coaches and parents to make sure everything is taken care of so their kids can have a great time. And even the kids don't have the greatest of accommodations either.

Yet, any of those individual complaints don't outweigh the overarching theme here.

They aren't selling quality games, luxury hotels for the players or a stress-free vacation for the parents (although does that really exist?)

They are selling an experience. And that's exactly what you should be selling.

Don't sell a perfectly mowed lawn or yard; sell that you are a professionally run business that was put on this earth to make customers (the kids in the tournament) feel like they are the only customer you have.

You can be one of the few things during their day or even in their life that they don't have to worry about, or better yet, that they look forward to.

When they see your trucks and equipment pull up to their home or commercial property, they get excited that you are there to do your job the right way and will make their space look impeccable.

You and your employees will answer any questions as thoroughly as possible and leave the property better than ever, and you will make your customer feel important because they are important.

By the way, we beat the Hawaii team and my kid hit a 3-run home run. Therefore, the Cooperstown tournament is the best experience ever, just like I said all along.

— Brian Horn



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Unlimited Lawn Care acquires Elite Turf

This marks Unlimited's sixth acquisition since 2022.

UNLIMITED LAWN CARE, a lawn care provider in the Southeast, has acquired Elite Turf. This strategic move enhances Unlimited's presence in South Carolina.

"I am thrilled to welcome Jeff Fugle to the Unlimited family. For a quarter of a century, we have taken great pride in the award-winning service and satisfaction our customers have come to expect and appreciate. During that time, Jeff has successfully built his company into a like-minded business focused on excellence and client satisfaction. He is now working alongside our management team as he services his existing customers and helps manage and grow our dual-brand businesses in South Carolina," says Scott Whitehead, CEO of Unlimited Lawn Care.

The acquisition of Elite Turf marks Unlimited lawn care's sixth acquisition since 2022.

"This is an exciting chapter for both Unlimited Lawn Care and Elite Turf. Our shared values and commitment to delivering outstanding service make this a natural partnership. I am eager to contribute to the continued success of our combined business and provide enhanced lawn care solutions to our customers," says Bill Pope, the president of Unlimited Lawn Care.

Landscape Workshop acquires Nature Coast Landscape Services

The company was founded in 2014 in the Tampa Bay area by Nestor Nazario.

LANDSCAPE WORKSHOP has acquired Nature Coast Landscape Services, marking another expansion into the Tampa market.

Nature Coast was founded in 2014 in the Tampa Bay area by Nestor Nazario.

"Our dedication to achieving outstanding results for our clients and commitment to the professional development of our team have been pivotal to our success. It was clear that Landscape Workshop shared these values, making them the ideal partner to ensure continued excellence in service and growth opportunities for our employees," Nazario says.

Nazario will assume the general manager position at Landscape Workshop, ensuring a smooth transition for Nature Coast's clients and its team of professionals.

"We're excited to welcome Nature Coast Landscaping to the LW family. Their well-established reputation in the Tampa Bay area complements our mission and expands our capability to serve the Tampa market. With the addition of this second Landscape Maintenance branch in Tampa, we are well-positioned to serve our growing client base in this important market," says J.T. Price, CEO of Landscape Workshop.

Landscape Workshop is a full-service grounds management firm, delivering professional service and expert maintenance for commercial outdoor spaces since 1984. Serving 30 Southeastern markets, Landscape Workshop operates in Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee and Florida. Landscape Workshop is backed by Carousel Capital and McKinney Capital.

Mariani Premier Group acquires Drost Landscape

The company, based in northern Michigan, has become the 20th company to join Mariani.

MARIANI PREMIER GROUP HAS ACQUIRED Drost Landscape, a landscape company based in the northern Michigan market. Drost has become the 20th company to join Mariani.

The company was founded in 1991 by Bob Drost and headquartered in Petoskey, Michigan. Their range of services includes design-build, enhancements, irrigation, pool/spa maintenance, tree services, snow removal, fertilization, lighting and maintenance.

“We are thrilled to welcome Drost Landscape to the Mariani Premier Group,” says Frank Mariani, chairman of Mariani Premier Group.

“Their reputation for excellence and dedication to customer satisfaction perfectly align with our vision and values,” says CEO Bryan Christiansen.

“This partnership represents an incredible opportunity for growth and innovation,” Drost says. “We look forward to contributing our ‘do more’ mindset to the collective expertise of the Mariani family.”

“Their reputation for excellence and dedication to customer satisfaction perfectly align with our vision and values.”

— Bryan Christiansen, CEO,
Mariani Premier Group

Executive Landscaping joins Fairwood Brands

Executive Landscaping was launched in 1996 by 12th-generation Cape Cod native Chris Cotoia.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN company Executive Landscaping, which has created and maintained outdoor spaces around Cape Cod for over 30 years, has joined Fairwood Brands.

Executive Landscaping was launched in 1996 by 12th-generation native Cape Codder Chris Cotoia. His passion for landscaping began while spending time working with his grandfather, who served as caretaker of a home in Hyannis Port. Cotoia’s childhood lawn mowing service turned into a neighborhood landscaping company that evolved into a nearly 50-person company of landscape designers, dedicated masons and other experts who do everything from providing ongoing lawn maintenance to designing and building elaborate outdoor patios.

Executive Landscaping is now part of Fairwood Brands, a nationwide family of companies. It was created in early 2023 by Columbus-based investment company Crane Group when they acquired companies around the country and created this new parent company.

“The Executive Landscaping acquisition connects Fairwood with a true leader in one of the best Northeast markets,” says Fairwood Brands CEO Mike McRae. “The Executive team has demonstrated design and delivery excellence while growing consistently since their inception. We are very excited about the mutual fit and the prospects for future success.”

Crane Group Senior Vice President Dan Crane says Executive is an excellent addition to Fairwood Brands.

“Executive Landscaping has an experienced executive team and a strong, thoughtfully built company culture,” Crane says. “Their dedication to quality and a fantastic customer experience is exceptional. We are very pleased to welcome them to the Fairwood family.”

Cotoia, the Executive Landscaping founder, says the company looks forward to becoming part of Fairwood Brands for several reasons.

“Crane Group has a clear track record of success across several industries, and I appreciate that like us, they are family-owned and people-first,” he says. “Crane Group and our company have aligned goals, and we’re confident that will drive results that make this a win-win for us both.”

Executive Landscaping Partner Kyle Holt-Cullity says the company is confident Crane Group will bring many benefits as a partner.

“You can tell with Crane Group that this isn’t just about the deal; they truly care about what they do and what they are building,” Holt-Cullity says. “They provide experts who will help support our day-to-day operations and our desire for continued growth. They open up new benefit opportunities for our team members. And we become part of a nationwide family where we can build peer-to-peer relationships with like-minded landscaping companies.”

APHIX acquires Eastwood Landscaping

Eastwood Landscaping was founded by Mark Smithson in 1982 and is one of the oldest landscape companies in the Knoxville, Tennessee, market.

APHIX HAS ACQUIRED Eastwood Landscaping, a full service grounds maintenance provider located in Knoxville, Tennessee. This purchase adds a third branch location in Tennessee as the company grows its presence in the Southeast U.S.

Eastwood Landscaping was founded by Mark Smithson in 1982 and is one of

“Their commitment to positively impacting people has been clear through the entire process and even more post-close.”

— Mark Smithson, founder, Eastwood Landscaping

the oldest landscape companies in the Knoxville market. Its customer portfolio includes corporate campuses, hotel/hospitality clients, shopping centers, HOA’s and other commercial landscaping customers.

Smithson will continue leading the enhancement and construction division in the East Tennessee region.

“As I met with and considered several options for the transition of Eastwood Landscaping, it was clear from the initial meeting that APHIX was the right partner,” Smithson says. “Their commitment to positively impacting people has been clear through the entire process and even more post-close. I am looking forward to

being a part of the APHIX team and leading the landscape market in Knoxville.”

The acquisition of Eastwood Landscaping aligns with APHIX’s strategic growth initiatives and commitment to providing landscaping solutions to commercial properties in the region.

“We are excited to have Mark Smithson and the entire Eastwood Landscaping team become part of the APHIX brand,” says Allen Sweeney, CEO of APHIX.

“Their commitment to excellence and unique skill sets aligns well with the vision of APHIX. The addition of Eastwood will enhance the value APHIX provides to the employees and customers in the Knoxville market.”



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SunWorks expands in Florida market

Exclusive Landscaping is SunWorks' eighth company in the commercial landscaping industry.

SUNWORKS LANDSCAPE PARTNERS, a commercial landscaping business backed by Orion Group, acquired Exclusive Landscaping, a commercial landscape maintenance company based in Orlando.

Exclusive is SunWorks' eighth company in the commercial landscaping industry. SunWorks partners with founder-owned landscaping businesses, providing liquidity for owners and resources to fuel their company's next phase of growth.

Exclusive Landscaping was founded by Jeremy Lapaglia with a single truck and trailer in 2008. He was joined several years later by business partner and General Manager Corina Diaz. Together, Lapaglia and Diaz built Exclusive into a regional business with over 150 employees providing landscape maintenance, enhancements, arbor care, plant healthcare and irrigation services to commercial properties across central Florida.

"Exclusive is well known in the Orlando area for their high-quality work and exceptional customer service. When I met Jeremy and Corina in 2022, Exclusive was growing quickly and they were looking for a partner to help navigate the challenges of a rapidly scaling field service business," says Nate Carlson, CEO of SunWorks.

"We found in SunWorks a partner that believed in the same things we did and believed the value in Exclusive was not its accounts or its equipment, but the awesome people we employ here," Lapaglia says.

Chief Operating Officer Sean Dowling will succeed Lapaglia as president of the company. Orlando landscaping industry veterans John Cornelius and Ryun Jack serve as general managers of the company's two branch locations.

"Exclusive is well known in the Orlando area for their high-quality work and exceptional customer service."

— Nate Carlson, CEO, SunWorks



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Monarch Landscape Companies acquires DynaServ Florida

The partnership expands Monarch's national footprint into Florida and the Southeast.

LOS ANGELES-BASED Monarch Landscape Companies, a national provider of commercial landscaping services, has acquired DynaServ Florida, a 30-year, family-owned and operated full-service commercial landscape company based in Davie, Fla., that services commercial properties, municipalities, HOAs and utilities. Terms of the deal were not disclosed.

Founded in 1994, DynaServ is a full-service provider of landscape maintenance, enhancement, arbor care, water and irrigation, fertilization and pest control, snow and ice removal and disaster

recovery services. With over 200 employees and a network of over 100 contractors, the company services clients across 12 mostly Southern states, reaching as far north as North Carolina and as far west as New Mexico.

"DynaServ represents both a strategic and cultural fit for the Monarch platform, and we're excited to welcome the entire DynaServ team into our organization," says Brian Helgoe, CEO and founder of Monarch. "The addition of DynaServ marks a critical milestone in our efforts to expand Monarch's footprint and diversify

revenues, and we expect to accelerate growth in existing and adjacent geographies, while building upon DynaServ's significant subcontractor network to better service regional and national customers."

Brad Gruber will continue to drive strategic direction and business development for Monarch's Florida operation, while Sean Foreman and Douglas Tripodo will lead self-perform and subcontractor operations, respectively.

Monarch has completed six add-on acquisitions over the last two years. The acquisition of DynaServ closely followed Monarch's acquisition of True North Landscapes, a Santa Rosa, California-based full-service landscape operator focused on sustainability and innovation.

"We're creating a national presence to service both our local clients as well as national commercial customers, and we continue to pursue acquisitions in new and existing geographies," Helgoe says.

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Bartlett Tree acquires Canopy Tree Services in England

With the acquisition, Bartlett currently operates 14 offices in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

BARTLETT TREE EXPERTS has expanded in the East Midlands of England with the acquisition of Canopy Tree Services.

With the acquisition, Bartlett has opened a new East Midlands office, located in Draycott, a village in Derbyshire.

Canopy Tree Services was founded by Ben Edmonds and Steve Barker in 2004 to provide tree surgery services in the Derby, Nottingham and Leicester areas. The owners say they were looking for

ways to offer a wider range of services and expertise for managing tree health.

“Bartlett Tree Experts is a multi-generational, family business that has been a leader in the industry for 117 years and is known for its scientific approach to tree care,” says Edmonds, who joins Bartlett’s new East Midlands office. “Their commitment to customer satisfaction aligns perfectly with our own values.”

“We are excited to welcome the talented team from Canopy Tree Services

to our new East Midlands office,” says Jim Ingram, president and chief operating officer of Bartlett Tree Experts. “This acquisition allows us to expand our full range of scientific tree care services while continuing to honor our commitment to exceptional safety, science, technology and business.”

With the acquisition, Bartlett currently operates 14 offices in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Bartlett recently announced it is developing a new 50-acre arboretum and research lab centre in Spencers Wood, a village south of Reading in the Borough of Wokingham, Berkshire, England. The new facility, which is expected to be operational in late 2025, will serve as a research, diagnostic and educational center for Bartlett clients and arborists in the UK and Ireland.



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Juniper Landscaping acquires Davis Landscaping

The company expands into new markets in North Carolina, South Carolina and Pennsylvania through the acquisition.

JUNIPER LANDSCAPING acquired Davis Landscaping, a landscaping maintenance and installation provider with operations across North Carolina, South Carolina and Pennsylvania. The addition of Davis expands Juniper's footprint to 33 branch locations across five states.

Originally founded in 1934, Davis offers full-service landscaping maintenance, installation and snow removal services for commercial customers.

"We are excited to partner with the Juniper team continue scaling our business," says Scot Davis, president of Davis. "This partnership allows us to take on additional maintenance and installation projects across our regional divisions in the greater Raleigh, N.C., Hilton Head, S.C., and Harrisburg, Pa., markets while continuing to provide best-in-class service quality and care to our existing clients."

Juniper's partnership with Davis facilitates the company's expansion into the Carolinas and Pennsylvania.

"We are thrilled to be partnering with the Davis family and their talented team to build upon and expand our growing presence throughout the Carolinas and Pennsylvania, which we expect will include additional strategic acquisitions in these markets," says Brandon Duke, CEO of Juniper Landscaping. ■

"This partnership allows us to take on additional maintenance and installation projects across our regional divisions in the greater Raleigh, N.C., Hilton Head, S.C., and Harrisburg, Pa., markets while continuing to provide best-in-class service quality and care to our existing clients."

— Scot Davis, president of Davis Landscaping

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TRAVELS WITH JIM follows Jim Huston around the country as he visits with landscapers and helps them understand their numbers to make smarter decisions.

AMONGST FRIENDS

→ SO, THERE I WAS BACK AT THE V-CUT (bourbon & cigar) Lounge in Nampa, Idaho, with five good friends and fellow entrepreneurs. Clients Gabe Dean, president of Daystar Excavation, was sitting to my left and Hans Ellis, president of Blue Ribbon Landscape, sat on a stool to my right. Tim Wangler, owner of the V-Cut Lounge, was standing behind us. Ritch Wheaton, owner of Wheaton Grading and Landscape, was on a stool beside Hans.

The conversation that evening centered around fall elk hunting, Hans' recent Flaming Gorge fishing trip on the Green River in Utah, Tim's refurbishment project of a 32' 1972 Airstream trailer that was to be a mobile cigar bar and — of course — business. It was a great evening.

HOW IT WORKS IN THE REAL WORLD. Earlier that week, I had worked with Gabe. You may remember him from an article I wrote about him and Daystar Excavation one year ago. I met Gabe and his wife, Michelle, at the V-Cut Lounge in April of 2022. He, Hans, Rich, Tim and their wives are all good friends. I was fortunate to know them and share in the camaraderie.

The first time I worked with Gabe for a full day in 2022, we created a budget for that year, costed out all of his trucks and equipment (some of which cost in excess of half a million dollars), and then priced all of his excavation work. This time we only needed half a day to do his 2024 budget and update his pricing. The other thing that we did was to price out gravel that he delivered to jobsites. This was a bit tricky as the cost per cubic yard for the gravel varied depending on its source. However, with a little creativity and an MS Excel worksheet, we were able to compensate for the diverse variables.

Essentially, I was helping Gabe do a more accurate cost-benefit analysis of his services and products. Calculating an accurate cost per hour to run his various dozers, graders, excavators and so forth was essential. Once we did that, costing out the operator to run the equipment was straight forward.

Because Hans had decided to go fishing, he and I did not meet. However, he did allow me to park my 25' 2019 Flying Cloud Airstream at his office where I camped for five days. I told Hans that I would provide "security" for his property while I was there and he was gone. A few years ago, Hans had purchased 20 acres on a prime transportation route in Caldwell, Idaho, that had excellent access to the Greater Boise market. He has great plans for those 20 acres: he'd include an office building, operations facility, rental units, etc. This facility will greatly enhance Blue Ribbon Landscape's footprint in the market from both a marketing and an operations aspect.

While camping at his office complex, I had an opportunity to talk with Danny Talich, Blue Ribbon Landscape's operations manager. We discussed how he could implement performance pay for his irrigation service technicians and lawn care (chemical) applicators. One way is to first calculate the daily amount to bill for the irrigation technician's labor (usually from \$900 to \$1,000 per day) and the average amount to bill per day for the lawn care applicator (usually from \$1,200 to \$1,500 per day). If they hit these amounts for five days in a row in a given week, I like to pay the technicians 1% to 2% of the revenue billed. That could easily amount to an extra \$100 per week or \$400 to \$500 per month. For the right technician, it's a pretty good motivator.

CONCLUSION. What we did was monumental for the individuals involved. Not only did we share great camaraderie as we discussed our sporting adventures (past and future) and business lessons learned, but we also made some significant improvements in our business operations. This kind of robust collaboration is essential for all of us to flourish and overcome the daily obstacles that get in our way and try to prevent us from running a successful enterprise. Bourbon and cigars may not be your thing. If it's golf and iced tea, poker and beer, church and pot luck, whatever; surround yourself with good friends, camaraderie and people who will challenge you to be better. We'll all be better for it if you do. **L&L**



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WORDS OF WILSON features a rotating panel of consultants from Wilson360, a landscape consulting firm.

THE VALUE OF A ONE-FIRM CULTURE

→ FROM ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY to innovation-based environments, most companies have a workplace personality and a framework for "the way we do things around here." Like DiSC for people, organizational culture profiling is essential for understanding how companies work. And for good reason: Companies with great cultures also have great people. In a war for talent, when you're going toe-to-toe with corporate competitors, a great culture is the ultimate differentiator.

CULTURE VS CORE VALUES. While it's true that a great set of core values is a magnet for hiring, it's not the same as culture. Culture is a shifting dynamic that evolves over time. A good example of this is if one of your core values is a fanatical focus on your customer. That value is a bedrock commitment to service that never changes. Culture would be the way employees are able to adapt to changing customer expectations. This distinction between the two is critical as you scale up. Stick to your core values but recognize you need people who can change as circumstances change without compromising your fundamental purpose.

START EARLY. Great cultures start sooner rather than later because it's easier to hire for what you want than fix it when it's broken. Recruit intentionally and seek out people with shared values, instead of hiring to fill a need. The expression "hire slow and fire fast" means just that. Take the time to match how a candidate works with how your organization works to save on the cost of an employee who doesn't fit and stays too long on the job. Allowing negative behaviors to fester is expensive, with replacement and turnover cost potentially including the loss of a customer or two.

HIRE FOR CHARACTER NOT CREDENTIALS. Companies using Scaling Up, Traction, Entrepreneurial Operating Systems and other EOS-based methodologies encourage hiring people for who they are before hiring them for what they know. I realized the wisdom and practicality of this approach years ago when building Environmental Care. We consistently hired for attitude, trained for skills, and ended up with a cohesive, talented team of colleagues who consistently performed at the highest level. Turnover was low, enthusiasm was high, and we were able to grow upwardly mobile and culturally-aligned managers and leaders by promoting from within.

CULTURAL ADD. A good rule of thumb for getting the right people is this: Getting the right people and the right chemistry is more important than getting the right ideas. I'm seeing nearly every landscape company changing their perspective from cultural fit to cultural add — hiring peo-

ple who are not just compatible, but add value and bring fresh ideas that strengthen the whole team.

WEAK LINK. Great cultures require a role model at the top. When leaders fail to lead by example, a once-positive work culture can fall apart slowly and then all at once. It can occur when companies go through explosive growth spurts; they have no plan to scale; or when branches and divisions become silos or turf battles occur. Unless all leaders are culturally aligned or use their leadership for the good of the whole company, a well-honed culture can begin showing cracks, with dysfunction keeping the company from clicking on all cylinders at the same time.

BALANCE COMPETING DESIRES. The wrong metrics can drive undesired behaviors just as the right ones can effect positive change. An example of this can be seen in KPIs and performance tracking, where individual performance is rewarded over team performance. In my company, I encouraged a collaboration-over-competition culture by incentivizing and rewarding a "one-firm" mentality. As a result, what was good for the individual was good for the whole. Our customers received benefit from the collective power and expertise we offered together and the "power in unity" approach made all the difference in setting goals we could rally around as a team. **L&L**

↓
NO MATTER WHAT, CULTURE IS CRITICAL —
 and finding cultural fits should be prioritized from the first interview on up.



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CREAM OF THE CROP

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CREAM OF THE CROP features a rotating panel from the Harvest Group, a landscape business consulting company.

GETTING RENEWALS RIGHT IN TODAY'S REALITY

→ EVERYWHERE WE GO, WE HEAR A SIMILAR REFRAIN: What's up in today's business climate? Does this sound familiar? And the answers are even more familiar — workforce base pay rates are at an all-time high and growing, pay rates for overhead positions are up, insurance rates are up, gas prices are up, materials costs are up and so on. Seems like everything is UP! Right? Right!

KNOWING YOUR OPTIONS FOR RENEWALS OR INCREASES IN PRICING.

Options for Renewals. You can do nothing and hope for the best and feel the effect on gross margins plus indirect and general and administrative costs and net profit. Not a good feeling folks. Or,

- You can add more workload to your teams and potentially burn them out — especially if they are already overloaded.
- You can get more productive/efficient which is a good idea, but will this cover the increases in cost? Maybe this will cover some but not all cost increases.
- Sell more enhancements or additional services at higher margins. This should always be considered.
- Get the right renewal at the right price that will enable you to make a fair net profit.

So why are we afraid of or don't go after renewals? We hear these reasons often:

- "If we ask, they will go out to bid and we risk losing the job."
- "What if we lose the job? We don't know if we're really making any money or not, so maybe some gross margin is better than no gross margin?"
- "We don't have the time; we're too darn busy focusing on other challenges."
- "Actually, we're not sure how to go about it."

HERE ARE 7 TIPS ON HOW TO GET THE RIGHT RENEWALS AT THE RIGHT PRICE.

Tip 1: Establish a job renewal process. Don't let this be a last-minute random act and miss an opportunity for a positive effect on your business. Build a renewal process and practice it consistently.

Tip 2: Assign champions to head up the process. This process requires a team effort headed by designated champions.

Tip 3: Know thy customer.

- Know your customer's budget timing and processes — timing is critical.
- Know the status of their business. Is it thriving or surviving?
- Know the key influencers and the naysayers. Learn how to engage them and get them involved.
- Know their level of satisfaction and appreciation of your services. Ask them, survey them and get their feedback.

Note: It's hard to get an increase on a job if they are not happy with your services and the relationship is strained. The "pay us more and we will make you happy" is not a good strategy for an increase. Rather, it's a poor strategy and needs to be stopped.

The best way to get a fair increase is to create a solid, positive, trusting

relationship with the customer, as well as meeting and exceeding their expectations and solving their points of pain.

Tip 4: Review the jobsite. What condition was the job in when you took it over? Review with your crew new job start-up conditions and areas defined by the customer as pain points. Know what condition the job was in when you started. Before and after photos are most effective. Document, document, document!

Tip 5: Review the financials costs. What are the direct costs over the past year including workforce cost with wages, payroll taxes and workers comp insurance? What increases have there been recently or anticipated in the next contract period? What materials were used on this job and what was the total cost?

Take a good look at your overhead costs including salaries, gas, vehicles, rent-leases, insurance, etc. The key is to know your costs to perform the level of service that is expected by your customer.

Tip 6: Establish a new price if needed. Make certain your price for your services will make enough gross margin that will cover your overhead expenses and make a fair net profit. This will vary by revenue streams and range from 45-65% gross margin.

Tip 7: Build your strategy and delivery.

- Establish the justification for an increase that is specific to their site and have specific examples. Maybe there was a change in scope and/or expectation and we need added funds to cover these changes.
- Practice your delivery for a personal face-to-face wherever possible. If not possible, build a persuasive presentation in writing for their review and consideration.
- Have some options to change the scope of work.
- Next, get a verbal understanding and then send written agreement.
- Know your walk away point.
- If it's a no go, leave the job professionally and in a positive manner. You never know when they just might want you back. **L&L**

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Anita Palmer

Chief Revenue Officer
Sperber Landscape Companies

ACHIEVING A GOAL ISN'T MERELY A DESTINATION BUT RATHER A JOURNEY.

As children, we were often asked what we wanted to be when we grew up, as if reaching that point would be the end of the book. Our careers, like our personal lives, are marked by numerous milestones. Some are seamless and smooth, while others are slow and rocky, yet sometimes we didn't even know they were milestones.

Our entry into the workforce and earning a paycheck was the initial stop on the map. If you were to take a moment and reflect on your very first job, think about the role it played in your journey. In mine, I started as a helper at a local landscape nursery, watering and nurturing plants during summer break. When I felt like it was aced, the owner asked me to expand and code all the customer purchases. By the time summer was over, I had tended the greenhouse, sold to customers, reconciled the daily purchases and coded all the sales. Through that experience, I learned what it meant to earn trust and credibility. There are moments when we

Anita Palmer is an active member of the National Association of Landscape Professionals Women in Landscape Network (powered by Envu) which provides a forum for industry professionals to support each other's professional growth. The Network is free to all industry professionals.

year to do more and contribute on a larger scale. We might even identify a new role that ignites our passion but are unsure of the path to get there. This early milestone opened the door to my love of the landscape industry and the people in it.

You never know what will come of taking a chance. Not long ago, a colleague of mine didn't apply for an open position, even though it was her aspiration. The role represented a promotion, but she felt she lacked the necessary skills in finance and operations. If she had the confidence, it would have made all the difference. My 12-year-old son wanted to pitch for his baseball team. He had never pitched before, but when the coach asked if he wanted to try, he said "absolutely" without hesitation. Imagine if we had that same courage to say "yes" to something we've never done before. When a former boss asked me to step up and take over two service lines, without a blink, I agreed. By saying "yes," it allowed me the opportunity to show my stuff all the while paving the way for the next milestone.

If you're looking to advance to the next level in your career or simply elevate your current position, here are a few suggestions I learned along the way.

- **Education:** Continuous learning will prepare you for any goal you set your sights on. It's just as important to recognize what you don't know as it is to showcase what you do. Community college, National Association of Landscape Professional classes, webinars and certification programs are all great resources.
- **Contribution potential:** Focus on what you can contribute rather than a specific title or role. It's your contributions that will precede you and pave that way forward.
- **Fear is Your Friend:** Anything new will be uncomfortable. When asked to take on a new challenge, say "yes" or better yet, volunteer for it. The only true failure is not trying.
- **Imagine:** Envision what your day would look like in whatever you venture. Identify the skills you need to improve. Seek out a mentor who can help you understand what to expect, what to learn and how to prepare.
- **Action:** Speaks louder than any words you can muster. Just do it!

Push the boundaries of your comfort zone. The path to your goals may not be straightforward but will be a long row of valuable milestones along the way. **L&L**

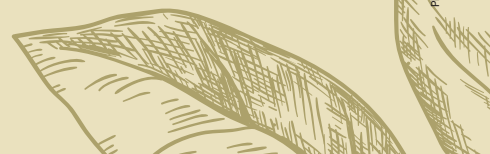


PHOTO COURTESY OF ANITA PALMER



2024 State Of The Battery-Powered
Equipment Market

POWER PLAY

EVERY YEAR, THE STORY EVOLVES, AND IN 2024, LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE MORE INVESTED IN BATTERY-POWERED EQUIPMENT.

By Kristen Hampshire



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ADOBE FIREFLY

Peter Novak's gut told him moving from gas-powered equipment was a must.

"I knew battery-powered equipment was going to be the future, so I started interfacing with manufacturers," says the president of Serpico in Hayward, Calif.

This was eight years ago, and some of the brands he partnered with to learn about handheld, battery-powered models are not around anymore. "We started field testing the equipment," he says, describing a year of trial and error that ultimately resulted in working directly with manufacturers to provide R&D-focused feedback.

"We learned how not durable it was back then, and we learned the pain points of charging inefficient batteries — and we also learned what we need in terms of durability, power, charge time and ergonomics," Novak says.



Peter Novak

The verdict: "Legitimately, I could not put a backpack blower on our landscapers and expect them to do their jobs when it weighed 10 times more than what they were used to and the run times weren't there," Novak says.

So, he waited on the sidelines for battery technology to advance, continuing to foster relationships with manufacturers.

By 2021, Novak gained confidence that battery-powered equipment had reached a commercial-grade capacity. He started the entire testing process over again, running another year-long round of field trials of several makes and models of hand-held equipment, riding mowers and walk behinds.

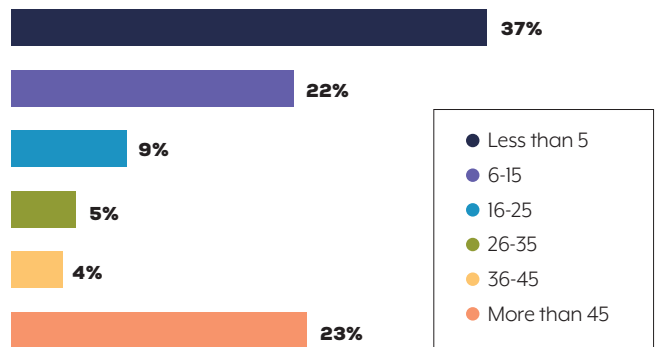


As the technology advances, electric vehicles are also increasing in popularity throughout the industry.



Customers and crews alike enjoy the low noise level of battery-powered equipment.

How many employees do you have?



What was your company's overall **gross revenue** for 2023?

27%

Less than \$200,000

13%

\$200,000-\$499,000

6%

\$500,000-\$749,000

5%

\$750,000-\$999,000

29%

\$1 million - \$6.9 million

19%

\$7 million or more

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What do you see as **positive aspects of battery-powered/electric equipment?**
Check all that apply.

67%

Decibel level

57%

Easy to maintain

53%

Ease of use

42%

Environmental impact

39%

Weight of the equipment

21%

Easy to repair

13%

Better ROI over time

10%

Availability



Mike Kowalski

When Ford rolled out its PowerBoost hybrid truck with a 7.2-kilowatt on-board generator, “that is the moment we knew we were ready to convert,” Novak says.

Since then, Serpico has been gradually phasing out its gas-guzzling trucks to the hybrids, realizing double the gas mileage while attaining on-the-road charging capabilities that Novak deemed essential for running a battery-powered business.

Today, about 45% of Serpico’s equipment fleet is battery-operated and he estimates complete conversion by 2030, mostly due to production lag time on the trucks.

“It’s very robust equipment,” he says. “The crews don’t expect it to be so powerful and robust, but it is. The mowers have steel bodies and a heavy-duty feel. They are all zero-turn and we run sizes from 36 to 72 inches.”

Mike Kowalski launched his battery-only crew in 2022 and it operates on residential maintenance properties throughout Ann Arbor, Mich., where Great Outdoors is based. From mowers to blowers, everything plugs into the trailer, and the electric truck charges in a station at the shop.

Each of the company’s 18 crews is equipped with at least one electric blower following Ann Arbor’s passing of a ban on gas-powered blowers, effective June 1.

“We are migrating in this direction, and I don’t feel it’s a bad thing,” Kowalski says, adding that technicians like the quiet nature of equipment and clients are amazed they don’t hear the crew coming.

“I like being ahead of the curve,” he says, expecting to have two all-battery crews running by early spring next year.

‘QUITE AN ENDEAVOR.’ From charging strategy to addressing a learning curve with crew member training, plus learning battery lingo like amperage draw, shifting to battery is “quite an endeavor,” Kowalski says.

“The first thing I wanted to know was, ‘Is this really viable?’” he says. “Can we get in a full day’s work when most of the batteries for handhelds say they last 45 to 50 minutes? We just wanted to make sure this would actually work, and when we got the (truck) and realized we can drive around, pull a trailer and get enough power from the truck, we knew a battery crew would work.”

Kowalski didn’t spend for the truck with larger electric charge capacity. The “normal range” is about 220 miles. On a daily basis, the crew uses half of its power.

Gradually acquiring and testing equipment, he built the battery crew one piece at a time. Its focus is residential lawns, and because the mowers reserve power while idling, there’s plenty of charge to manage the route.

For smaller equipment with limited run times, Kowalski invested in multiple batteries so the crew can simply switch them out and dock the depleted batteries on the truck’s charger to reboot.

During the past couple of years, Kowalski has adopted battery-powered equipment in other categories such as chainsaws, cut-off saws and hedge trimmers.

Investment is the operative word because the equipment and trucks do cost more. Kowalski hasn’t exactly figured out the return on investment, but the mower he purchased in 2018 is

Are you aware of any **existing or developing efforts to ban gas equipment** in your community or state?

YES
46%
NO
54%

Are you aware of **any hour restrictions when using gas equipment** in your state or community?

YES
43%
NO
57%

still running strong. “That’s six years, and longer than I typically keep gas-powered mowers,” he says.

FormLA in Los Angeles, Calif., only uses people and electric-powered equipment — meaning crews prefer elbow grease to gas and batteries over rumbling engines. “The costs associated with going electric are outweighed by the health benefits alone,” says Oscar Ortega, landscaping maintenance care manager.



Oscar Ortega

Some clients with asthma or allergies seek out FormLA “because they know the impact of having cleaner air near their home,” Ortega says.

Also, the crews feel better at the end of the day. “We learned working behind a gas-powered mower or blower takes a long-term toll on lung and heart health. What’s remarkable is we can actually feel the difference in our day-to-day health,” he says.

Ortega adds, “Most of us prefer to sweep or rake for the exercise and more aesthetic results, but the battery-powered blowers help in expansive spaces or on difficult materials like gravel.”

FormLA’s use of mowers is somewhat limited. Most clients cultivate grassy-meadow lawns. “Our battery-powered mowers are used on the few sites that still have turf and where clients prefer a more tailored look,” Ortega says.

For Jesse Smith at Royal Greens in Frederick, Md., sampling battery-powered sprayers and blowers for his lawn care business began about eight years ago. Back then, the equipment was clunky, and the entire unit had to be plugged in to charge vs. the battery packs they use today.

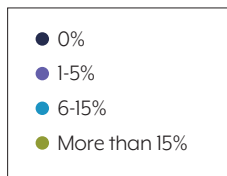
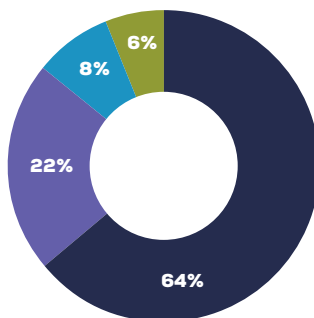
The switch has been positive for productivity and reduced callbacks.

The alternative is hand-pump sprayers, and those are no good for crews, he says.

“We are using materials more effectively because of the way they are uniformly pumped out,” Smith says. “We’re getting



What percentage of your customers **have requested crews that use battery-powered equipment?**



better weed control and using the battery sprayers is easier on the guys.”

KNOCK OFF THE NOISE. The flashing light indicating mowers are in operation is helpful since the machines’ purr is like “cruising around in a Tesla,” says Kowalski, noting that even the high-torque spinning blades operate in hush mode.

“We had clients comment on how quiet the crew is and one person put up an online review saying, ‘I hope you start another crew like this,’” he says. A crew member remarked that he no longer has to feel guilty about arriving at a property at 7:30 a.m. to beat the heat because no one resting indoors will hear a growling gas mower.

Ortega says when FormLA first started using battery-powered equipment, a crew showed up at a client’s site — and he was waiting for the team’s arrival. He missed it altogether because the machines were so whisper-like he didn’t realize they were maintaining the property until he walked outdoors after they were gone and saw the manicured results.

“He emailed us with kudos,” Ortega says. “Even though he was listening for us, he didn’t realize we were there. He didn’t hear the noise. He didn’t smell the fumes.”

In many Los Angeles communities, gas-powered blowers are banned because of noise and pollution concerns, he adds. “Some landscapers risk fines on themselves and their clients,” he says. “We don’t, and it is noticed.”

Billy Courtney injected the noise factor into the tagline of Bentonville, Ark.-based SparkLawn: Go Green. Go Quiet.

“A lot of our residential clients work from home and the most common feedback is,

2024 State Of The Battery-Powered Equipment Market



Impending gas-powered equipment bans in some municipalities has led to an increased use in battery-powered equipment.



‘We didn’t know you guys were there,’ and that’s the best thing,” Courtney says. “They say, ‘I was able to take my Zoom meeting and I didn’t feel like I had to apologize to everyone on the call.’ That is a consistent drumbeat.”

On the commercial side with clients like Starbucks, car dealerships and banks where business is conducted outdoors, SparkLawn doesn’t have to schedule early morning, late evening or weekend jobs to avoid disrupting business. “Most of the feedback is about noise,” Courtney says. “What we haven’t gotten yet overtly is, ‘Thank you for doing your job to slow climate change,’ or, ‘Thank you for creating green jobs in our region,’ though those are real benefits.”

SOMETHING DIFFERENT. Before launching SparkLawn, Courtney worked in the media advertising and technology space, heavily focused on consumer-packaged goods. His location in Bentonville, home of Walmart, is a retailer’s mecca.

Courtney worked with Walmart, Coca-Cola, Nestle and others selling ad-tech space. He made the switch to landscaping a year ago when he launched SparkLawn, desiring a “hyper-local venture that is literally tethered to the community.”

SparkLawn is the area’s only battery-only landscape maintenance firm serving residential clients and commercial property owners, including national brands. “We are forward thinking, and we knew there was a better way to do an everyday business, and that is why we made the decision,” he says of the battery-exclusive organization.

Courtney drives a Tesla and equips his business with electric trucks. The commercial-grade battery mowers crews operate stand up in retail environments, he says. He found hand-held batteries to “wear out fast” and moved to a backpack system with attachments including string trimmer and blower, calling the configuration and power capacity “a huge win.”

“We have the flexibility of running multiple devices, so on a big landscape cleanup day, we can trim shrubs, edge and blow debris on a single charge,” Courtney says.

While SparkLawn had to “cycle through and test equipment” to find the right fit, partnering with a nearby dealer who can provide support and training has been invaluable. And the equipment quality has even been surprising in some cases now that he recognizes which pieces can hold up to commercial use.

For instance, the blade tip speed on mowers is fast, some achieving up to 18 miles per hour, he says. This translates to a clean cut even in especially thick or dew-covered turf. He has noticed improvements, too.

“There is a better weight-to-torque ratio, so it doesn’t jump as much, and the manufacturer has done a nice job with the width of the tires and balancing the weight so it’s more centered,” he says. “You can see and feel the difference in the control you have.”

What are the **barriers to increasing your use of battery-powered/electric commercial equipment?**

Check all that apply.

74%

Run time is too short

69%

Equipment/battery are too expensive

61%

Recharging the equipment takes too long

48%

Not enough power

20%

Don't think they are environmentally-friendly

13%

I don't know how to perform maintenance or how to find a mechanic to service them

10%

No barriers

6%

I'm not familiar with them

5%

Hassle of training the crew how to use

2%

I don't know where to get the equipment

Comments: “Our biggest challenge has been solving the charging infrastructure required for the batteries. We’ve done that this year and we’re now full steam ahead in replacing all of our 2-cycle equipment, and will then work on replacing larger gas mowers with electric options.”

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LEVEL UP. “You can’t just buy a bunch of new, expensive battery-powered equipment, dump it on your crews and say, ‘Here, you’re going from gas to electric,’” Novak says. “They will revolt.”

Novak’s move to electric was gradual and intentional, supported by in-house training. “We developed it in the field, translated it to paper and then established an e-learning site for our company where we nest all those trainings,” he says. “When you join the company, you go through an orientation.”

Battery-powered equipment responds differently than gas engines.

“You have to change your methodology,” Novak says.

For instance, when Serpico introduced battery blowers, crews naturally reverted to full-blast mode (when there is a power boost mode, it begs to be activated). “Your training program has to incorporate how to use the different mechanics,” Novak says.

The battery mowers Serpico uses go about twice as fast as gas-powered models. “You get so much torque and traction because you have more RPMs on the blades — so you can cut better and faster, improving productivity.”

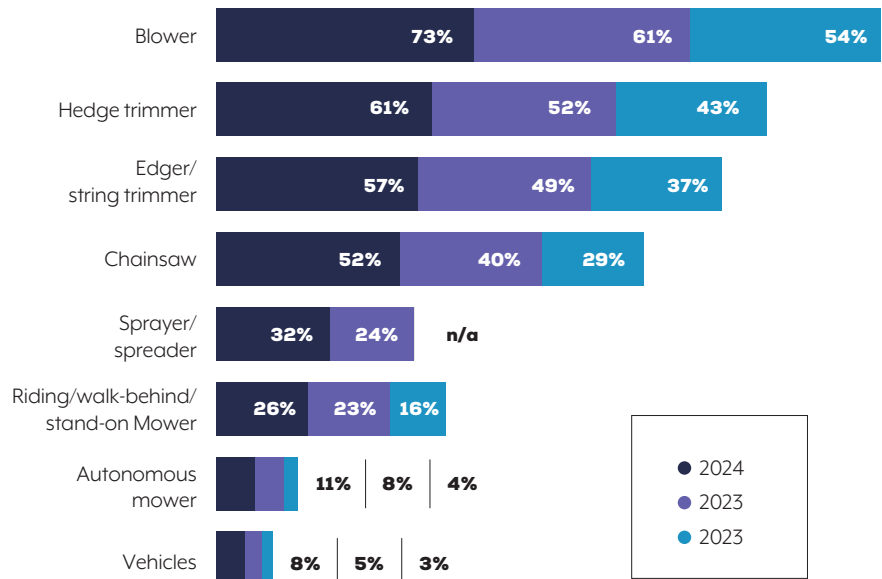
But the zero-to-hero acceleration — much like the Tesla — means taking care to not “spin out” and damage the grass, Kowalski says. “There was a learning curve, but now our technicians have gotten good with it.”

NO GOING BACK. Cruise the power equipment aisles of a box store in many regions throughout the country and the offerings are largely battery-powered. “There is a normalization of the equipment that is happening at the entry-point level, which is great,” Courtney says. “We’ll continue to see customer education plus some regulatory actions largely predicated on noise and pollution reduction.”

Courtney adds, “Within 10 years, if someone is out in a retail complex operating a gas blower, people will think, ‘I can’t believe you’re still using that.’ There will be

What **battery-powered/electric equipment** do you use at your landscaping or lawn care company?

Check all that apply.



“Within 10 years, if someone is out in a retail complex operating a gas blower, people will think, ‘I can’t believe you’re still using that.’ There will be a stigma associated with it. That’s the way I see things going.”

— BILLY COURTNEY, SPARKLAWN

a stigma associated with it. That’s the way I see things going.”

It’s not just a California thing.

Smith says nearby Montgomery County, Md., famous for its pesticide ban, also issued noise ordinances and restrictions on gas-powered hand-held equipment “for now,” he says, hinting there’s no going back. Which county is next?

“We see a philosophical change in Ann Arbor,” Kowalski says, relating that the city pledged to be carbon neutral by 2050. He is encouraged by the progress in the battery-powered outdoor equipment sector but not ready to deploy an electric fleet to a large-scale commercial property that requires a daylong crew.

“(Battery) has a place on commercial sites, however,” he says, adding that it has been a few years since he operated his electric crew on a 35-acre property. “We haven’t been able to test our battery crew out on that one yet.”

Novak suggests establishing a relationship with a provider who offers battery-powered options and testing equipment in the field.

“Educate yourself,” he adds, specifically pointing to the importance of a plan on how to charge while on the road. “This is not a gas mower. There’s a lot you need to know about how to support these batteries.” **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

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OF MOWING YOUR LAWN

Building blocks for GROWTH

The Lawn & Landscape Business Builders Summit was 1.5 days of jam-packed education on all things M&A — here's a recap of two sessions.

The inaugural Lawn & Landscape Business Builders Summit took place May 22-23 in Nashville. The event included panels on everything from preparing to sell your business, Private Equity 101, growing organically and more. Here is just a snapshot of some of the discussions. **We'll see you for Year 2 in Nashville — May 7-8, 2025.**



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When the time's right

It may hit you from the moment you sell. It might take six months down the road. But at some point, the personal aspect of selling your company — the one you likely spent years building up — is going to hit you.

Allen Sweeney was one of four panelists to tell Business Builders Summit attendees that there's a real emotional aspect to selling your company. Sweeney sold to private equity in 2022, and he advises anyone looking to sell to strongly consider how they'll process that sale. Will it affect how you interact with your family, friends or colleagues?

Tom Heaviland, with Verde Property Services, remembers how surprisingly emotional the process was for him. It was a Friday morning at the start of November, and he was surrounded by attorneys and family members. When he heard, "Congratulations, Tom, you're part of the BrightView family now," it resonated with him. He had run the business with his dad for over 13 years prior to the sale.

"It was truly a family business," Heaviland says. "You build this thing up, it's your baby. You nurture it from infancy to adolescence to adulthood. You hand it over...and it's not yours anymore. That hit me pretty hard."

Of course, that's not to suggest there are regrets. Not all sales are created the same way, but understanding the why of the sale is critical. Heaviland says the reasons can range from a business owner feeling like they've reached the ceiling of their opportunity to it being a seller's market.

"Try to determine, 'What's motivating me at this time?'" Heaviland says.

KNOW YOUR WHY. Sweeney says he knew he wanted to offer his employees things he couldn't do without private equity backing, and today, he's writing bigger checks and has given away more than seven figures in additional money to his team.



Left: Attendees were able to ask panelists questions about their experience selling to private equity.

Above: Panelists advised attendees on what steps need to be taken ahead of time to prepare a company for an eventual sale.



"We wanted to create something in the landscape industry where we can make a big difference for people," he says. "There's life-changing moments that will continue to come for those people that are generational."

J.T. Price, the CEO at Landscape Workshop, adds that it's important for an owner to know what problems they're trying to solve. Are they trying to retire in a year, or are they hoping to run the business but need more private equity backing? Price says the companies looking to buy can't answer those existential, more personal questions — only the owners and their families can do that.

"If you can't have a boss, you need to be self-actualized with yourself," he says. When Landscape Workshop has acquired companies, he's seen owners do anything from leave entirely to adopting and becoming the platform. "You kind of meet the sellers where they are in terms of what they're trying to achieve," he adds.

Jeff Mullen, the director of M&A finance at Ruppert Landscape, says there is a lot of value in staying on and operating post-transaction. "A great way to think through it is to just have conversations," Mullen says. "Think about your time horizon."

GETTING STARTED. Mullen's on the other side of the table during M&A discussions, as he's the one navigating acquisitions. His goal is to help companies understand the process and come to a handshake deal before the letter of intent to help establish the framework for a potential partnership.

"My role is to limit surprises," Mullen says.

Price recommends lining up an M&A lawyer before even testing the market. While folks like Mullen help landscapers digest the process, it's important to have another set of eyes on fundamental deal terms and non-competes, which Price adds are getting really hairy. Landscape Workshop has seen two or three deals of their 30 result in mid-level employees leaving and stealing clients.

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Knowing key terminology like “platform” or “strategic” is also vital. Mullen says becoming part of a platform means you’re still fully in charge, but you need to report to your partners now. Joining a strategic means you’re responsible for a region. Either way, back-office burdens like payroll and hiring responsibilities are lightened, but you’re still tasked with driving the business.

“Our partners are responsible for managing the customers and managing the service,” he says.

Sweeney says that not every business — and not every owner — is meant to be a platform.

“I think when people think about the acquisition side, they don’t understand the language that’s being spoken,” he says. He encourages sellers to ask potential partner questions to see what life may look like once the deal’s done. Aligning with missions and personalities that fit your own is key. “You’re going to ask yourself,” he says, “What does that look like post-close?”

Heaviland also suggests surrounding yourself with good counsel. In some cases, if you plan on exiting the business entirely, identifying the right person, or people, as next-in-command could be crucial. They may be leading the business you built once you sell. Are they prepared for that task?

“Knowing what’s going to be left over is critical because when you do transact and you close, there’s no un-ringing that bell,” Heaviland says. “When you make a decision of this magnitude, you want it to be the right decision for you at that time.”



Keep the culture

Mario Hernandez likened a company to the human body, suggesting that the people are at the heart of the business and the team’s finances are the brain.

If all of that’s true, then Hernandez says the culture is the blood, flowing through all parts of the business.

“It sets the precedent for which way you’re going,” says Hernandez, the president of Royal Landscaping. Hernandez joined Charlene Chacon, Brent Moore, Zack Stratton and moderator Brad Stephenson during a panel discussion on culture at the event.

Moore says everyone has different definitions of culture, but he aligned with the other panelists in saying that it largely comes down to core values. If folks can’t get in line with that, they’re unlikely to last at his company, Outdoor Living Southeast. Chacon, who is residential team manager at DesignScapes Colorado, says the core values also help define what quality of work they’re doing for the clients.

Stratton, the CEO of Elite Grounds + Stratton and Bratt, says anyone can mow the grass pretty well, but “generally, the differentiator is our culture,” he says. “We hire, fire and promote based on that.”

CULTURE MISTAKES. But as companies grow, maintaining a consistent culture becomes more difficult. Stratton says he would often promote people for spots they weren’t ready to manage, which was detrimental to the employee and the company alike.

Meanwhile, Chacon says hiring the wrong employees in the first place is a problem. Often, she prefers finding employees who have “bright eyes,” who appear to be motivated and driven.

“That’s more valuable than looking at a resume with all these bullet points,” Chacon says.

Moore admits that one of his biggest mistakes is not getting rid of “culture killer” employees fast enough.

Hernandez adds that this leadership is vital. As he’s tried improving his team’s culture around safety, he’s noticed it was much easier when there were just a handful of employees. Now that Royal Landscaping’s exceeded 60, it’s tougher.

So, when the employees see Hernandez riding around on mowers without safety glasses, they think it’s okay to do that, too.

“When you’re a leader, you have to lead by example,” he says. “That’s something you really have to embody every day.”

CULTURE BUILDING BLOCKS. The panelists all pointed out things they’ve noticed have helped bolster their company’s respective cultures.

Chacon says finding ways to celebrate business awards like on team safety is important.

Moore says quarterly, offsite meetings have lifted team morale. In one instance, Outdoor Living Southeast paid everyone for eight hours and took them out in Jacksonville to play airsoft and eat at a Brazilian steakhouse. He says some of the restaurant meals that leadership takes for granted are opportunities rarely afforded to all of their employees.

Hernandez says he’s also found talking to his employees in their native language is important. Stratton adds that everyone on his leadership team is bilingual. They list everything on signage around the office in both languages but list Spanish first.

“Meeting the people where they are is really key,” he says. “That really resonates with a lot of our guys. We’re stewards of our business...It’s just created a really good atmosphere.” **L&L**

Panelists Mario Hernandez and Charlene Chacon agree culture is key to growing a business.

The author is an associate editor with Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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Keeping Business Moving with New Cool-Season Herbicide Options

In the world of lawn and landscape, the introduction of new products can not only change how you service your clients but also how you operate your business. Envu, a trusted name in the industry, is entering the cool-season herbicide market with four new herbicide products specifically designed to help operators control cool-season weeds and open up new avenues for growth.

“Envu has been in the warm-season business for a long time,” says Zac Reicher Ph.D., of the Envu Green Solutions Team. “Now, we’re focusing on cool-season herbicides to better serve our cool-season lawn care operators.”

The introduction of these new herbicides expands the portfolio of options available to LCOs and their opportunities. As Reicher explains, “While we’ve excelled with warm-season herbicides, it’s time to give more attention to our cool-season weed control.” With that new attention, LCOs have access to products tailored to their specific challenges — helping them not only handle tough weeds but also in tough weather conditions.

The new lineup

Acclaim® Accelerate

Building on the success of Acclaim® Extra for annual grassy weed control, this herbicide features a unique, fast-acting formulation of quinclorac. It’s specifically designed to improve absorption into the plant and controls the full range of crabgrass stages. And with improved rainfastness, it can help you get back control of your schedule through tough forecasts.

- Quick-acting formula targeting all stages of crabgrass, including the problematic intermediate 3-5 tiller stage
- Improved control in moderate drought stress and improved rainfastness

Terradex™ Crabgrass & Broadleaf

This product is highly effective against a wide range of weeds, including crabgrass and 190 other broadleaf and grassy weeds. It controls those difficult late-spring and summer weeds with a combination of three active ingredients and is the perfect cleanup for areas that didn’t receive a preemergence herbicide or are showing weed breakthrough.

- Best use: Early to late summer applications on mixed stands with broadleaf weeds, annual grasses, crabgrass, foxtail, etc.
- Great for early summer hot spots with mixed weedy stands of annual grasses and BDLVs

Terradex™ Quick Strike

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- Works quickly with visible results in 24-48 hours and plant death occurring within 10-14 days
- Rainfast in as little as six hours

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- Controls the toughest weeds from spring to late fall on 83 labeled broadleaf weeds
- Best use: Tough-to-control spreading weeds like ground ivy and wild violets, or woody weeds in no mow areas on the golf course.

Tailored for lawn care operators

One of the standout features of these herbicides is their versatility. They can be used in ride-on sprayers and are labeled for applications at less than half a gallon per thousand square feet. “These herbicides are designed for use in challenging times of the year. They’re premium products, ideal for harder-to-control periods,” says Reicher, emphasizing their utility during June, July, August and sometimes in spring.

For lawn care operators, understanding the appropriate application techniques and timing is crucial. Reicher highlights the importance of using the right adjuvants to maximize control while minimizing issues like phytotoxicity. Using the right adjuvants can be highly effective, but also come with risks especially in warm summer weather. Use adjuvants that you’re comfortable with from previous experience.

Ready for the market

These new herbicides are available now. Envu is committed to ensuring these products meet the highest standards, offering competitive pricing without compromising on quality.

For those looking to enhance their cool-season turf management, the latest herbicides from Envu represent a significant advancement. Contact your area sales manager or the Green Solutions Team for more information and to ensure you’re ready to take advantage of these new products.

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Water hyacinth

SU

By Jimmy Miller

NEW SPECIES MAKE AQUATIC
WEED CONTROL EVEN TRICKIER.

Surfacing this summer

DIVING INTO WATER MANAGEMENT MEANS controlling a diverse range of weeds that can devastate a pond or aquatic body. Unfortunately, applying that control incorrectly could also spell irreparable harm to a complex ecosystem.

“From the landscaper side of things, often times, one of the first things we tend to run into is a general misunderstanding of how aquatic plants goes,” says Stephen Enloe, a professor at the University of Florida and invasive plant extension specialist. “This is not simply going out and applying management.”



Uneducated landscapers working in water management can cause massive fish kills, harm to birds or the loss of other aquatic plants. Understanding basic aquatic biology can help landscapers prevent common mistakes. These include weed misidentification and applying the wrong control; applying the wrong treatments at the wrong time of year; and being too reactionary with chemical control.

That's not to mention that all sorts of invasive weeds are spreading nationwide as a result of aquarium trade and boating across state lines. Karin Kettenring, an associate professor of wetland ecology at Utah State University, adds that mud on construction or landscaping equipment can transfer some of those seeds to different bodies of water, too.

"Be careful to not be a part of the problem," Kettenring says. "We're talking about transportation soil and dirt on machinery, so there are protocols on best practices for cleaning equipment."

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Kettenring joined Enloe and Brittany Chesser, an aquatic vegetation management program specialist, in explaining ways landscapers can approach weed control in the water. Plus, they offered examples of some of the weeds they expect to surface this summer.

THE RIGHT THING. Texas is home to a wide variety of ponds — 1.3 million of them. An influx of people moved to the state during COVID-19, and cattle and livestock owners use those ponds for watering. In the meantime, Chesser — with the department of rangeland, wildlife and fisheries at Texas A&M — has seen livestock trampling down slopes and dragging in different vegetation. Plus, there’s that patented Texas heat.

“When it’s a long, hot day, and you have cattle waiting in that pond, they’re constantly dropping nutrients in the water,” she says, adding that Texas has had some extreme drought conditions over the last

two years. “We’re constantly losing water through evaporation throughout the summer. What some people don’t realize is that when we’re losing the water, those nutrients aren’t evaporating. They’re staying in that pond and they’re compounding.”

So, for those working with water, doing the right thing matters. Everything they do in these ponds dramatically affects the watershed and vice versa. Chesser says that learning different types of management is essential for those working in landscape construction, too.

That’s not just important in the southeastern United States. In Florida, Enloe says the preferred method of control has been chemical treatments, but there are other options that are worth considering like mechanical harvesters for bigger bodies of water. Doing the research to find the right biological controls, like grass carp, can help keep aquatic weeds at bay, too, as they feed on some submerged aquatic plants and

some floating plants. Landscapers would require the right permits in Florida to introduce this control into a body of water, so that’s likely true in most other states as well. They’re also subject to predation, so managing the biological controls can be a pain.

There are also lake lawn mowers for those larger spots, or there’s always the option to hand pull. Enloe says this is often exhausting though.

“People can do that on extremely small scales, but even on a pond on a tenth of an acre, you can wear yourself out pretty fast,” he says.

So, that means herbicides get the most “bang for your buck,” Enloe says. But the number of available herbicides is slim compared to options available in the turfgrass world. The two active ingredients that are most common are diquat and glyphosate. It’s hard to get more approved beyond that.

“They’re subject to extensive aquatic testing prior to EPA approval,” Enloe says. “We



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have to do a lot more due diligence on the safety, what its persistence is going to be, are you going to have problems irrigating? All of that information has to be vetted very rigorously.”

It’s a good thing there’s rigorous testing, Enloe adds, because incorrect water management is so damaging. There’s also a great deal of negative public perception, especially around the ingredient glyphosate, the subject of a number of notable lawsuits over the last decade. But he’s still recommending it as a treatment option when used properly.

“The reality of it is, if the science changes, I’m going to be the first one waiving the red flag,” Enloe says. “Until that happens, I’m not going to be reactionary.”

Chesser reiterates the point that there’s less options available for those working in the water. She says there are much more restrictions because water can easily flow in to public water bodies or to your neigh-

bor’s properties in a flooding event. “Our toolbox is pretty limited, so you have to be pretty mindful of that. There’s no silver bullet,” she says.

“I think the number one thing is, (you should) realize you’re not working with a two-dimensional system. You’re looking at a one-surface acre pond, but there’s a lot going on underneath that,” she adds, saying that’s going to make a huge difference to anyone trying to manage something. “We

talk in terms of acre feet, which is surface acres versus surface depth.”

Out west, in Utah, Kettenring recommends landscapers follow best practices and immediately clean equipment before leaving a jobsite. She also points landscapers toward their local university’s extension programs, which help dispense valuable public information. It’s there they’ll have pamphlets, websites, YouTube videos and personnel focused on aquatic invasives.



I think the number one thing is, (you should) realize you’re not working with a two-dimensional system. You’re looking at a one-surface acre pond, but there’s a lot going on underneath that.”

— BRITTANY CHESSEY, AQUATIC VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM SPECIALIST,
DEPARTMENT OF RANGELAND, WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES AT TEXAS A&M

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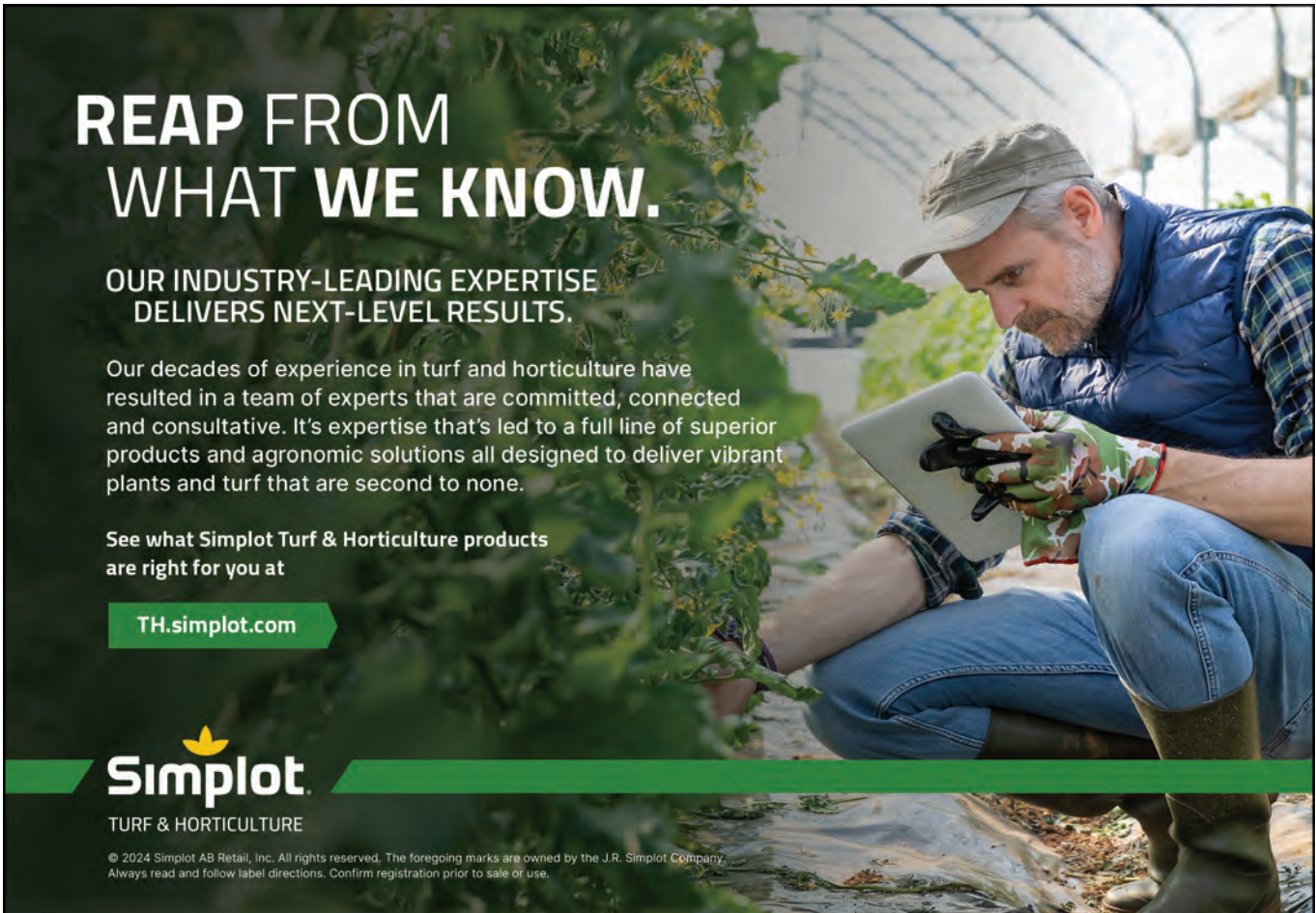
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“Be aware of best practices and don’t be a part of the problem,” she says.

THE WORST OF THE WEEDS. Enloe says there’s a number of species that fall under floating plants and a plethora of water hyacinth and giant salvinia, an aquatic fern that’s capable of tremendous vegetative reproduction. They’ve seen that one spread across the southeast in recent years, and it’s a particular worry for those studying aquatic weeds.

“It’s one of tremendous concern because it’s one of these species that tends to layer across itself,” he says. “They can cause major ecosystem change.”

He adds that hydrilla water weed is a classic submersed plant that’s been a problem in the southeastern United States, but over the last 10 to 20 years, it’s appeared northwards, as far north as Michigan. Without great biological controls, and the fact fishermen love hydrillas



Giant Salvinia

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because they feed the fish, it can be a tricky weed to mitigate.

“These things are not all the same, but they are finding their niche in waters farther and farther north,” Enloe says. “That’s going to be a really big problem for a lot of the country that’s simply not ready for it.”

Enloe says milfoil, a submersed species,

is now prominent across the northern tier of the U.S. “We’re learning that some of the hybrids can be more aggressive than the Asian water milfoil,” he says. “I expect the hybrid version to be a big problem across the northern tier United States.”

Meanwhile, flowering rush, which reproduces so many different ways, is



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Hydrilla Water Weed



Algal blooms and other aquatic vegetation continue to be an environmental problem, particularly troublesome in the Southeast.

becoming a bigger problem because of how easily it spreads. Enloe also referred to floating heart and alligator weeds as common issues landscapers will need to thwart this summer.

Chesser jokes that the running gag between those in her department is that at least they’re not Florida — there’s so many issues in that state that are still spreading elsewhere, but they’re not quite elsewhere



in those spots with more ports. It's encouraging for land-locked states that this won't change, but there are still problems like curly-leaf pondweed that are troubling.

Kettenring adds that invasive species like quagga mussels are worth looking out for, too, but the encouraging thing is that states are becoming more aware of

these issues. They have checkpoints and protocols across state lines. It's all about managing the vectors carrying any of these weeds or species.

"They're not totally out of control in these regions," she says. **L&L**

The author is an associate editor with Lawn & Landscape magazine.



Flowering Rush

yet. She says algal blooms can be tricky because people often think their ponds are self-sustaining when they see those algae mats, when in actuality, fish kills could be happening below the surface.

"Aquatic vegetation is the number one reason for oxygen fish kills," she says.

Kettenring says the reason coastal states experience more pressures is due to how much international trade and travel exists

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Father and son duo,
Paul Rizzuto and
Austin Smith, started
Orange Blossom
Lawn Care in 2019.

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ng opportunities

Orange Blossom Lawn Care's persistence has translated into serving high-profile commercial accounts and even some acquisitions to promote growth.

By Kim Lux

Paul Rizzuto spent decades in the corporate world, but when his company asked him to relocate, he knew it was time for a change.

The Florida native decided instead to start a landscaping company with his son,

Austin Smith.

"My son, who is 33, has always been doing landscaping. From right when he was out of school, he's owned his own small company," Rizzuto says. "But he's always been a one-man band. He said to me one day, 'Why don't we do this together?'"

And that's how Orange Blossom Lawn Care was born.

"This was April 2019 when we put it all together," Rizzuto says. "We sat down, came up with a name and thought about what the business model would be and how we'd structure it. We wanted to do residential work and keep it in a small area. Maybe a 10-mile radius."

By 2021 the company reached \$205,000 in revenue. The following year they grew by 49% and surpassed \$400,000 in revenue.

Nowadays, Rizzuto says the company is growing by leaps and bounds. He predicts they will break the \$1 million barrier by the end of 2024.

"As of today, we've acquired three other small companies and are sitting with about 240 accounts," he says. "We are the service providers for Costco and Buc-ee's — which are huge clients of ours that multi-million-dollar compa-



nies had before us. We ended up taking the business from those places because of what we do and how we do it."

Rizzuto also attributes their success to the thriving area of St. Johns, Florida, where the company is based.

BACK TO THE BEGINNING. But Orange Blossom hasn't always been budding with opportunities. Rizzuto says he remembers the early days fondly when he and his son were out pounding the pavement trying to drum up new business.

"On May 10, 2019, just the two of us with our printed business cards, we picked neighborhoods we thought would do good for us and we just started driving around. We parked and put cards in door jams or handed them out to homeowners and we did that for five days the first

week,” he recalls. “The first week we had two phone calls. And then it began to grow. At first, we had enough accounts to fill half of Monday and then we’d start handing out more cards — and then we had enough accounts to fill Monday and part of Tuesday.”

Fairly quickly though, Rizzuto and Smith were able to fill up their week with plenty of jobs.

“I was out doing the work with my son every day,” Rizzuto adds. “It was just the two of us and it got to the point where he and I were doing like 24 accounts a day, five days a week.”

Though not in the field as much now, with a small team of 12 employees, Rizzuto says his clients still receive personalized service from him — something he says makes a big difference.

“When you called to get a quote, you got my direct phone,” he says. “It’s still

like that today. All my customers know me and email me. Even though we now have a customer service department and email addresses and all that... quite honestly my customers know that if they ask me a question, they get an answer straight from me.”

RADIUS REVISING. As Orange Blossom was gaining momentum, Rizzuto admits it was tempting to expand or even take on any and all clients who called — but he says sticking to his guns, and the company’s 10-mile radius, was the best way to start their upward growth.

He suggests other fledgling companies do the same.

“Control your area. The best thing we did was limit the area we were going to go in,” Rizzuto says. “That’s really hard when you’re starting out because we got calls outside of our zone and you’re eager to take on

revenue... so you immediately want to take on everything. We never did that.”

That waiting worked off and after about a year of grinding away, Rizzuto says the hard work really started to pay off.

“Initially we were purely residential, but about a year into it, I went to do a residential quote and the gentleman asked if we did commercial accounts. I told him we didn’t have any, but we would do them,” Rizzuto recalls. “He told me he was the general manager for a waste management company...he didn’t like who he had out there, and I gave him a competitive bid to take it on.

“I figured I’d bid and if they take it, I’d begin to fill in the area in between,” he adds.

Rizzuto says he didn’t feel bad about not sticking to the status quo and says the company was well-established enough to take on the task of a large-scale commercial account.

“For us, our residential accounts were anywhere from \$135 to \$150 a month and we had this three-tier price range based on size,” he explains. “But here’s an account that’s going to pay us \$1,000 a month. We knew we needed to branch out...Once that happened, we started to just open ourselves up to some other things.”

From there, Rizzuto says he found himself constantly bidding against several multi-million-dollar national companies at every turn.

Despite the tough competition, Rizzuto says it was his persistence that paid off the most when Orange Blossom garnered its first Costco account.



The company, which provides residential and commercial maintenance, is based in Florida.

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“We sat down, came up with a name and thought about what the business model would be and how we’d structure it. We wanted to do residential work and keep it in a small area. Maybe a 10-mile radius.”

— Paul Rizzuto, president and director, Orange Blossom Lawn Care

“Costco opened up, and I contacted them right when they opened,” he says. “They told me they were under contract for the first year but to contact them when the year was up. I maintained contact with them through emails that were never answered. And then one day the general manager answered the phone and said, ‘Your follow-up is incredible. Give me a quote.’”

Once again, the company was up against some hefty competition.

“We bid against them and won the job,” Rizzuto says.

During this time, Orange Blossom’s new headquarters was also blooming. Which has been a godsend, according to Rizzuto, as the company’s radius is expanding.

“Initially I had an office in my house, and I rented two different storage facilities and rented parking spots and garages to keep equipment and supplies and park our trucks and trailers,” Rizzuto says. “Now we’ve moved into a facility in St. Augustine, and we have a 3,600-square-foot warehouse and an office.

“From our new headquarters we’ve expanded a bit,” he adds. “The big change has been once we took on Buc-ee’s in Daytona, we now picked up three condo associations along St. Augustine beach. When all is said and done — we’ll probably have a 60-mile radius headed south, and probably only about 20 miles headed north. We haven’t gone any further north than when we first started.”

UNANTICIPATED ACQUISITIONS. Not only has been getting some high-profile commercial accounts been a game-changer for Orange Blossom, but so has a recent series of acquisitions.

Rizzuto says acquiring the maintenance divisions of three area companies has also given the company a much-needed boost.

“In 2022, I bought out a company that

was lawn care and irrigation — but they were moving solely to irrigation,” he says. “They had some residential, but more importantly, some good HOA clients and large church campuses, so I bought some of their equipment and I bought their accounts. That supplemented us and from there we’ve continued to grow.”

Even now, Rizzuto says that company still handles irrigation on some of Orange Blossom’s biggest accounts to this day.

“I basically outsource the artisan trades like irrigation,” he says. “They make sure it’s all right and good. I want those relationships to morph and stay relevant. So now they do all the irrigation at all my big accounts like Buc-ee’s and Costco. They bill me monthly for preventative maintenance and it’s billed into my contract with the client.”

Rizzuto says he isn’t out there hunting for companies to acquire. He adds that having good relationships with others in the industry has helped tremendously.

“With the first one, I got to know them at a home show where we both had tables looking to drum up new business,” he says. “I met the son of the owner and then a year later they contacted me out of nowhere to see if I’d be interested in buying accounts when they go out of the maintenance business.”

And whether it’s at a home show or at the gas station, Rizzuto says these connections are critical.

“(The second acquisition) was just a guy I got to know in the mornings when we were gassing up,” he says. “All the crews seemed to go to the same gas station. Everybody would get their coffee and donuts and we’d say hello to each other and talk about the business... then one day he reached out to my son and said he was looking to sell at least half his company.”

Just recently, Orange Blossom marked

its third acquisition.

“I finalized buying the remaining accounts of a company,” he says. “I bought six large commercial accounts from them and about 18 to 20 residential accounts... It was someone that my son used to work for 10 years ago. He maintained contact with him. They own a spray company that does fertilization and pest control... I got to know him and built him into my quote for larger clients because we don’t do those services.”

Rizzuto says those acquisitions have filled in the density in St. Augustine. Now, he has his sights on everything between St. Augustine and Daytona.

WHAT HE WISH HE KNEW THEN. But all this growth wasn’t without its hardships.

According to Rizzuto, the company’s biggest struggle has always been a common plight — labor.

“Especially during the COVID times and coming out of that,” he says, “it was incredibly hard to find people to reply to ads and show up for interviews. People would accept the job and then not even show up the day they were supposed to be starting. People would show up and say, ‘This is too hard’ or ‘I’m too hot’ and leave in the middle of the day. We had at least two years’ worth of difficulties.”

Though the company’s labor issues aren’t as hard-pressed now.

“Luckily, my son had friends and had been doing this a long time, so we had several people who were consist with us,” he says. “We always had enough of a core to get the work done. We also picked up three or four guys last year who have stayed with us and then picked up a few new ones in the last month. They are doing very well. I feel like we’ve turned a corner on that problem.”

Another challenge Orange Blossom faced early on was having equipment

COMPANY PROFILE

spread out and stored off-site in different places.

"It made maintenance and upkeep very difficult," he says. "If you don't keep up with the maintenance of your equipment, you experience failures on the job and at the worst possible moments. We had a lot of trouble with that."

Another piece of advice Rizzuto has for new businesses is to keep equipment maintenance top of mind.

"If something breaks down or something goes wrong, and you don't show up for two or three days — that's the reason I got calls in this business," Rizzuto adds. "Even when you're small, you have to have the equipment to back you up. If equipment goes down — you're down. You cannot work."

Rizzuto notes it hasn't always been easy and running a successful company takes sacrifice. It was so much sacrifice that Rizzuto only recently started earning a salary



from the company.

"Luckily, we had enough working capital that if we needed things done, we got it done," he says. "I didn't draw a salary from the company, so any money that the company had coming in was always turned back in to upgrade and add things.

"I switched the company from an LLC to an S Corp effective Jan. 1, 2024," Rizzuto adds. "At that point I started drawing a salary."

Additionally, Rizzuto says it can be the

smallest of things that sets a company like Orange Blossom apart from the competition.

"The personal involvement in the beginning... I can't tell you how many customers are amazed by that," he says. "I know that's what frustrated me as a consumer, so I knew if I was going to do this, I was going to be accessible and be the responsible person making sure people got what they asked for."

And what they were asking for was world-class service, Rizzuto notes.

"It's about showing up on time. Showing up clean — with neat equipment, neat shirts and a clean appearance," he says. "You also have to do the work you said you were going to do. Those simple things are what propelled us." **L&L**

The author is an associate editor with *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

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ASK THE EXPERT

Q + A

with
Tim Baker



Director of Product Management – OPE; EGO Commercial

TIME IS MONEY, and maximizing uptime is crucial for successful landscaping. As professional landscape contractors (PLCs) shift from gas to battery-operated equipment, managing this new fuel source is essential. Tim Baker, Director of Product Management for EGO Commercial, offers guidance on making this transition smoothly and efficiently.

1 What are common misconceptions among PLCs when transitioning from gas to cordless equipment?

There's a common misconception that an overwhelming amount of batteries are needed on OPE trailers to last the day. PLCs should choose a unified battery platform allowing interchangeable use across equipment of all sizes. The more effectively PLCs manage their energy, the better they can control costs and minimize the number of batteries needed.

Additionally, there's often a belief that charging many batteries requires numerous chargers to be plugged in and organized. However, any time multiple electronic devices are plugged into a standard circuit, the risk of tripping a circuit breaker increases, because too many chargers will overload and trip the circuit.

2 What solutions does EGO Commercial offer to address these?

With the PGX™ Commercial Charging 1600W Hub, one standard 15-amp circuit is all you need—no expensive electrical upgrades are required. It's also flexible: the 1600W Hub can be mounted in a garage, vehicle, or mobile trailer to connect to any standard 120V outlet.

And it's scalable: each 1600W Hub connects to PGX™ Commercial Charging 3-Port Docks to charge up to three batteries at the same time, and as many as 24 3-Port Docks can be connected to charge up to 70 2.5Ah batteries overnight from one 15-amp circuit. Lastly, it's economical: unlike other chargers needing costly electrical upgrades and hardware, it's designed to be simpler and much less expensive. So as PLCs scale their PGX™ system, they can do it for a much lower cost than the competition. To solve for those instances where energy is depleted that in the gas world would require a quick stop at the gas station, we've also designed an off-the-grid solution: the PGX™ Commercial Charging Power Bank recharges up to eight 5.0Ah batteries. Using a 2.2kWh (40Ah) High-Capacity battery, it recharges batteries in the field without cables or special connections, recharging two in just 30 minutes.

3 How does a PLC go about calculating how many batteries they need?

New industry jargon can be daunting. EGO Commercial simplifies it and guides you through battery comparisons. Stick with me; it's about to get a bit technical, but the payoff is straightforward:

Watts is the unit of power measurement for cordless and the equivalent to horsepower in the gas world. Watts is calculated by multiplying Volts times Amps ($V \times A = W$). The equivalent to gas tank capacity in battery-speak is Watt-hours, the unit of energy. Watt-hours is calculated by multiplying Volts times Amp-hours ($V \times Ah = Wh$).

The more energy a battery contains, the more work it can do. For example, a 12Ah battery is an option for several voltage platforms, but not all 12Ah batteries are equal. Let's use a real-world example comparing 12Ah batteries on 18V and 56V platforms:

18V battery: $18V \times 12Ah = 216Wh$

56V battery: $56V \times 12Ah = 672Wh$

In this example, the 56V battery is more powerful and has more than three times the energy. That means three times more 18V batteries would be needed to harness the same amount of energy.

4 How is EGO Commercial simplifying the process of calculating PLC energy requirements?

Calculating energy needs when transitioning from gas to battery can be complicated, which is why we introduced the Power Manager, a web-based tool designed to help PLCs begin to answer the most important questions when converting to cordless: "Where do I begin and how?"

In a few steps, the Power Manager provides battery and charger recommendations based on your crew size, tools, equipment, workday length, and estimated trigger times, ensuring you have the run time needed to complete your typical workday.



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RAISE THE BAR

WITH JUSTIN WHITE
CEO OF K&D LANDSCAPING

JUSTIN@KNDLANDSCAPING.COM

RAISE THE BAR is a monthly column by Justin White, CEO of K&D Landscaping, written to help improve professionalism in the green industry.

TECHNOLOGY IS YOUR SUPERPOWER

→ WITH THE ANNUAL LAWN & LANDSCAPE TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE taking place this month, it seemed fitting to share an article on tech. Let's walk through three areas of your business that are imperative to embracing technology: client growth and retention; employee recruitment and retention; and operational efficiency. We can all agree that if you can master these three sectors, the rest of the business will become easier to manage. Technology is influencing the industry like never before, and we are entering a revolution in which there will be clear winners and losers. This article is meant to incite your ability to think strategically, to think about the future and to ask the difficult questions about our capabilities.

Let's talk about growing your customer base and retaining the clients you already have. In today's world, your company's communication, quality of work and employee professionalism make a huge difference in retaining clients and acquiring new ones. However, the tides are changing and technology will soon be a major factor for clients when they make the decision of who to hire for their projects and properties. Now is the time to think, "What areas of friction can we improve upon so the client experience is streamlined?"

Here's a few examples: mobile payments like Apple Pay; text message communication; GPS sharing of the technician's location for onsite arrival (similarly to watching your Uber drivers' location); a strong online presence (for some clients such as hotels/resorts, having a large online following can benefit them by driving traffic to their social channels); a company who operates on an ERP software; a client portal where they can access photos of progress or quality checks; electric equipment (especially in residential environments); and of course, how you present your proposals (think AI designed visuals). If you are able to be a market leader in one or more of these areas, you will find your ability to grow will dramatically increase.

Next up is employee recruitment and retention. As you grow, finding and hiring great people is a critical requirement. The better these people are, the easier and more profitable your growth will be. The other part of the equation, and I would argue the more important, is retaining these great employees. Technology is playing more of a role in this process. A common example: You are a middle-market company and just hired an "A-player" from a larger competitor. This person came to your team because they align with your values and like the idea of knowing the owner of the business rather than working for a large corporation. However, as they onboard, they realize you are missing some key technology tools that your larger competitor had.

This doesn't even include the equipment in the field that's old and outdated. They soon realize they have to work twice as hard in your company to get the same result they were achieving at the larger company. If the situation is not corrected or improved upon, they may burn out quickly, and you'll have driven them away quicker than when you hired them.

Lastly, let's discuss operational efficiency. This is a huge bucket so let's focus on labor management as this typically ranges between 25-50% of your total P&L cost structure. The question to ponder here is, "What new technologies can help us deliver more services without increasing our costs?"

Some ideas include: digitizing your time-keeping process; digitally communicating to your team how many budgeted hours they have to finish a given task or service; tracking those budgeted hours to actual hours digitally; automating your scheduling and routing of crews utilizing GPS; using autonomous mowers for large lawn areas; and automating the tracking of key performance indicators such as labor efficiency, gross margin, overtime, drive time and so on.

If you are able to master just a few of these areas, it can dramatically increase your capacity so you're able to add more revenue without adding more cost. As you grow, a key element to focus on should be, "How do we do more with the team we have?"

If you are attending this year's Technology Conference, I hope to see you at my talk where I'll be diving into many of these areas and providing tools that will enable you to implement tech faster with higher buy-in from your team.

I will also be sharing my company's real numbers on how we have increased our gross margin by over 10% points since onboarding a key ERP system. Stay tuned over the next few months as I share with you some of my takeaways from the conference and what disruptive new technology you need to keep an eye out for. **L&L**

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