

## Q&A WITH THE EXPERT ZERO-TURN MOWER



# Q&A WITH CASEY CHILD and MARK LINKLETTER

Commercial Business Development Managers, AriensCo.

### 1 What are the biggest challenges facing landscape contractors?

**Casey Child:** Landscape operations of all sizes continue facing labor issues. From attracting talent to retaining it, lawn & landscape companies are fighting for resources in a dwindling pool of candidates. Because landscaping is a seasonal business in much of the country, it can be costly to retain employees year-round.

Finding out if your business qualifies for the Federal H-2B Temporary Worker Program is a good place to start if you're struggling to find seasonal employees.

**Mark Linkletter:** Increasing regulations related to the use of pesticides and fertilizers, limits on noise levels and emissions associated with lawn care require landscape professionals to be aware of current policies as well as understanding changes that may be on the horizon.

It's essential for landscapers to stay up to date on industry trends as well as state and local regulations. Industry groups like the National Association of Landscape Professionals are a great resource for trends and updates.

### 2 How can landscapers retain employees in a competitive labor market?

**CC:** While attracting and hiring the right employees depends heavily on an owner's

intuition during an interview, retaining good employees depends on business culture. Fostering a healthy work environment in which employees feel empowered, supported, and recognized is essential.

**ML:** Safety and comfort should also be a priority. Maintaining established processes and SOPs, embracing technology, and upgrading outdated equipment will allow employees to work more efficiently, comfortably, and safely.

A focus of the Gravely Pro-Turn 600 is operator comfort and safety with specific features to reduce body fatigue. The Operator Pod System separates the operator from the bouncing and jostling the mower encounters, reducing impact on employee's back, arms and shoulders.

### 3 How will alternative fuel sources shape the industry?

**ML:** The demand for alternative fuel sources will continue to increase as consumers expect their landscape providers to offer greener options. Landscape contractors will evolve to meet those demands but also to address the need for reducing costs associated with fuel and maintenance.

Following our commitment to innovation, we designed the new fully electric Gravely Pro-Turn EV. Powered by FusionCore, the industry's first swappable lithium-ion battery system, it delivers all

the power associated with the Gravely name along with new benefits like lower maintenance costs, zero emissions, and quieter operation.

### 4 What trends are you seeing in mower purchases by landscape contractors?

**CC:** The industry is experiencing a growing demand for greener machine options, along with increased performance and comfort.

We're also seeing more professionals lease lawn equipment. Leasing helps business owners retain their cash flow reserves while taking advantage of low interest rates. New equipment also means lower maintenance costs and higher employee satisfaction.

The Gravely Pro-Stance® is one of our frequently-leased models. It combines quick on-and-off versatility with a suspension platform designed to ease vibration and take stress off the operator's back.

### 5 What should contractors keep in mind when selecting the right mower for their business?

**ML:** Carefully selecting a specific dealer and manufacturer is as important as choosing the right product. It's important to find the right partner who can provide service, knowledge, training, and value to your bottom line. ●

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## Q&A WITH THE EXPERT BUSINESS MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

# Q&A WITH MARK TIPTON

CEO & Founder, Aspire Software



### 1 How is technology shaping the landscaping industry?

**Mark Tipton:** Productivity improvements driven by integrated information systems are revolutionizing every industry, but many landscape business owners tell me they still rely on an array of disconnected systems to run their business—things like spreadsheets, Google Docs, QuickBooks, a CRM, or even paper or whiteboards. The potential to transform their business is great, but they believe this patchworked set of systems is “good enough.” That’s often driven by their mistaken belief that investments in software are an expense while investments in machinery and equipment are moneymakers.

### 2 What's wrong with that approach?

**MT:** What they fail to realize is how much this impacts their bottom line due to inefficient business practices and operational data spread out among disconnected systems. They’re basing business decisions on late, inaccurate, or even missing information that unnecessarily results in lost revenues and lower profits.

### 3 Can you give us an example?

**MT:** Sure. For example, many landscapers price their work based on past job results and perceptions about what the market will bear and use a spreadsheet to make their calculations. However, this approach doesn’t account for their true costs. For instance, most landscapers are not aware of their actual

labor costs for each division. For a \$3 million landscaping company with 72,000 labor hours, even a small difference of \$0.50 per hour in their labor rate translates into \$36,000 in lost revenue and profits. So they’re scratching their heads at the end of the month because they’ve hit their budgeted hours but have fallen short of their profitability goals. They don’t know how or why that happens.

That’s just one example. There are many more I could mention involving invoicing, payroll, and other areas of their business. The sheer frustration of a lack of insight and control over their business can be overwhelming.

### 4 So how do they avoid that?

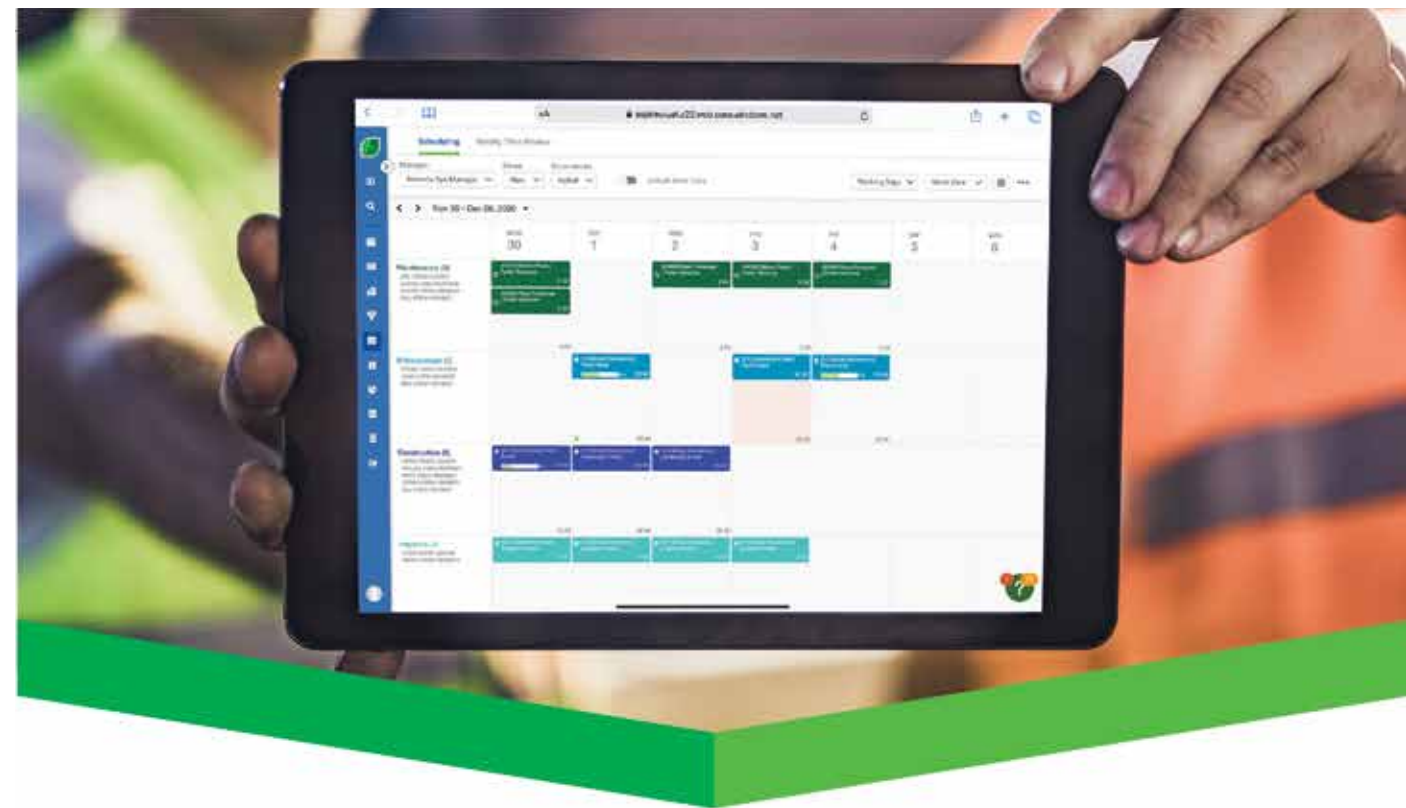
**MT:** They need to use a single, centralized system around which they can

align their organizational data. Using my pricing example above, this type of system would provide clear insight into metrics like average labor rates for each division as well as other job costs so that their estimates are priced at the right profit margin.

### 5 What should such a system include?

**MT:** They need a fully integrated business management system that provides full visibility into every aspect of their business. It should provide accurate real-time job costing and drill-down reports and dashboards that empower their managers to make good, timely, and profit-enhancing business decisions. They also need a vendor with seasoned industry experts to implement, train, and support them on the system. ●

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## Q&A WITH THE EXPERT HERBICIDES

# Q&A WITH ZAC REICHER, Ph.D.

Green Solutions Team, Bayer



## Summer Weed Control in Warm-Season Lawns

Summer weed control in warm-season turf can be tough for LCOs. Weedy grasses, broadleaves, and sedges can all be found in lawns during the summer, plus widely variable temperatures, wind, and soil moisture can negatively impact applications. Here are some common questions and answers regarding summer weed control.

### 1 What is the most important aspect of summer weed control?

**Zac Reicher:** Do no harm! Herbicides are designed to kill weeds, so be careful not to damage the turf or ornamentals in adjacent landscape beds. Herbicide selection is critical to minimize risk to the various warm-season turf species. Celsius®, for example, has proven turf safety on St. Augustine and centipede where phenoxy herbicides may cause damage. Avoid applying to drought-stressed turf or during excessively high temperatures. Summer temperatures will increase volatilization and off-target drift of herbicides, so be careful around ornamental beds, trees, vegetable gardens, etc. Be sure to follow all label directions to minimize the chances of non-target damage.

### 2 Can preemergence herbicides still be used during summer months?

**ZR:** YES! Preemergence herbicides can and should be combined with postemergence herbicides to extend residual control of weeds yet to germinate. Combining a broader spectrum PRE like Specticle® FLO with Tribute® Total or Celsius® will

extend control of difficult broadleaves like doveweed, dollarweed, or Virginia buttonweed as well as annual grasses like crabgrass or goosegrass.

### 3 What's the best way to control sedge in summer?

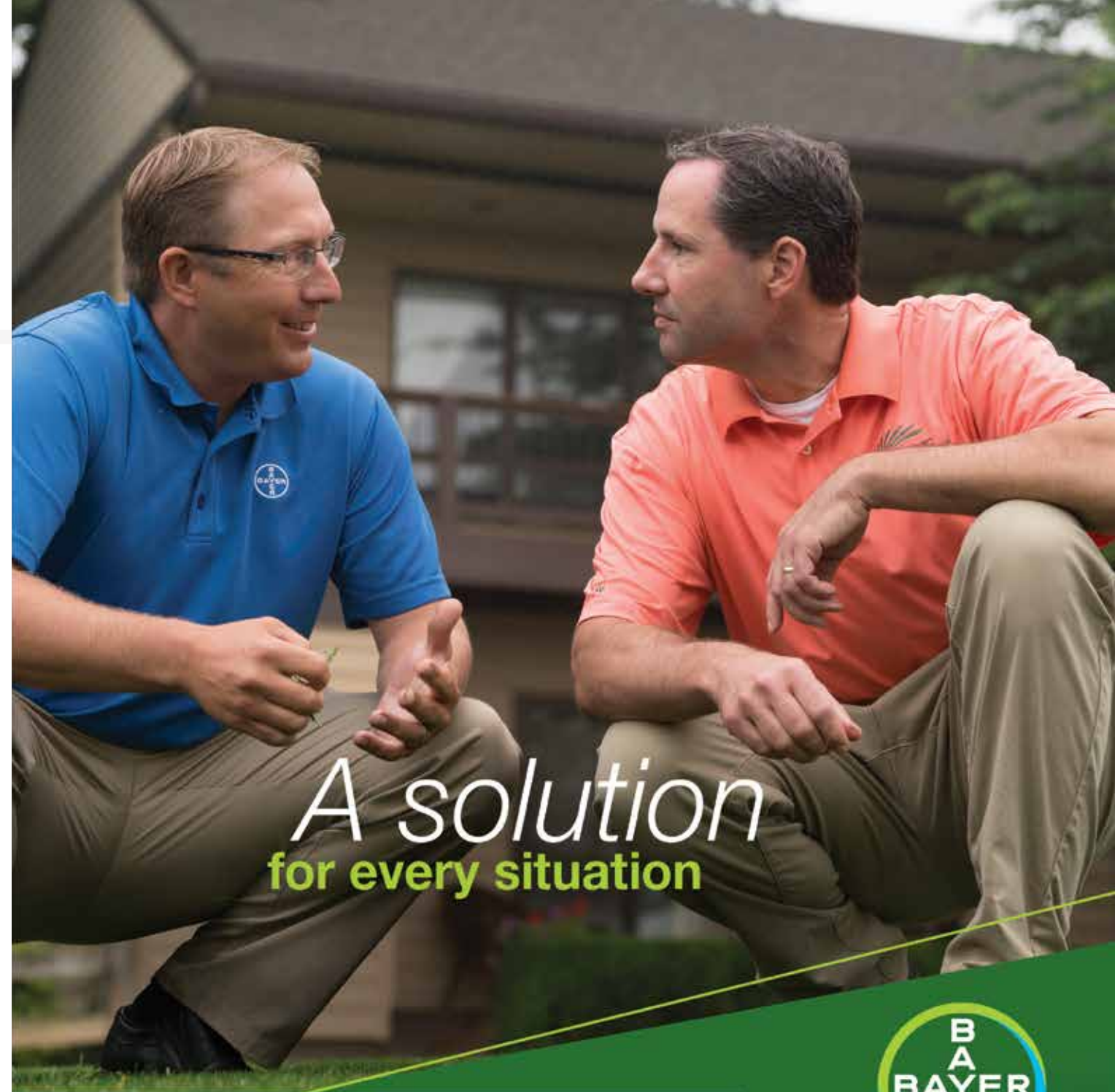
**ZR:** In turf we have both annual and perennial sedges and kyllingas. Control of annual sedges and kyllingas is easier than the perennial types. Specticle Flo offers preemergence control of both annual sedges and kyllingas. However, it is not designed to control perennial sedges like yellow and purple nutsedge or the perennial kyllingas, so a POST product must be used. The most recent research suggests early summer applications with nutsedge in the 2-3 leaf stage are more effective than later, more typical applications. Realize that 2-3 leaf stage nutsedge is tough to see in a lawn, so pay special attention on lawns with a history of nutsedge problems. Since sedges germinate over a wide window of time, repeat applications on 4- to 6-week intervals are most effective. Tribute Total controls sedges as well as a wide range of broadleaf and grassy weeds found in bermudagrass or zoysiagrass lawns.

### 4 Can bull paspalum, dallisgrass, and other tough grasses be controlled in summer?

**ZR:** Controlling a perennial grassy weed in a perennial grassy turf is difficult because there's not much selectivity in herbicides between closely related grass species. Closely follow label directions and seek advice from turf experts. POST control of grasses is more effective with moist soils compared to drier soils. Revolver®, Tribute Total, and Celsius are labeled for some grassy weeds, depending on the weed and turf species.

### 5 Should adjuvants be used in the summer to improve control?

**ZR:** Yes, adjuvants can be used but with extreme caution. Using herbicides during summer heat can be risky when a single herbicide is the only product in the tank. Adding fertilizer, adjuvants or additional herbicides can dramatically increase leaf burn potential. Follow the label, personal experience, and expert recommendations to help with your decisions. It is always better to error on the side of simpler applications during stressful conditions to limit the chance of turf damage. ●



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## Q&A WITH THE EXPERT SOIL HEALTH

# Q&A WITH NICK diLORENZO

Product Manager, Landscape Products, Horizon Distributors

### 1 What trends and changes are you seeing in the landscape industry?

**Nick diLorenzo:** The Landscape or Green Industry has grown significantly over the last 20 years. According to the latest research, the landscape services industry grew to \$93.7 billion in 2020, with a projected 13% growth in 2021. With that, it has also gotten increasingly competitive. Much like the downturn in 2008/2009, we've seen a number of individuals struggling with unemployment decide to jump into the landscape maintenance world, often driving down market prices. With this influx of competition, it's becoming more and more important to set yourself apart by showcasing your knowledge and expertise while avoiding the "cheapest guy" price wars.

### 2 What are some strategies landscape businesses can use to differentiate themselves?

**ND:** I think a great approach is to offer

an organic service option - focus on the "brown" rather than focusing on the "green." When I started my distribution sales career 17 years ago, I needed a message that would set us apart and provide value to the customer, and learned of a study that showed 89% of surveyed households said they felt an environmentally friendly approach to lawn care was important. Offering a solution that is perceived to be safer with less risk of exposure and pollution is an attractive selling proposition.

### 3 You mentioned expertise.

**Any suggestions on how they can position themselves as Landscape Professionals?**

**ND:** Make the conversation not just about the turf, and help your clients understand it's about the soil. Soil Health is no longer just an industry buzz word; it's becoming a social movement. It's a revenue stream for those that understand it and integrate it into their businesses, which means us-

ing the tools, understanding the science and then applying the science to solve the core issues. This isn't simply using organic products and calling the soil "healthy." It's understanding the importance of soil and taking the steps to improve it while correcting the liabilities that contribute to poor soil. This creates sustainability, and not just within the landscape system, but within your business. Recommend soil testing and then review the results with your clients - this brings tangibility to your service. Your client will quickly see that you deserve that higher rate and help keep you out of bidding wars.

### 4 Are there other aspects of soil health landscapers should be considering?

**ND:** Absolutely - water. It's important to understand any liability in the irrigation water. Not all water is equal; it can have excessive salts and bicarbonates that drastically effect pH levels. Offer an irrigation suitability test to identify any hidden liabilities. That's the water you are stuck with - fixing it up front will save a lot of money and frustration down the road.

### 5 Any other suggestions for marketing their company in this new world?

**ND:** Check out Horizon's Turf Triage solution. It's a simple program that helps landscapers understand soil and water tests results and makes recommendations on products that can resolve any uncovered problems. ●



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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT  
IRRIGATIONQ&A WITH  
**CHRIS HUDSON**

Irrigation Product Manager, Horizon Distributors

**1** Product availability was a big issue for our industry in 2020. Is the Covid-caused product shortage behind us?

**Chris Hudson:** When it comes to irrigation branded products, for the most part, yes. The major manufacturers have done an excellent job of catching up after the factories were closed in April & May, but they couldn't build inventories back up to normal off-season targets, so we're still experiencing some isolated backorders. In addition, demand's at levels we haven't seen since the housing boom of 2005-6, so we're seeing a little pinch on the supply side with commodities. Finally, as we have all experienced, COVID is still very much a reality, and outbreaks will impact capacity in factories. I think everyone needs to understand that we will continue to see ebbs and flows in lead times, with some shortages over the remainder of the year.

**2** What's happening with PVC pipe pricing and availability?

**CH:** That really is the biggest issue right now. As we all know our business starts and finishes with pipe. Bottom line is, we have been subjected to a perfect storm over the last 8 months between Hurricane Laura, gulf snowstorms, and unprecedented demand for PVC resins around the world. We have been hit with 50+% price increases over the last 6 months. The freeze in the Gulf area in February forced Force Majeure. That means all price contracts are rescinded, so we're expect-

ing significant increases to keep coming for now. An even bigger issue, though, will be the availability of PVC pipe. The resin guys are behind and having problems getting product to pipe manufacturers. All distributors have been placed on allocation, limiting our purchases and causing shortages that I believe we'll continue to wrestle with through summer.

**3** Are there other commodity products being impacted?

**CH:** Unfortunately, yes. Inflation is widespread in construction materials for all industries; in fact I'm hearing lumber prices have gone up 75% over the last 8 months. For us though, it's primarily PVC fittings, PE pipe & drip tubing, and copper-based products like backflow and wire. Reality is our industry is built around plastic, and plastic is made with resin, so we're feeling it.

**4** What can contractors do to minimize the impact on their business?

**CH:** Well, if you don't have a good relationship with your supplier, I'd create one. The better suppliers are actively managing the situation not just to keep

their shelves filled, but to keep product coming for our customer's jobs. If we know you've got a project going in the ground in the next two months, we can order appropriately to ensure we have the product here when you need it. But we can't help if we don't know, so make sure you are communicating with your supplier on a regular basis. I'd also recommend having accounts with multiple suppliers. Keeping your options open is important this year.

**5** What's Horizon doing to navigate the volatility?

**CH:** Communication, & more communication. Our team can't perform if they don't fully understand the situation. We are giving the field almost daily updates on shipments, forecasts, pricing, anything else that might impact the supply channel and our customers. We have worked with our manufacturer partners to create reporting tools that are helping us navigate these predicaments together. We recognize that we've got to come together as an industry if we are going to minimize impact, and the best thing we can do at Horizon is roll up our sleeves and be part of the solution. ●



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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT  
EDGINGQ&A WITH  
**DANIEL MARTIN**

Director of Marketing, Permaloc Corporation

**1** Should I be using a different edging for straight runs as opposed to curved lines?

**Daniel Martin:** We've all been there. Trying our best to make edging that is running parallel to a structure look straight. No matter how hard we try, the waves between each staking point remain painfully obvious. The human eye is designed to pick up those anomalies.

That's why when doing straight lines with edging, it is important to use an edging that was created for that. Not only will the result look much better to those that will see it over time, but you will save yourself a great deal of time during the install. And in this business, time is money!

Edgings designed for straight lines

typically have a feature built in that allows them to remain perfectly rigid, like a small "foot" on the bottom. They should still have built-in staking to assure that it remains in place and does not shift during the lifetime of the project.

**2** How do I install a paver edging for permeable pavers when I can't drive a spike in?

**DM:** As permeable pavers become increasingly popular, in large part due to governmental regulations on stormwater management, many contractors are curious about how the installation steps vary from traditional installation over a compacted base.

With non-permeable applications, the

edging is simply spiked into the compacted base using a spiral steel spike. This provides plenty of holding power to keep the edging in place. However, permeable pavers require an open-graded base to allow the water to move through. This loose stone will not provide any "bite" for the spike to hold the edging in place.

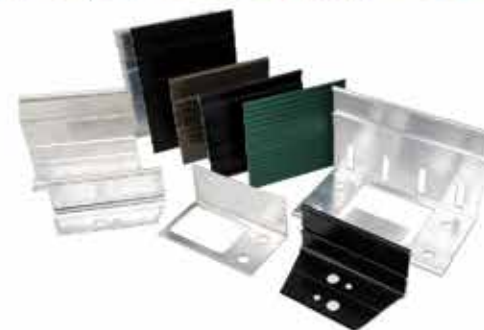
A new system for holding edging in place on a permeable base involves attaching the edging to a biaxial geogrid textile embedded between two layers of stone. The edging is attached using a capture plate and heavy-duty screws to assure that it will maintain holding power under the heaviest of vehicular loads.

**3** What is the difference between residential edging and commercial edging?

**DM:** The primary difference in edging grades is wall thickness. A thicker wall provides more vertical strength, allowing heavier foot traffic and larger maintenance equipment to traverse the edging.

It is important to match the thickness and depth of the edging with the circumstances associated with your installation. This checklist can include foot traffic, maintenance requirements, adjacent materials, soil type, etc.

It is important to note that landscape edging uses nominal thicknesses (similar to lumber), and not all edging companies provide the same wall thicknesses within the same nominal size. So be sure to do your research to make sure you are truly getting what you are paying for! ●

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## Q&A WITH THE EXPERT MARKETING

# Q&A WITH KENDALL HINES

Co-Founder and CEO, Lawnbot

### 1 What is Lawnbot?

**KH:** Lawnbot is a sales automation tool that makes e-commerce easy via an AI-enabled chatbot that lives on your company's website. It lets your company respond to leads, 24/7, by meeting customers where they are. When customers click on your Lawnbot, it guides them through the quote and sales process with a brief text-based chat, asking them questions about their property and what they're looking for, providing them with accurate estimates, customized program recommendations and fast, seamless checkout. It's fully branded to your company, using your logo, your photos and your service categories. Customers don't see "Lawnbot," they see your business.

### 2 How did Lawnbot get started?

**KH:** I grew up in the industry – My parents owned a Lawn Doctor franchise, and I grew up on the lawns with my dad, learning every aspect of the business from the time I was eight years old.

A few years ago, I took over sales and marketing for the family business, and I realized right away that the green industry has a huge problem. When a homeowner wants a quote for service, they want to talk to someone – no matter when. This would get frustrating for us because our offices were closed on weekends, and we'd come in on Monday to 150 emails and 80 voice mails. We would miss sales because we'd get bogged down and couldn't respond to everyone.

That's how Lawnbot came to be. I said,

"Why can't people just order service online?" I think of Lawnbot as a salesperson that never sleeps, gets sick or takes a vacation. It's always closing sales.

### 3 How can Lawnbot help green industry companies with sales and growth?

**KH:** The most obvious way is that we make sales easy and we help you capture leads that you might otherwise lose. With Lawnbot, customers get the instant satisfaction of a quote right when they're thinking about buying, and you get the reward of the sale. We also help businesses collect positive reviews from happy customers, something that is really crucial when it comes to your ongoing growth.

### 4 What would you say to a business owner who doesn't think they need a Lawnbot?

**KH:** I'd start by asking them why they want to add extra layers of work into their sales process. Lawnbot automates many of the difficult, time-consuming parts of sales: Quick response to inbound leads, making sure there's a standard set of probing questions for each prospect, recording contact information for every lead, sending an instant proposal along with the ability to buy and pay instantly.

Plus, other companies act as middlemen between you and your clients. You subscribe to their service, but they own the customer relationships. Lawnbot is different: With us, you own your own customer relationships. Lawnbot is a branded technology platform, you set

the prices – and you own your customer relationships 100 percent.

### 5 Lawnbot and Real Green Systems are now strategic partners -- what does that mean for Lawnbot and its customers?

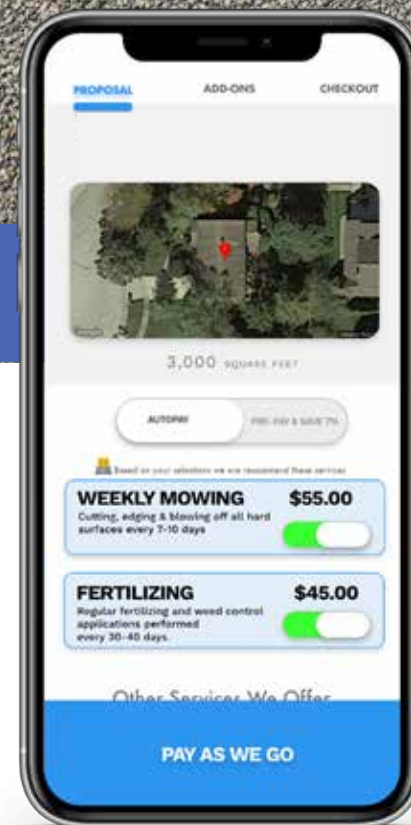
**KH:** This is an exciting move for Lawnbot and for our customers. Our partnership with Real Green will enable us to deliver even greater service and to drive even more exciting innovations. Our goal is to make our products the best and easiest to use in the industry, and this partnership will help us continue to achieve that goal.

### 6 How does Lawnbot's strategic partnership with Real Green Systems strengthen its integration with Service Assistant@ 5?

**KH:** The beauty of Lawnbot's integration with SA5 is how easy it makes everything. When a lead visits your website and engages with your Lawnbot, all of the information they share is captured and funneled into SA5. Their initial contact information, property details, accurate measurements – we are able to capture amazingly accurate measurements through our measur.it tool, where the customer just traces their own property with their fingertip or their mouse – estimates and quotes, payment information. It's all there with no need for manual input. We'll be adding even deeper integrations as we continue to develop and improve the tool, like real-time pricing updates and other key features. ●



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## Q&A WITH THE EXPERT INSECTICIDES

# Q&A WITH MATT GIESE

Technical Services Manager, Syngenta



**1** What benefits does Acelepryn® insecticide offer lawn care operators (LCOs) to give their business a unique advantage?

**Matt Giese:** Acelepryn offers season-long control of multiple insects with one application including the longest-lasting grub control on the market. This length of control can help reduce call-backs from homeowners. It can also be applied early, in April and May, **without the need to water in**, so LCOs can rest assured their customers' lawns and landscape ornamentals are protected from the start.

Additionally, Acelepryn, not only has shown no adverse effects on non-target organisms but is the only diamide that does not harm bees and pollinators. This is important because in a 2021 TechValidate survey, **92%** of LCOs reported it was important to them/their customers that

Acelepryn has **no signal word and no adverse effects on beneficial and non-target organisms including honeybees.\***

**2** In addition to controlling grubs all season, what other insects can Acelepryn prevent?

**MG:** Along with controlling grubs, Acelepryn can protect lawns from additional insects like billbugs and turf caterpillars. While less common than white grubs, these insects can still cause substantial damage.

Billbug larvae feed inside the grass stem then drop to the soil surface to feed on the crown and roots of the plant, making them difficult to spot. Damage is identified by tufts of turf that are easily pulled from the surface and usually appear in late June through early August, so preventive applications targeting larval

development are key. Meanwhile, by foliar feeding, caterpillars (including sod webworms, fall armyworms and cutworms) can cause patches of damaged, dead or dying turf that rapidly increase in size, causing severe damage one blade at a time. Preventing infestations will severely limit turfgrass damage and speed up plant recovery.

**3** How does Acelepryn work to protect lawns from these key insects?

**MG:** Acelepryn is powered by *chlorantraniliprole*, a diamide that provides long-lasting control. Once applied, the treatment moves into the soil and roots, and up into the plant stem, protecting turf from insects below the surface that you cannot see. Unlike most other products for lawns, irrigation or rainfall is not required after a treatment is applied, which can save you time and avoid homeowner noncompliance. In fact, **94%** of surveyed organizations **reported that Acelepryn exceeded their expectations** compared to the insecticide they used before.\*

**4** What kinds of results have LCOs seen with Acelepryn?

**MG:** With Acelepryn, LCOs can see powerful results against a wide range of pests, with the added benefit of no adverse effects on non-target organisms. **98%** of surveyed LCOs reported that they find **Acelepryn to be a highly effective product.\*** When it comes to reducing breakthroughs, **69% of surveyed LCOs**

**said they saw a notable improvement.\*** Overall, most LCOs report excellent results with **53%** saying they'd **rate Acelepryn five out of five stars** and **96% rating Acelepryn at four stars or higher.\*** We are confident LCOs who incorporate Acelepryn into their rotation will see better control of target pests.

**5** Some expensive applications occur early in the season. Does Syngenta offer any financial solutions?

**MG:** A key benefit of Acelepryn is that one application can provide the season-long control you and your customers need. In addition, as part of GreenTrust® 365, customers can defer payment until late June with SummerPay™ terms. This

provides flexibility to manage expenses more easily throughout the season. For instance, if you qualified for GreenTrust 365, you can use Acelepryn for grub control between April and mid-June, and you can choose to pay any time before July. Also, if you purchase 10 gallons or more of Acelepryn, Syngenta offers a volume discount.

**6** What other tools and resources does Syngenta provide to help LCOs grow their businesses?

**MG:** Syngenta offers free marketing materials for LCOs to use with customers to help explain services that control grubs, as well as turf diseases, fire ants and mosquitoes. To order these materials, visit **GrowWithSyngenta.com**. In addition,

we have soil temperature maps and growing degree day tools available to help monitor for common insects found in specific areas. They can be accessed at **GreenCastOnline.com/AgronomicAlerts.** ●

Learn more about Acelepryn at **GreenCastOnline.com/Acelepryn**.

\*Source: 2021 TechValidate Survey  
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**94% of lawn care companies confirmed Acelepryn exceeded expectations compared to previous insecticides used.**

**SEIZE SEASON-LONG CONTROL**  
Acelepryn® insecticide performs all season-long.

One application provides the longest-lasting control of grubs, billbugs, turf caterpillars and more.

- Offers an alternative to pyrethroids and neonicotinoids with an innovative mode of action
- Has shown no adverse effects on beneficial and non-target organisms like honeybees\*
- Offers the flexibility to apply early without the need to water in

Download free marketing materials for your business at **GrowWithSyngenta.com**

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\*Jonathan L. Larson, Carl T. Redmond and Daniel A. Potter, SCL, September 2011.

**Acelepryn®** Insecticide

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