

Aug./Sept. 2002



# BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

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### TPI Midwinter Conference February 26-28, 2003 Birmingham, England Sneak Preview

- ♦ Educational sessions featuring:
  - Producers from various global regions will discuss production
  - Thames Water Plc. rep will address global water issues
  - Randy Graff will share insight into successful pricing
- ♦ Two days of exhibits
- ♦ JCB Factory/Headquarter Tour
- ♦ ITPF Banquet & Fundraiser in England's Castles and Gardens
- ♦ Many Optional Pre- and Post Conference Tours from Eagle Tour

Visit [www.TurfGrassSod.org](http://www.TurfGrassSod.org) for more.

## TPI Takes Leadership Role:


### Coalition Acts on Methyl Bromide

In an unprecedented show of industry unity, TPI is leading a coalition of U.S. state and regional turf producer associations to complete a nation-wide "Critical Use Exemption For Methyl Bromide" application. Practically all uses of methyl bromide are to be banned after 2005 and only a special United Nations group (the Methyl Bromide Technical Options Committee or MBTOC) has the authority to grant special use exemptions.

Recognizing the enormous resources required to complete the USEPA's 27-page application in a short amount of time, the TPI Board of Trustees agreed to take the lead; helped to create an advisory group of experts on the subject and began coordinating the nationwide effort.

Turf producers from across the U.S. have been asked to submit highly confidential data to TPI for inclusion in the application. No farm's data will be exposed to scrutiny or used for any purposes other than completing this application.

TPI Executive Director Doug Fender said, "We're fortunate to have Drs. Haydu, Unhru and Vansickle...all from the University of Florida...and Steve Godbehere from Hendrix and Dail assisting with this process. They are all recognized experts on various aspects of turf and ag economics and agronomics as they relate to methyl bromide's importance to this industry. We recognize that even an outstanding application may be rejected by the EPA or MBTOC, because their objective is to ban this chemical. However, if we don't make the effort we won't have grounds for any later appeals or other options."

TPI President Stan Gardner said, "It's great to be addressing what is basically a warm-season growers' concern. In the past, TPI has been criticized for focusing almost exclusively on cool-season concerns. We have and will continue to put TPI's resources on those issues where they are needed, regardless of whether it's warm- or cool-season grasses." 

## When Customers Say "No," Don't Quit

Although the goal of every sales call is to "close" (confirm an order), to expect that to happen every time would be unrealistic. However, to simply *quit* after the customer says, "No" to your sales pitch closes the door to potential sales. Keep the door open by trying to close something—anything—to keep the sales process alive.


*Reason:* Closing on something heightens commitment and increases the prospects' motivation to buy later.

Learn to recognize and welcome "intermediate" closes, including gaining the prospect's promise to:

- ♦ Meet again at a convenient time
- ♦ Review your product literature
- ♦ Accept a bid or proposal
- ♦ Visit your farm and experience first-hand your crops and test plots
- ♦ Visit and talk with others who use your

products and services

- ♦ Use your products or services on a trial basis

Be sure to follow up each sales call with a personalized letter of appreciation, reaffirming highlights of the conversation, including an invitation to contact you for additional information. 

## Member Benefits for Non-Renewals to Stop

As of September 1, farms and firms who have not renewed their TPI membership for 2002-2003 will stop receiving member benefits, such as this newsletter, Turf News and a wide range of other valuable services.

If your renewal notice has been misplaced or lost, or you're not sure whether you renewed, contact the TPI office right away at 800/405-8873 or 847/705-9898.



# Taking Care of Business

By Dave Anderson  
[www.LearnToLead.com](http://www.LearnToLead.com)  
Los Altos, CA

## Seven Ways to Stay Up in Down Times

Business-as-usual doesn't cut it when markets, consumers or other conditions beyond your control turn against you. The old saying, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger," is little consolation when business is slow. Here are seven steps to help you stay up in down times:

**1. Focus on your core business**—and invest in what your business does best. Always assume your core is under performing and you'll be right most of the time. Aggressively market to your current customers. In down times one of the best ways to gain market share is to retain the customers you already have and gain their referrals.

**2. Don't "panic-spend" on advertising**—and focus on doing a better job with the customers already coming through the door. With lower traffic counts comes an opportunity to build more rapport, give better presentations and follow up more thoroughly throughout the sales process—often resulting in more.

**3. Don't kill your capacity to produce**—improve your bottom line by maintaining a tighter inventory, re-focus ad dollars, put vendor products/services up for bid, and improve receivables and other cash flow factors. Resist the short-sighted strategy of cutting costs that contribute to the development of the your most valuable asset: your people. Training is not a luxury and it's not a

cost; it's an investment in sustaining your competitive edge and increasing your production.

**4. Reduce entitlements, reward performance, terminate the weakest links**—tenure and credentials don't substitute for results; so, reward and support employees who perform. Otherwise, the weak links in your organization can lower the collective self-esteem of the whole team, compromise your standards and impair your credibility as a leader. Top performers feel cheapened and diminished working in an environment where others don't contribute and can't pull their weight. Use down-times as an opportunity to clean up your roster.

**5. Cut once**—reducing expenses one month by cutting out free pop, then two weeks later eliminating another benefit (and perhaps an employee or two) and so on, is disruptive and demoralizing. Get it over with by bringing all employees together and explaining what you are about to do, why and then do it. Then reassure your people that everyone and everything that remains has been strengthened by these cuts, and now it's time to get back to work.

**6. Don't develop a loser's limp**—an economical down-turn always exposes the sins of the good times, yet many individuals tend to blame outside conditions in order to escape responsibility of their current business ills. Typical ones

include poor (or lack of) leadership, hiring standards, performance expectations, accountability, strategy, urgency, people-development and a growth environment. These are the inside threats a business owner/manager must work on to eliminate day-in and day-out.

**7. Stay positive**—through honest communications, good coaching leads from the front with plenty of speedy, positive reinforcement for worthy performances. It involves encouragement, motivation and listening. Good coaches also give fast feedback, as well as consequences for deficient performances.

Stay focused on the big picture. And remember the best time to fix the roof is when the sun is shining. When better times return it's the best time to train, coach, clean up your roster, set standards that create urgency, make the tough decisions, implement necessary changes, take risks and lead from the front.

If these things are done when business is good, people will stay sharp and focused. Let them know there's still room to improve. When business starts to pick up again, develop a mind-set to run up the score rather than sit on the ball, and the next downturn will find you bullet-proof rather than bullet-riddled.

ETPI

## PR Insight: Editors Like Short Releases

Sending one-page feature releases can get you on an editor's must-use list, according to Carole Collins, senior media specialist at the federal Consumer Information Center. Reasons:

- One-pagers offering readers a main point and some usable tips that need little polishing

- These briefs feed editors' hunger for stories that urge people to act, not ponder

Here are some ideas to improve the chances

editors will use your releases:

- Use lots of "you" copy—information "you" can use, or how "you" can make or save money. Also, try to include the powerful word "FREE."

- Put tips in a bulleted list format

- Write text that shows how readers can control their lives—"These techniques will increase your property's value"

- Appeal to readers' fear of losing control—"Are you in danger of

losing community prestige?"

- Include a statistical chart or a graph. Editors will sometimes run your release just so they can use the chart or graph.

- If you send a release electronically—which many editors prefer—include the text of the releases in the e-mail message rather than as attachments. *Reason:* Some editors have trouble detaching a file because of system differences and might delete it.

ETPI

## Financial Management

**The Stop Payment Trap**—Although banks usually accept verbal stop-payment requests, they may not accept the responsibility for mistakenly honoring the check. The best defense is to tell the bank representative you will follow up with your request in writing; then put the stop-payment request in writing and fax or deliver it the same day.

**Gift Tax Trap**—According to *Bottom Line/Business*, putting assets such as real estate into a family limited partnership (LP) and then gifting non-voting shares to heirs is one way to reduce gift and estate taxes. This works best if the assets are put into the LP or LLC before making the heirs partners or members. A new Tax Court case says that setting up an entity with all interests in place and then adding assets amounts to making indirect gifts to the beneficiaries, potentially with adverse consequences.

ETPI



# Marketing Tip

By Dave Dymond  
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## Now is A Good Time to Review What Works and What Doesn't

As Charles Dickens began his *Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times." In the sod growing business we have benefited from the "best-of-times" economy this past decade. Marketing or selling our product has been relatively easy. In fact, in our case, we have been challenged more to produce enough, than to sell what we had grown. However, could now be the beginning of those dreaded "worst of times?"

We have been called on to shift gears and pay attention to how we can improve the marketing of our crops now that the economy has begun to soften and inventories, as well as competition, have grown. It has been a long time since we were concerned about whether we could move all of our products or maintain profitable volumes.

It has become very clear that it is time for us to assess what we have been doing right—in the eyes of our customers—to bring us the success we have enjoyed in the past. It is also time to ask ourselves the following questions:

- ♦ What else can we do for our customers?
- ♦ How can we help our customers market more of our sod?
- ♦ Are we giving our customers what they want in the manner they truly want it?
- ♦ Have we updated our knowledge of the local market/economy?
- ♦ Is our product as good of a fit for the market today as it was, say, five years ago, three years ago...or even last year? And, more importantly, will it fit for the immediate and future years?
- ♦ Have we told customers about any new varieties or products we are growing and experimenting with that may be a better fit for them?
- ♦ Have we invited our customers to the farm to see our operation?
- ♦ Have we communicated with all of our customers or just our favorites?
- ♦ Is there any way we make the smaller volume customers into larger volume customers?
- ♦ Have we become "just order-takers?"
- ♦ Have we assessed and observed the

competition?

- ♦ Have we lost some of our customers' business without even knowing it?
- ♦ Have we added any new customers lately?
- ♦ When was the last time we "beat the bushes" for new customers?
- ♦ Is our staff still friendly, helpful and professional?
- ♦ Is our credit policy too strict or too loose?
- ♦ Have we just simply asked for more business from our customers?
- ♦ Have our methods become static or stagnant, no longer dynamic and fresh?
- ♦ Have our quality, consistency and reputation maintained their high level, or has it fallen in our customers' eyes.

I'm sure each of us can probably add a dozen or more questions to ask ourselves. But the point is, it's time for self-evaluation and re-examination of all that we do, not just a few of the things, but all of them. We must do the same with our relationships with our customers.

The benefit of this self-evaluation will be the foundation on which to amend or intensify the direction of our marketing program. It may only need a few minor adjustments—rather than a major overhaul—to be improved. As another familiar old saying goes, "You don't need a sledgehammer to kill an ant."

In closing, ask yourself this question, "Have I been too busy chopping wood to sharpen my axe?" If you have, I can assure you that your competition's axe is extra sharp and ready to cut into your customer list.

QTP

### Looking for More Business Management Ideas?

At website [www.bizmove.com](http://www.bizmove.com), you'll find food for thought about topics ranging from "Sales and Marketing," "Personnel Management" and "Financial Management," to "Buying a Business," "International Trade," "Internet Business," "General Management," "Inspiration Stuff" and a lot of other usable information.

# Shrewder Computing

## Web Content—Dos and Don'ts

A Stanford University study reinforced the fact that—unlike newspapers and magazines—the text of a Web news site is the primary focus, the graphics are secondary.

**Lesson:** Although your Website's appearance is important, its informational content matters most. The right content influences visitors' perceptions of your business, generates sales and contributes toward customer loyalty.

### A few suggestions:

1. **Reinforce company image**—be sure the content is targeted to your audience and conveys your goals
2. **Insist on accuracy**—spelling, grammatical structure and unbroken links are as important as factually accurate and complete text
3. **Access to your business' background**—separate any advertising from the informational content to avoid comprising your objectivity
4. **Include a "Last updated" message**—better to link pages after completion than to link a partially completed section and apologize with an "Under Construction" sign
5. **Monitor popular content**—in addition to traditional surveys and focus groups, use Web response forms and tracking services (such as HitBox at [www.hitbox.com](http://www.hitbox.com)) to determine what works best
6. **Remember your neighborhood**—although the Web is worldwide, an on-line newsletter publisher (*Streetmail*) survey revealed that 72% of Web users indicated they were more likely to use content created within their communities than that produced in a remote source
7. **Frequently re-evaluate your Website's content**—make sure your site's information is current, accurate and complete; tests links (internal and external) to insure they're still working.

QTP



## TPI Action

### Non-US Producers Can Turn To TPI For Methyl Bromide Assistance

All TPI firms who have or are using methyl bromide should immediately determine if their country is a signator to the "Montreal Protocol." This international treaty requires developed countries to essentially ban the use of methyl bromide by 2005. At this time, TPI has not been able to obtain a listing of all countries signing the "Montreal Protocol," and thus is unable to specify which TPI members may be impacted by this process and ultimate ban.

In its research of the subject, TPI has learned that *Basamid* is the only chemical alternative designated for turfgrass sod production, and is therefore the only product turf producers need to address in their applications for continued use of methyl bromide. Much of the information being assembled by TPI for the U.S. producers' application may have merit and bearing for the applications of other countries.

### Board Approves 'Restructuring' of TPI

Following months of fact-gathering, listening to members and hearing from experts, TPI's Board of Trustees is embarking on a 'restructuring' of the organization as a means of making it more responsive to member needs. Details will be presented in *Turf News* and through mailings to the members, but essentially, the Board has chosen to move away from multiple standing committees and will now seek-out member input through twice-annual "Open Forum Round Tables," focus groups and working groups.

In addition, a new group, "Affiliate Representatives" will be developed by area, state, regional and national turf organizations who select a TPI member to serve this working group. They will convene twice a year to address common concerns, share solutions and seek TPI's involvement or coordination.

### Have You Renewed Your TPI Membership?

To receive additional information on any of these items, Contact the TPI Office

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

Fax: 847/705-8347

e-mail: [info@TurfGrassSod.org](mailto:info@TurfGrassSod.org)

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

## Water Awareness

### Best-Management Practices (BMP) for Golf Course Irrigation

Golf courses simply cannot afford to waste water. It's to their advantage to incorporate water conservation through best management practices: proper plant selection and maintenance that provide adequate turf quality while minimizing water use. These include:

- ✓ Selecting low water-use turfgrasses, groundcovers, shrubs and trees
- ✓ Providing adequate nutrients to the turf—a balance of potassium and nitrogen, while avoiding excessive nitrogen
- ✓ Using mulches in shrub and flower beds to reduce water evaporation losses
- ✓ Adjusting mowing heights to ideal levels, based on seasonal water-use characteristics of species
- ✓ Using soil cultivation techniques to improve water infiltration and minimize irrigation- or rain-water run-off
- ✓ Improving drainage to produce healthier turf root systems that draw moisture from a larger soil volume
- ✓ Limiting cart traffic to paths to minimize turf wear and soil compaction
- ✓ Cycling irrigation sessions for good infiltration and minimize run-off
- ✓ Pruning tree roots near turf to prevent competition for moisture and nutrients

 TPI

## Business Management

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