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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

Drought Warnings Signal Need For Planning

If severe droughts predicted for much of the U.S. and northern hemisphere become a reality, what will you do? Preparing now will lessen the impact if the drought becomes a reality. Drought preparation should at the very least address equipment, agronomics water availability and marketing concerns.

Irrigation Systems Tune-Up

Nothing breaks until you use it, but a comprehensive mechanical check-up of your irrigation system is essential, before peak demands are reached. Drive systems, supplies of essential spare parts and alternative or back-up systems should be reviewed. An audit of the system's efficiency and uniformity could also reveal areas in need of improvement.

Toughen, Don't Weaken the Plants

Normal agronomic practices should be carefully reviewed with the goal of making the grass more drought ready. Areas to consider would include fertility application rates and timing, as well as pesticide treatments. A careful balance between "pushing" the field to maturity and holding it back to avoid "lushness"

will have to be considered. The potential problem of set-back from pesticide treatments will also be an issue to address. Steps taken to harden the field should prove worthwhile during an extended or severe drought.

Potential Watering Bans

As sure as the sun rises, droughts inevitably lead to watering restrictions or ultimately a ban on outdoor water use. Rather than waiting for the ban to be announced, producers should be meeting with water officials to advise them of options and alternatives, or at the very least to gain a place at the decision-making table. Advanced planning, knowledge and recognition can help to avoid surprise announcements or just plainly bad decisions.

Marketing Adjustments

While the economy remains very strong, droughts and bans can easily shut-down turf sales. Having a well throughout marketing plan now can make a difference. Stay in touch with your commercial customers and seek their advice about alternatives and timing.

TPI Time-Capsule - A Retrospective Perspective

This retrospective article first appeared 14 years ago in "Business Management."

"Advertising" Your Sod Farm's Expertise, and Product...Cheaply!

Have you ever thought about advertising your farm's sod, only to discover that the costs are sky-high? A firm in another industry came up with a way to get first-class exposure for about one-tenth the cost.

They have a standing offer with their employees that if any one of them writes an article that gets published in a targeted publication, they will receive \$500. According to the firm owner, most articles that are printed will run about two pages each, and if the ads had been paid for, the cost would be nearly \$5,000.

Not only does the farm's message get presented, it probably has greater credibility because it is not seen as an advertisement, but rather an editorial-type of article. Care should be taken in preparing any such articles to insure that articles contain solid information about the farm or sod product and not be too oriented to selling. Let the reader reach his own conclusion that you have something he should be interested in.

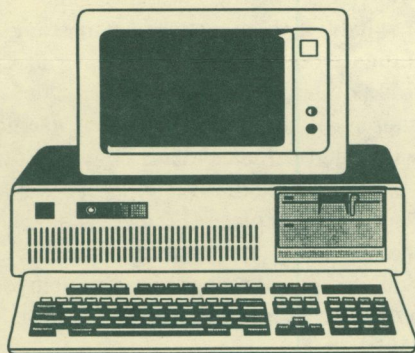
A farm owner can save even more by writing the article himself, but involving employees will also build greater loyalty and a sense of belonging and contributing to the success of the operation.

Marketing Tip

Chris Hummer, Sporting Valley Turf Farm
Manheim, Pennsylvania

Marketing a Website

How you market your Website (new or old) greatly depends on what goals you have set for your "online presence". A few years ago you could get away with not even having a Website, and if you did, it was OK to focus almost entirely on what is known as "brochure ware" (building a Website that is really only an electronic version of your existing marketing material). However, if it now seems like everyone has a Website, it's because they do!



Step 1 - Build a Website that adds value to your products or services. Beyond brochure ware, there are three other major categories of Web (sometimes now called eBusiness) strategies; Content, Business to Consumer (B2C), and Business to Business (B2B). A content strategy simply provides valuable information or tools to your users. A B2C strategy allows your business to sell products directly to consumers. A B2B strategy allows your business to conduct transactions with other businesses such as suppliers or in the sale of wholesale products. Decide which strategy you need to pursue and commit to doing it right. Don't hire the "kid next door" to build your site either. Go with a professional firm that can show you at least ten successful Websites that you like.

Step 2 - Pick a Good Name. Your Website address should be less than 10 characters and less than two syllables whenever possible (not including the www or the dot-com). Long, hard to spell Web names will never help your efforts in trying to get people to come to your site. To find a list of available names - as well as to purchase one - go to www.register.com.

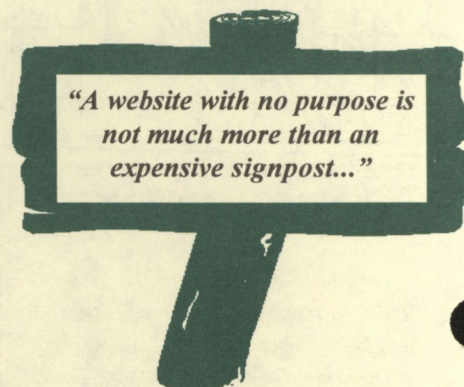
Step 3 - Save some money for Marketing and Maintenance. The most common mistake any size business makes is spending their entire budget on a great Website, thinking that the world will automatically beat a path to their electronic door. This is a BIG mistake. There are too many Websites in the world for you to expect people to find yours on purpose, let alone by chance. You need to set aside at least 25% of the initial cost of building your Website to actually promote it as soon as you "go live". You also need to keep your site content current or it will become outdated and useless to your core customers or visitors. Winning someone to your site for the first time is only about 5% of the battle. The key to success is to keep first time users coming back again and again. You should be prepared to spend at least as much each year on updating and marketing your site as you did to build it in the first place.

Step 4 - Search Engines. Getting your Website to appear on most of the top 20 search engines (used by over 80% of Internet users) is as simple as going to each one of them and filling out their "Submit your Site" form. In as little as one day, to as much as 2 months, your site will begin to appear in their database. For about \$300 you can go to a site like www.submitit.com and have them publish your Website to hundreds of search engines all at once. However, just having your site in these databases will not help if it does not appear above the third page (usually the top 30 sites) when someone is randomly looking for a Website just like yours. The key to getting the best "placement" is in your Meta Tags, Page Titles, and Page Content. Work with your Web developer to make sure all three of these contain the three or four words or phrases that best describe your site.



Step 5 - Banner Ads and Buttons.

As explained in two of the next three steps, the best places to advertise your Website to strangers is most often on other Websites. In order to do this, you'll need a number of different ad banners for them to use on their pages. (Visit the Ad Banner Standards section of www.iab.com for a list of standard sizes) Try to have at least one of each of the standard sizes, with more than one ready to go in the most popular 468x60 and 120x60 pixel sizes. Don't over-do the animation effects or graphics, keep it simple and be sure to include a call-to-action e.g. "Click Here".



Step 6 - Barter, Barter, Barter. With your new ad banners in hand - get on the Internet and find other Websites that my have the same types of users that you are looking for, but that do not compete with your business. If you complement each other's businesses you can often work out a free, or discounted, trade of ad banners.

Step 7 - Free Promotion. Unless you are operating a B2C or B2B Website, the people who will gain the most benefit from your Website are your existing customers, and your sales prospects. Print your Web address on EVERYTHING you can, including invoices, business cards, price lists, shipping slips, and even on the walls of your office (inside and out). Use your Website to provide additional value to your customers and to help win that next big contract. Let's face it, if you are a regionally based sod farm, then why spend much time worrying about what a stranger on the other side of the country thinks about your Website. Focus on your business strategy, and leverage your existing marketing efforts.

Marketing Tip Continued

Step 8 – Paid Marketing.

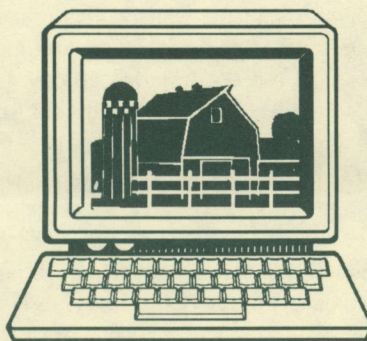
Before you spend any real money on advertising your Website, you need to make sure that it will really benefit your bottom line, either in sales dollars, or customer goodwill. In addition to including your Web address on ALL print advertising that you are already doing, you should concentrate most Website-specific promotion on purchasing banners on other Websites. Find Websites that cater to your potential customers, and don't be afraid to spend \$2 – \$10 per 1000 ad impressions. Try to steer away from search engines, as most people using search engines are only there to find something else that is on their mind.

Above all else... be sure you know what you want to get out of your Website strategy before investing in one. A website with no purpose is not much more than an expensive signpost in the desert. There is a common feeling out there that ANY business that cannot learn to embrace the Internet will NOT be around five to ten years from now at all. Embracing the Internet may be a Website, or it may be in the way you automatically order new pallets, but make sure you think long and hard about how the Internet can help your business in the digital future. For those of you already concerned about the trend towards commodity pricing of sod, watch out because Web-based sod brokerage sites are right around the corner. Will you be ready?

Shrewder Computing

TPI Website News Update

For several years, TPI has used GrowZone/VersaCom as its Internet Service Provider (ISP) - or "website host." Over this same period of time, GrowZone has functioned as a website host and/or 'portal' or entry-point to many other TPI-members.



Several months ago, GrowZone announced plans to develop a new "business model" where it would move away from functioning as a portal - and begin focusing on electronic-commerce as its primary business. This new e-commerce approach allows buyers browse GrowZone-affiliated-company's products and order online, with GrowZone handling the transaction.

With this change in focus, it is unclear if GrowZone intends to continue providing existing clients with the same service (at the same price.) While we are in no way suggesting that GrowZone will not honor its existing contracts or agreements, we are unsure as to whether these will be renewed upon contract/agreement expiration.

What is known is that there will be costs associated with taking part in this new e-commerce business. It is anticipated that initial set-up fees, ongoing service/maintenance assessments and per-transaction charges will likely apply to participating companies.

TPI is currently exploring several options (and ISP firms) to ensure that TPI's websites continue to be hosted and serviced in a responsive, appropriate manner.

TPI encourages all members affiliated with GrowZone to:

- a) Clarify the terms of your ongoing relationship (ie. service and fees) with GrowZone; and,
- b) Consider additional alternatives as you deem appropriate.

TPI Technology Resource "Preferred-Provider" Survey

Help us identify high-quality technology-related speakers, conference topics and "Turf News" article topics. Please return by fax to TPI: 847/705-8347 *Thanks!*

Technology Area	Your Preferred Supplier	Supplier Address/Phone	Satisfaction Level (high/low)
Website Service			
Website Design			
Radio/Cellular (equip)			
Cellular phone service			
GPS Equipment			
GPS Service			
Digital Camera			
Scanner			
Computer Hardware			

Software	Product Name/Version	Software	Product Name/Version
Payroll		Field Mgt.	
Accounting		Internet	
		Language Translation	
		Safety/Training	

TPI Action

SOLD OUT TPI SOUTH AFRICA/ZIMBABWE STUDY TOUR will continue to accept reservations for a wait-list in the event any of the current 52 participants must cancel. Although the tour plan called for up to 70 participants, in-country airline seats became a restricting factor. For more details, contact the TPI office.

'WATER RIGHT' FUND RAISING CAMPAIGN pushes toward \$500,000 goal with members and manufacturers contributing to support research and education. The tax-deductible, three-year pledges will support a variety of important new research projects as well as materials that will help to educate water policy makers, consumers and producers about the important issue of conserving water through proper establishment and maintenance practices. ITPF is encouraging all members to contribute, at as high an amount as possible, to further demonstrate the industry's unity and concern about water quality and availability.

SEASONAL AG LABOR REFORM LEGISLATION HITS THE HOUSE through HR 4056, recently introduced by Congressman Sanford Bishop of Georgia. After months of waiting for a House bill to match the Senate's version, the industry now has a vehicle to strongly support. TPI has been vigorously encouraging faster action in both the House and Senate as a means to help the turf industry hire sufficient numbers of legal workers. **TPI members should contact their Representatives to gain their support for immediate passage of HR 4056.**

TPI MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL LETTERS will be sent in the coming weeks, encouraging everyone to respond immediately and maintain all of their benefits. Because TPI membership is a mark of real distinction for marketing, as well as a source of up-to-date information and ideas specific to turfgrass sod production, an exceptionally high percentage of current members always renew. Don't delay renewing and miss important information.

To Receive Additional Information On Any of These Items, Contact the TPI Office

Phone: 800/405-8873 or 847/705-9898

Fax: 847/705-8347 or E-mail to Turf-Grass@msn.com

Website: <http://www.TurfgrassSod.org>

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International
1855-A Hicks Road, Rolling Meadows, IL 60008

Jest For The Fun Of It

Ponder This...

I'm not into working out. My philosophy:
No pain, no pain.

I have six locks on my door all in a row.
When I go out, I lock every other one.
I figure no matter how long somebody
stands there picking the locks, they are
always locking three.

You have to stay in shape...My grand-
mother started walking five miles a day
when she was 60. She's 97 today and we
have no idea where she is.

Future presidential-historians in the United
States will be able to study at the Gerald
Ford Library, the James Carter Library, the
Ronald Reagan Library, and the Bill
Clinton Adult Bookstore.

*Don't Forget
TPI's Summer
Convention!*



*July 18-21
Spokane, WA*

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