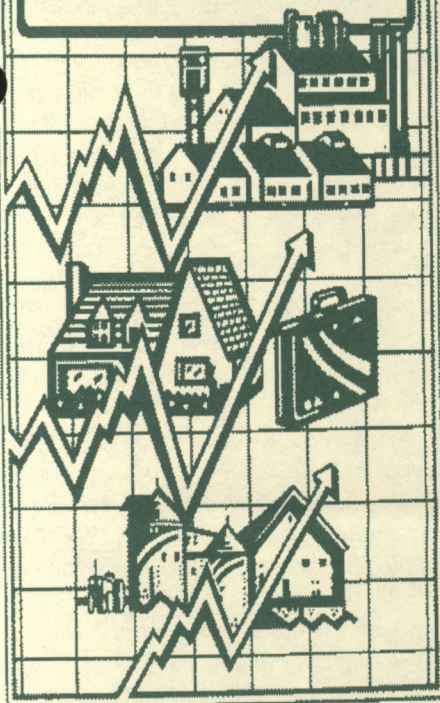


June / July 2000



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TPI Members No Longer 'Hosted' by Growzone / Versacom.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

Quick Ways To Improve Sales

Gleaned from a variety of sources, try these quick and easy tips to improve your sales success:

Close The Sale

There is a 95% chance of losing a sale if the prospect stalls for time before making a buying decision. If you hear, "I'm not sure," or "I need some more time," that's your cue to probe.

Ask what additional information they want or need? Are they unsure about your price or product? Are they the real decision-maker, or should you be talking to someone else?

At the very least, set-up a firm appointment for when a decision can be made.

Trade Shows

With more than 75% of all trade literature thrown away before customers leave the arena, offer to mail your information to prospects. It saves the hassle of carrying it around and it sets you apart from other exhibitors. But, act fast...use overnight or next-day services to get your materials on their desks.

Designing Brochures

To make your new brochures stand-out, save all promotional mail you get for two weeks. Next, separate everything into

two stacks...what you like and what you don't like. Now, scan each pile to see what particulars worked and what didn't. Large firms spend a ton of money designing their mailers and you can "liberate" their best ideas for your own use, and save.

Pick Your Sales Words

Three over-used words that have lost all impact and attraction you should avoid are: "quality," "service," and "value." (Ask yourself if their use in ads attracts your own attention.)

Words that can effectively sell turf, that have maintained their sale-punch (at least for now) are: "free," "total freedom," "worry-free," "no hassles," "call toll-free."

Website Host Alert

TPI recently learned that VersaCom, also doing business as GrowZone or TurfZone, is advising most of its customers that they will not host individual websites after July 1. Although TPI has asked that the date be extended until January 1, 2001, that now seems unlikely.

TPI members who have had their website hosted by VersaCom, GrowZone.com or TurfZone.com should contact the company to determine what actions are in their own best long-term interest.

If a new website host is selected, consider whether or not your page will require periodic updates or other management that can become expensive.

Be cautious of moving from one host to another, as this may involve contract terms or costs that later prove inconsistent with your objectives and goals.

When Renewing Your TPI Membership

...review and update all of the information pre-printed on your renewal form;
...add new information, such as spouse name, varieties, cuts, etc.;
...proof-read the listing for your email or website carefully, or add this information if it is not listed;
...double-check your telephone and fax area codes to ensure accuracy;
...return renewal form, with payment (in U.S. dollars) as early as possible to ensure continuation of benefits and services.

Business Software Suite Packages

Business software suites - bundles of business applications sold at attractive prices - are powerful and versatile products. They help small businesses tackle a comprehensive array of daily tasks, including letter writing, sales analysis and presentation, customer - information management and Web publishing. Here's a quick look at the latest products and how they match up, including pricing and contact information...

Microsoft Office 2000.

More people use Microsoft Office than any other business suite. Included applications: Professional Edition: MS Word word processor, Excel spread-sheet, Access database manager, PowerPoint presentation program, Publisher desktop publishing program and Outlook personal-information manager. Small Business Edition eliminates Access and PowerPoint. Pros: Powerful programs, good Internet support, good collaboration with other users. Cons: Expensive, not the easiest suite to learn.

Price: \$599* for Professional Edition... \$349 for customers upgrading from an earlier version or a competing business suite. \$499 for Small Business Edition... \$249 for customers upgrading. From: Microsoft Corp., 800-426-9400. www.microsoft.com.

Corel WordPerfect Office 2000.

Comprehensive collection of useful tools. Included applications: Professional Edition: WordPerfect word processor, Quattro Pro spread-sheet, Paradox database manager, Corel Presentations presentation program, Corel Print Office desktop publishing program, Trellix Web publishing program, Corel Central personal-information manager and Dragon Naturally Speaking speech-recognition tool. Standard Edition eliminates Paradox, Corel Print Office and Dragon Naturally Speaking. Pros: Dragon Naturally Speaking lets you talk instead of type, comprehensive, easy to learn. Cons: Programs aren't as integrated as they could be. Price: \$399 for Professional

Edition ...\$199 for customers upgrading from an earlier version or a competing business suite. \$299 for Standard Edition...\$99 for customers upgrading. From: Corel Corp., 800-772-6735. www.corel.com.

Lotus SmartSuite Millennium Edition.

Featuring extensive collaboration tools, this suite is geared toward corporate users. But small-business users can also benefit from its feature-laden programs. Included applications: Word-Pro word processor, 1-2-3 spread-sheet, Approach database manager, Freelance Graphics presentation program, FastSite Web publishing program, Organizer personal-information manager and IBM Via Voice speech-recognition tool. Pros: Well integrated-easy to move among programs, outstanding collaboration tools. Cons: Not as comprehensive as other suites. Price: \$472...\$159 for customers upgrading from an earlier version or a competing business suite. From: Lotus Development Corp., 800-343-5414. www.lotus.com.

Marketing Tip

Who Needs Prompt Paying Customers?

Usually the best customers are those that are willing to pay a fair price for quality turfgrass sod and pay promptly when the grass arrives. Recently, however, Sod Solutions, Inc. and King Ranch - Florida actively pursued a customer who promised neither.

In August 1999, both companies partnered to supply 35,000 ft² of Palmetto® St. Augustine sod free of charge to a high profile project in the Jacksonville, Florida area. Although no way to run a business on a daily basis, Sod Solutions and King Ranch were delighted to be involved with the project because they received something more valuable than the actual cost of the turfgrass...TELEVISION EXPOSURE.

The project supplied was the personal residence of Gary Alan, a landscape designer / contractor who hosts a television program called *The Designer's Landscape With Gary Alan*.

Greg Douglas, Sod Solutions, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina

This program is carried on the Home and Garden Television (HGTV) network and Public Broadcasting System affiliates throughout the country.

This quid pro quo arrangement was put together after weeks of coordination and culminated in the taping of a half-hour episode devoted primarily to the installation and maintenance of Palmetto® St. Augustine sod in typical home lawn settings. The episode will be aired August 5, 2000 on HGTV and at various times throughout the year on PBS affiliates; almost one year after its original taping.

Given that this episode will reach over 180 million households in the United States, Sod Solutions and King Ranch - Florida feel that this non-paying customer might be one of their best ever. Perhaps your business should also consider pursuing customers such as this whose payments aren't necessarily measured in dollars and days overdue.

Business Briefs

Simple Retirement Solutions

for Small Business: Facts about profit sharing, Simplified Employee Pensions (SEPs), 401(k)s, and Savings Incentive Match Plans for Employees (SIMPLEs) for small employers. From: Pension and Welfare Benefits Administration, Washington, DC. Phone: 800/998-7542. Web: www.dol.gov/dol/pwba.public/pubs/savings.htm

30 Serious Errors / Problems Found in Pension and Profit Sharing Plans.

From: National Center for Retirement Benefits, Inc. Phone: 800/666-1000. Web: www.ncrb.com

Key to Telephone Savings:

Length of Calls...not rate per minute. Best: Billing in six-second increments for long-distance calls. On local calls, look for a 30-second initial increment - enough to complete a short call - followed by six second increments. Payoff: Six-second timing can easily save 40% of phone charges.

Taking Care of Business

Ronald Nixon, Heritage Turf, Inc.,
Midway, Alabama

Fertilize to Grow Customers

This past year has taught me the absolute necessity of having an active marketing plan. We advertise in order to sell our product. But we market to project our company and services before our target customers. We must do that because the market place is in a constant state of change. Even if you are doing just as you did last year, the customer (or prospect) from last year may have changed.

Someone else may have spoken to your customer, so you should be sure to let your customer that you still want and need his business. Maybe there were personnel changes and the new decision-maker does not know of the excellent product and service you provided last year. Of course, the ownership could have changed with the new owners having contacts and obligations elsewhere.

The life-span of a business can be very short. In fact, many fail in a couple of years. We have just celebrated our 25th year in business, and have out-lived most of our customers. As you might have guessed, this isn't all good news... especially when existing customers fall by the wayside.

New landscape contractors will not know about us - or consider us a source for sod - without aggressive marketing. It may very well be a difficult sale to make for we may be considered ancient, or something less than the newest and the best.

We triumph over the cycling of change by continuing to market our company. Very much like we fertilize our grass, sometimes we want growth and other times we fertilize just to sustain what we have created. This same idea is also true in marketing.

TPI Time Capsule A Retrospective Perspective

Even when economic expansion slows, people and businesses can do well (if not great) and some are able to create momentum that moves them ahead even faster when stronger-times return. Here are some tactics that may help you make the most of a slowing economy:

Spend time with loyal customers - even though they may not be placing orders as large or as frequently as they once might have, time spent with loyal customers to talk about business and product improvements will pay off when better times return. They'll remember you first when they need to place orders.

Avoid cutting prices - all of your competitors who can't afford to lose sales will match your price cuts, so your company's market share won't rise and revenues will decline further. In fact, bargain hunters are generally the worst customers for small businesses because they are inherently disloyal. Then too, customers will come to expect lower prices and getting back to yesterday's prices will be very difficult.

Look for bargains - sod farms aren't the only businesses that are affected by economic slow-downs. Vendors you've done business with in the past may be willing to accept your order, on your terms and conditions of price, delivery, etc.

Build relationships with new customers. Get to know customers by name, and use their names in conversations with them. Take time to chat with them when they visit your farm and try to learn about their family or other interests they may have that you can incorporate into your discussions. The value of the relationships you build may ultimately outweigh the price difference between your sod and that of the 'low-bidders' in your area.

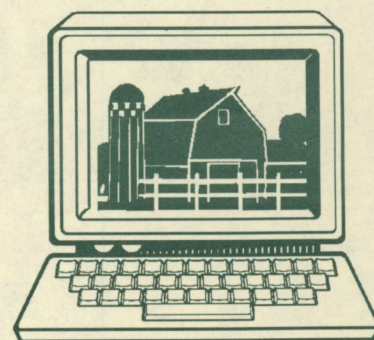
Lastly, watch your cash-flow and review your business to determine if there are markets you've yet to explore. As an example, although small orders can be a nuisance...with a bit of planning, multiple orders can be grouped for delivery to various sites - where more often than not, you get paid immediately!

Shrewder Computing

Entry-Level Websites...Free

If you would like to have a modest website, but don't want to pay for it, consider using one of the free website development and hosting services available online. A number of companies currently offer these services (MSN, Lycos and Yahoo, for example). Primary disadvantages: your host will have a banner-ad on your page, and the size of your space may be limited.

Online software walks you through the process, and you don't have to be a computer nerd to set up your own site. You can use templates to upload text, pictures and most importantly...your contact information to your site.



You can develop the site and have it online in an hour or so. There are even utilities available to help you 'promote' your site. Once you are up-and-running, you can always modify your site to improve upon your initial design. As you become more comfortable with the process, you can create separate pages for visitors to view and even add animated graphics!

All you need to begin is access to the internet. But before you begin, think-through the kinds of information you want to have on your site, (company profile/history, directions to your farm, logo, etc.) and gather these materials for use as you create your website. Have fun, and email TPI your web address!

TPI Action

With over 70% of TPI's producer (Class A) members residing in the U.S., a proportional amount of effort is directed toward legislative and regulatory actions in the U.S.; however, many elements effect producers in all locations. Members are encouraged to provide TPI information or suggestions on the following items, or to bring others to the leadership's attention:

Turf Sodding Projects for public relations articles, especially those focusing on economic values of sodding, erosion control or water conservation
Erosion Control Projects, large or small scale, with before and after photos or documentation of turf's benefits

Water Conservation techniques related to turf farming or installation sites, both large and small, or landscape ordinances that favor sodding

The following legislative and regulatory matters are also being addressed by TPI. Where legislation is pending, bill numbers are shown and TPI members are asked to contact their Senators and/or Representatives to gain support:

Food Quality Protection Act (S.1464 and H.R. 1592) -- gaining sponsors

Ag Guestworker Reform (S. 1814, H.R. 4056 and Cong. Pombo bill to be introduced)--Senate hearings now underway, House activity to proceed soon. Need grassroots support from all farms to achieve passage this year.

Federal Crop Insurance (S. 2251 and H.R. 2559) -- now awaiting conference committee action. Need to encourage attention to specialty crops, like turfgrass sod

Methyl Bromide Availability (H.R. 4215) -- recently introduced by Cong. Pombo, will extend availability dates. Needs strong push from TPI members.

Invasive / Alien Species & Noxious Weeds --

OSHA Ergonomic Standards --

Atrazine & Chlopyrifos EPA re-review on availability --

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 Email: Turf-Grass@msn.com

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

Jest For The Fun Of It

By the Numbers...

\$6 billion. Amount the U.S. Federal Government collects annually through a 3% phone tax, enacted in 1898 to help pay for the Spanish-American War.

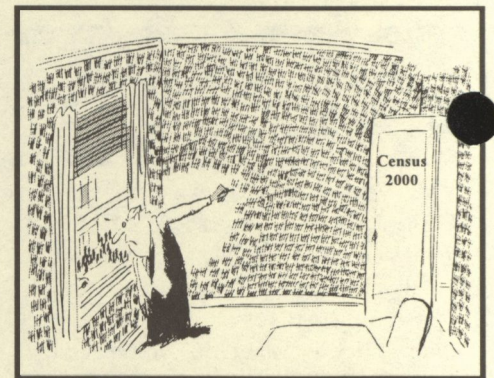
4.9 billion. Estimated total cost of the eight-month, Spanish-American war, adjusted for inflation.

\$839,486,000. U.S. turfgrass sod sales in 1998, according to Census of Horticultural Specialties.

\$110,000. Cost of a Louisiana study that found underage gamblers can buy lottery tickets 64% of the time.

42,000. Daily number of births in India.

O. Number of times a man is allowed to forget his wedding anniversary.



BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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

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