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State of the Software Market



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Moving beyond the status quo

The landscape industry isn't known for being quick to adopt new technologies, and it's not hard to understand why. Implementing new technology requires change — change that often involves a significant investment of time and resources. Who has the capacity to learn a new way of doing things when the status quo is so much easier?

There's just one problem: Growth that shows up in a company's margins (not just its revenue stream) requires change. When business owners critically evaluate their processes, many find costly blind spots and inefficiencies. As landscape companies grow, so does the complexity involved in organizing all their moving parts. It's easier to get away with using tedious, manual processes when the business is just starting out. As it grows, though, so do the problems caused by those processes. The most successful landscape contractors today realize that in order to scale profitably, they have to be willing to implement new technology.

The idea of using comprehensive business management software is still a somewhat novel concept to many landscape contractors. Even those who have moved away from paper-and-pencil to spreadsheets and software programs often find their business suf-

fering from an assortment of disjointed solutions and manual processes. But for those who've decided to make the jump, the change is transformational.

At Aspire Software, we frequently hear stories from customers about how their businesses have been impacted by our programs. After implementing Aspire Landscape, for example, DBL Landscape saw 18% growth in their gross margins and Landscape Workshop grew 26% without the need for any additional back-office staff. As the most comprehensive end-to-end business management system for landscape contractors, Aspire Landscape allows business owners to manage every aspect of their company — from estimating and scheduling to purchasing, invoicing and more — in one centralized location.

And at Aspire Software, we practice what we preach. We're committed to the process of continual evaluation and iteration. We foster a culture of innovation so we can build products that not only help transform individual landscaping businesses but the industry as a whole.

MARK TIPTON
CEO
Aspire Software



While Gachina Landscape Management uses multiple software systems, the company houses them all on one central platform to make things easier for employees. It has worked for the company, which ranked No. 68 on Lawn & Landscape's 2021 Top 100 list.

Solve it with **SOFTWARE**

Companies of all sizes can eliminate daily stress and streamline their efficiencies by taking advantage of different software.

When it comes to software, it's all about having options. Whether it's a customer relationship management (CRM) system, traditional business software or a learning management system, landscape and lawn care professionals can benefit from utilizing a customizable suite of software.

Andrew Wesselman, owner of A&A Lawn Care & Landscaping, says his Kentucky-based company has been using lawn care management software since the early days of the company and have only grown with it.

"We've been on that since 2008," he says. "We adopted it fairly early on and really saw benefits of technology when we just had one or two trucks. The efficiency, even just from a billing standpoint, was really what attracted us to it."

Streamlining tasks and improving efficiency has led to A&A expanding its fleet to 70 trucks and employing 130 individuals.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GACHINA LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

“We’ve grown tremendously,” Wesselman says. “As we continue to grow, we use more of the features that they offer. Everything that we do on a day-to-day basis revolves around the program that we use.”

Software also continues to fuel growth at Gachina Landscape Management in Menlo Park, Calif. The company ranked 68th on Lawn & Landscape’s 2021 Top 100 List with \$33.4 million in 2020 revenue and 400 employees.

In the past year, Dan Wolf, director of information technology, says the company has been able to drop its accounts receivable (AR) by massive margins just by integrating additional financial software into the landscape business software already being used.

“It automates collections and is a great system,” he says. “In the last year, we dropped our AR by \$1 million. It’s amazing. This was with improved automations and collection ability. We didn’t have to hire anybody to do that; it was just by using the technology to assist us with that process.”

**ADVANTAGES OF
GETTING AUTOMATED**

Earthco Commercial Landscape’s Dan Morrison says embracing technology has helped set them apart from their competition in the Santa Ana, Calif., area.

“We’re pretty forward-thinking in terms of technology,” Morrison says. “Because we know how antiquated the landscape industry is with technology... You’re starting to see more companies adopt the approach that if you don’t adapt, you’re going to be out of business soon, because the technology keeps pushing forward.”

Earthco now has about 350 employees between its tree and maintenance divisions. Morrison adds that he’d like to see the company go completely paperless as they focus on implementing software.

“We utilize a custom software for all of our service requests and estimating,” he says. “It’s been extremely important and helpful for our business. We have been able to grow as a business significantly because of this software.”

WHAT WAS YOUR 2020 REVENUE?

Under \$199,999	30%
\$200,000 – \$999,999	25%
\$1 million – \$6.9 million	33%
\$7 million or more	12%

**HOW MANY DIFFERENT
SOFTWARE PRODUCTS
DO YOU CURRENTLY INVEST?**

1	22%
2	29%
3	24%
4	8%
5	5%
More than 5	12%

Wolf says Gachina uses a wide variety of software, but in order to keep everything easy to use, it’s housed on a central platform.

“I recommend that when I talk with other businesses, that if you’re going to start building integrations and doing customized ones... I recommend building them out on a standard platform,” he says. “We looked at a variety of different platforms and settled on one that wasn’t the most expensive or the cheapest — they’re right in the middle. We chose them early on and we’ve been very happy with the platform. We continue to build on integrations out on top of it.”

Like Wolf, Morrison says using software that automates most processes is ideal and a big time-saver.

“One of the biggest selling points of the software is that a lot of it is automated,” he says. “Emails are automated, and so are service requests, so there isn’t that much functionality that the guys have to learn within the system. It allows us in the field to give real-time updates with pictures and have our account managers close our service requests, or submit proposals... It allows our account managers so much more time for other activities, to go look at things, to solve problems and everything else.”

**WHAT DO YOU USE SOFTWARE
FOR IN YOUR BUSINESS?**

(Choose all that apply)

Invoice/billing	91%
Payroll/accounting	64%
Job costing/estimating	58%
Field service/scheduling	51%
CRM/sales management and tracking ..	45%
GPS/fleet management	42%
Landscape design/drawing	41%
Property mapping	39%
Material inventory	26%
Water management	6%

Editor’s Note: Survey results collected by Lawn & Landscape and are based on approximately 170 responses.

And in a time when working from home is more common, making sure you have effective software is more important than ever.

“We’re also entirely on Google Suite, so anything you need to access from our company, you can access on the internet,” Morrison says. “During the COVID period, it’s been amazing because our staff doesn’t necessarily have to be in the office in order to complete what we need to complete to make our clients satisfied.”

**EXPECT CUSTOMER
SATISFACTION TO INCREASE**

For A&A, customer satisfaction improved the more they incorporated software.

“Results are one thing, but if you can make it easy for people and following the times and technology — that’s a big thing,” Wesselman says. “Part of our growth has been that we’ve made it easy for customers to do business with us. We’ve opened up all these different avenues for people to pay their bill online or request additional services or just ask a question about their account.”

With a large commercial client base, Earthco’s software keeps the little things from falling through the cracks.

“Most of our clients are HOAs, so we’re receiving tons of emails, texts and

IN AN AGE OF AUTOMATION,
software can help you communicate
better with your customers.

photos of things that need to be taken care of or addressed from a landscaping perspective, so if you don’t have a way of organizing that, or a software to utilize, you’ll be running around like a chicken with your head cut off,” Morrison says.

Now with automated emails and reporting, the company is connecting with its clients on a whole new level.

“From a client perspective, it has allowed the client a lot more access to us as a business,” Morrison says. “In terms of customer service, it has 100% made our business a better business to service these clients. And that’s what really drove the initial investment into software.”

Morrison says that property managers Earthco work with like the software so much, that it’s been a great referring tool as well.

“We walk into client meetings, with property managers we already work with, and they pitch our software to the client,” he says. “They say, ‘It’s amazing to work with this company because I’m always up to date with what they’re doing, I’m consistently getting emails and responses, so I don’t have to follow up with them.’”

Wesselman says the software his business uses also helps in reaching prospective clients. “Now, we’ve adapted more of the marketing features and really it’s been a big reason why we are at where we are today,” he says. “That CRM manages our current customers and have built it to be our marketing database as well. It’s managing all of our potential people, tracks mailing pieces and so forth that we’re pushing out.”

And while it may be difficult to put a dollar amount on how much revenue the software has brought into the company, Morrison says it’s invaluable.

“I’d like to say from a profitability standpoint, it’s probably increased but it’s hard to see a direct correlation to say that by implementing ‘X’ software we saw this amount to the bottom line,” he says. “It doesn’t work like that. I think the bottom line portion comes by the retention of clients. We’ve been able to retain and even use it as a marketing piece for new clients.”

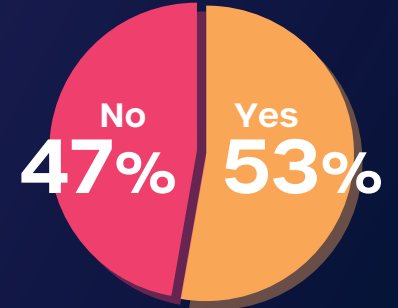
**TAKE TRAINING
TO THE NEXT LEVEL**

The many layers of software may make it seem overwhelming at times, but regimented training can ensure that everyone from senior executives to crew members are able to utilize the technology to its full potential. However, Morrison says training everyone on the software may be one of the biggest hurdles a company faces when implementing something new.

He advises breaking the training up into small segments, that way employees can master one element of the technology at a time.

“One hurdle is always getting the employees onto the system and getting them trained in it,” Morrison says. “That’s a whole beast in itself because you will be importing a ton of data and changing the whole way your company

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**Do you have a “software
champion” at your
company who runs
point on the products?**



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functions. And if you’re going to make a big move like that, it’s going to require a lot of patience, a lot of training and a lot of time to get that implemented.

“The best way we found to get around these struggles is to be consistently and constantly training,” he adds. “We make it a priority that every week you’re sitting down to train on a portion of the software, and then reiterating that portion and still training on something new.”

Not only is Gachina training its employees on the software the company uses, but they are also utilizing software as a way to train employees on a myriad of job tasks.

“With the onboarding, when I first joined the company, it was an all-manual process,” he says. “And that was one of the first systems we implemented.... Now, all of our recruiting and all of our onboarding is all automated. As far as the training side, we have a training process we go through, and I am trying to automate that more and more.”

The training videos on Gachina’s learning management system range from how to use the mobile time entry, to work ticketing to the mobile app crews use and more. “One of the advantages is they can go back and review when they need to if they’ve forgotten something,” Wolf says of having the training videos housed on the system.

Wolf notes that all of this automated training doesn’t necessarily replace tra-



Gachina Landscape Management uses a learning management system to store training videos that employees can view during the onboarding process and even review at a later date.

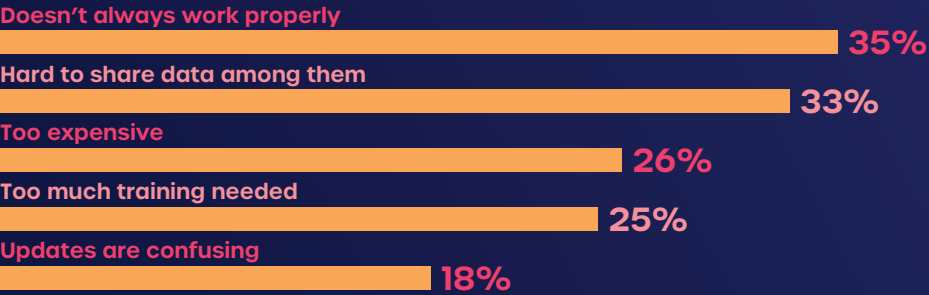
ditional on-site training and face-to-face educational opportunities.

“We do still have standard in-person training and the operations team also does regular tailgates where they get together and they review different things. It might be chemicals, equipment use and things like that,” Wolf says. “I’d like to see some of that moved onto the platform though.”

And even after it feels like all employees are taking advantage of the technology and are fully comfortable using the software, Morrison says companies should still be introducing them to the latest and greatest.

“We’re pretty diligent in making sure our employees are attending seminars and also bringing people into the company to train up on all the latest technology,” he says. “Again, if you’re not staying

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**What pain points do
you have with your software
systems (click all that apply)**



“You don’t have to have this big office infrastructure to have the same software that larger companies have access to.”

Andrew Wesselman, owner
of A&A Lawn Care & Landscaping

KEEPING IT CUSTOMIZABLE can allow you to focus on the metrics that are important to you and your business.

up to date and at least informed on what is out there — you’re falling behind.”

**SOFTWARE WORKS
FOR ALL SIZES**

No matter the size of the company, Wesselman, Wolf and Morrison said software is a game-changer.

“With the way technology is these days, you don’t have to have a big server. Everything has moved to the cloud,” Wesselman says. “You don’t have to have this big office infrastructure to have the same software that larger companies have access to.”

Wesselman adds he tells everyone this — even his employees who have their own side hustle.

“You know, it’s inevitable that guys are going to do side work on the side...but if they’re mowing 10 or 20 lawns on the side, I would even educate those guys to have something in place,” he says. “You got to track it. I don’t care that they do it, I just want them to charge what I would charge. They should have something more than just the notepad in their phone to keep track of things.”

In his opinion, Wesselman says a good CRM can be a company’s introduction into the digital world.

“I would highly advise anybody of any size to have at least a CRM,” he says. “A CRM can be as robust as you make it. It doesn’t have to be anything elaborate... Yes, you might not use all the bells and whistles on it, but so be it.”

For Wolf, business intelligence software is crucial for success.

“Ultimately, if there’s one place a smaller company should invest in, it’s your business intelligence — it’s those metrics that show where are you are right now with respect to your profitability and jobs. You have to invest in that area.”

Wolf says Gachina continues to integrate additional business intelligence metrics into the CRM they already use.

“We’ve shown it to some of our fellow landscaping companies our size and smaller and they are kind of blown away by the ability to see that level of



COVID-19 has caused software to be more critical as it keeps crews connected.

metrics,” he says. “For example, when you’re looking at gross margin and trying to understand where each job is and breaking that down by account manager, or service, or by branch... it’s very difficult to drill down to that if you don’t implement the technology to get you to that level of visibility.”

Morrison recommends having something that can be truly customizable to you — and preferably something designed specifically for the green industry. He says make a list of what you’re looking to have from that software before you start shopping around.

“Pick a software that works for you, because when we first started looking, there really weren’t a lot of companies servicing the landscape industry for exactly what we needed,” he says. “A lot of the software said it was customizable, which just meant you were trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. It didn’t have the exact features you needed.”

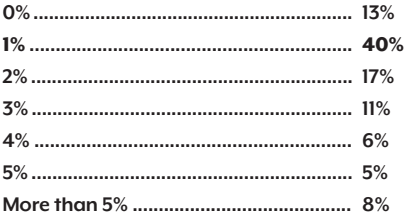
And while some may be hesitant of the cost to incorporate software into their business, it might be worthwhile in the long run.

“The efficiencies we’ve benefited from have far outweighed the cost of the soft-

**HOW LONG AFTER FIRST
IMPLEMENTING YOUR CURRENT
BUSINESS SOFTWARE DID YOU
FEEL COMFORTABLE THAT IT
WAS BEING USED CORRECTLY
AND EFFICIENTLY?**



**HOW MUCH OF YOUR
BUDGET IS ALLOCATED
TO SOFTWARE EXPENSES?**



ware,” Morrison says. “It’s now the backbone of our business. I couldn’t imagine the business without it now because it’s so ingrained into how we operate.” **L&L**



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