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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

State models create 'fast-track'

Lawn-Limiting Ordinances

TPI members world-wide should be alert to the growing likelihood that turf-limiting landscape ordinances could be drafted without their knowledge or input.

Since November, TPI has become aware of efforts in Florida and Massachusetts to write or update state-wide model landscape ordinances, with locals using the models to rapidly draft ordinances. In both states, the models assume turfgrass either wastes or requires more water than other plants and then strongly suggests that some manner of limiting turf be included in local ordinances.

In addition to the need for state green industry groups to address and correct the short-comings and scientific errors of the state models, actions must be taken at local levels.

Local TPI member awareness and involvement is absolutely essential because with the guidance, and empowerment of a state-wide model, local ordinance drafting can advance very quickly and beyond the point where scientific fact, common sense and balanced environmental considerations can be effectively introduced.

As outlined in ITPF's brochure, "*Share The Water*," producers can take a lead position in organizing other green-industry interests and being a valuable resource to water-policy ordinance writers. Also, the ITPF book, *WATER RIGHT -- Conserving Our Water, Preserving Our Environment*, can be an invaluable educational tool for all involved interests.

Copies of these publications are available from TPI at little or no cost to members.

Yellow Pages Ad Scam Costs Small Businesses Millions

Small business owners pay an estimated \$500,000 to "bogus" Yellow Pages billing schemes, annually. What makes this misleading and fraudulent Yellow Pages solicitations appear to be so authentic is their frequent use of the famous (but never trademarked) "Walking Fingers" logo. Consequently, many of these bills are routinely paid by unsuspecting business owners, nationwide.

Some tips on how to recognize a bogus Yellow Pages billing and what you should do if you suspect you have received one:

- ✓ Examine the bill carefully before you pay it. Check your files for pending contracts with Yellow Pages publishers to ensure the mailing relates to advertising you ordered.
- ✓ Notify your local postal inspector who wants to stop fraudulent mail.
- ✓ Contact the Better Business Bureau.

- ✓ Alert your State Attorney General's office.
- ✓ Photocopy the solicitation and post it on a bulletin board. Circulate among staff.
- ✓ Contact the Yellow Pages publishers with whom you do business so they can alert other advertisers in your area.

Selling in Other Countries? Register Your Trademark

If your sales are increasing in other countries—perhaps via the internet—where your trademark is not registered, you may want to consider registering it there. Otherwise, an individual or company could use or register it as their own for a similar product, making it difficult to take corrective legal action. For more information on trademarks, in the United States call 800/786-9199 or visit www.uspto.gov; for other countries' trademarks, contact the embassy of the countries in which you're interested.

Taking Care of Business

By Joel Addink,
A-G Sod Farms, Inc.
Riverside, California

Save Time, Money and Frustration: Hire Right!

Since I have interviews scheduled for two different job openings this week, it seems that hiring is a timely topic for this column. We have all heard the saying "people are our most important asset," but the grind of finding, screening and training people can get old. We love our jobs, but it's the people that get us down!

In his book *Hiring Excellence*, Pat MacMillan tells the story of going fishing with his father. They began walking to his father's favorite fishing hole. The boy became puzzled as they passed other fishermen who had stopped to drop a line closer to the road. His father explained that the fishing holes close to the road did not have any really big fish because they had been caught years ago.

An hour into the foothills provided plenty more opportunities to drop their lines in numerous small streams they crossed on the way to richer waters.

Dad led them to a high mountain lake where they spent the afternoon pulling in beautiful, large rainbow trout. "You don't find these fish by the side of the road" his father reminded him. The hike back to the car was interrupted by the

boy's insistence that they stop and compare their fish with those caught by fishermen they had passed earlier in the day.

MacMillan used the story to emphasize that exceptional people are less accessible but it is worth the effort to find them. We are often too quick to settle for the acceptable versus the exceptional ones.

Larry Burkett, in *Business by the Book*, emphasizes the need to define the job clearly. Often by reading a job description the prospective employee will see he is not qualified or that this is not his "cup of tea." Even hearing a verbal description during the interview is not as effective as seeing it in black and white. The job description is also invaluable in defining expectations after the hire date and can protect you legally when someone falls short of expectation.

Hiring the best person for the job may involve having the person take a personality or skills test. Personality tests can be used to determine if a candidate is a good fit for key positions. Compare personality tests of someone who does the job well in another company and look for a similar personality profile.

Skills testing is also important. If a driver needs to lift a heavy tarp, have them do it as part of the interview. When interviewing for customer service positions, give the person a test which measures customer service attitudes and accuracy. The G. Neil Company (800/999-9111) has a variety of tests available for purchase and they can help walk you through which one is right for the job.

When the snow and rain stop and we are short a driver or field crew, it is easy to hire the first person through the door as long as their breath will fog a mirror. You will probably regret this later. It is better for the existing crew to work their butts off than to hire someone who will drag down the team.

By hiring a bit early, you can usually

avoid the problem of being short-handed. It costs a little more in idle time to hire early, but the rest of the season will go much smoother since you have qualified, trained employees.

I took a job as assistant manager of a Burger King right out of college. My manager gave me the task of hiring the crew needed to handle the lunch rush hour from the nearby high school. He encouraged me to begin interviewing early rather than wait until the last minute. Of course, I procrastinated and had hired the people we needed barely in time for the start of school. Chalk one up to experience.

When Your Wallet is Stolen

Within one week of a man's wallet and credit cards being stolen, the thief had ordered an expensive monthly cell phone package, applied for a VISA credit card, received credit approval to buy a Gateway computer, received a PIN number for the DMV to change the man's driving record information on-line, and more.

Everyone advises cancelling your credit cards immediately, but the critical key to limiting the damage is for you to have the toll-free credit card companies' phone numbers and card numbers handy so you can call and report the theft immediately. It's also a good idea to file a police report in the jurisdiction where the crime took place, as a demonstration to the credit providers you were diligent.

Most important in the U.S., however, is calling the three national credit reporting organizations immediately to place a fraud alert on your name and social security number—any company that checks your credit knows immediately that your information was stolen and they have to contact you by phone to authorize new credit. The numbers are:

Equifax: 800/525-6285

Experian: (formerly TRW) 888/397-3742

Trans Union: 800/680-7289

Social Security Administration:

(fraud line): 800/269-0271

More Hiring Tips

- ◆ If you run a newspaper ad, act quickly on the applicants you receive since the good ones go fast.
- ◆ If you use a temporary agency, interview the candidates yourself. Most temporary agencies are more motivated to place a *person* in the job than to place the *right person* in the job.
- ◆ If it is a key position, have at least two people interview the candidate.
- ◆ Interview first, explain the job later. If you tell them all about the job up front, then they will tailor their answers to fit what you described.

Marketing Tip

Little Things Mean a Lot... Successful Direct Marketing

Some turfgrass producers have discovered direct marketing as an effective—and often overlooked—way to not only establish contact with a large group of potential customers but to generate a more immediate buying response. While direct marketing includes telephone selling, TV, radio, e-mail and other variations, it remains that traditional mail—even at higher rates—is still by far the most effective tool for direct marketers. Following are some tricks-of-the-trade used by successful direct marketers

Make a big deal out of being a small company. There is probably a story behind what makes your company unique and how you came to sell the products and services you do. Tell it. In printed ad copy and direct-mail letters, this story—as told by you—will help you establish long-term relationships, not just make initial sales.

Example: Paint a clear, memorable portrait of your company, like one direct marketing company did for a pecan farmer. Prospects were sent a folksy message, very much in keeping with the client's "retired businessman turned pecan farmer" personality. The mailing talked about how he followed his dream and learned the hard way about raising pecans. Prospective customer were offered a sample pack of pecans for \$10...orders came rolling in.

Get the most from your own mailing list. Large companies pay thousands of dollars to update their databases, often because their original customer lists lacked detailed information. As a small business operator, you can create a database of names, addresses and buying habits by talking to your customers and prospects. Keep this list up-to-date from the start and you'll have something to build on and grow.

Example: An outdoor sports clothing company might rent a list from a company that sells fishing and hunting apparel. Turf producers might want to simply spend a few minutes searching the internet for

contacts at state and local parks, colleges and high schools.

Don't cut corners on the offer. Many small companies feel they can't afford to give away something truly valuable as part of a direct-marketing, even after considering how much it costs to get a new customer the conventional way with sales calls.

Example: Today's better educated consumers value credible information. After investing in a newly sodded lawn, they want to know how to care for and maintain it. What better way for their landscape contractor to demonstrate his concern for their new lawn than by giving the customer a brochure with that information in a clear, easy-to-read format. For turfgrass sod producers to offer those brochures to their landscape contractor customers at no charge is worth promoting in a direct mail piece, which also invites the contractor to meet with the producer and visit his farm. Be sure to keep accurate record of all responses and follow-up at regular intervals.

Improve Your Marketing Materials

Here are some items to keep out of your marketing materials:

Jargon—Using "jargon" puts a big barrier between you and most audiences. It's better to simplify.

Inappropriate photos—Make sure every photo or graphic image you include adds value to your message, is simple and understandable. Outdated photos are not acceptable in this era of high technology.

Lack of focus—While general purpose brochures have a place in marketing, they should be accompanied with a piece that has focus—the core of marketing.

History Lesson—If you include your company's history, keep it brief.

Shrewder Computing

A Patchwork Server for Defense Against Viruses

The easiest, most cost-effective tip businesses can follow to avoid a maelstrom of internet viruses is to keep current with the latest server patches. Viruses are malicious computer codes capable of crippling any company by corrupting data or bringing down networks. Some of the newer viruses often go undetected by older versions of anti-virus software. That's why current server patches are a basic, essential line of defense against viruses.

But patches, alone, often are not enough. Companies also need to maintain defense in their networks by installing firewalls and multiple anti-virus software packages at the gateway. Companies also should be aware of security alerts, "hot fixes" and other updates that would help guard against the latest viruses. Microsoft, for example, has patches available for download on its website.

Up-front investing in a technician to review your network or download and install patches to your server is prudent, compared to the thousands of dollars it could cost to restore crippled networks after a severe viral attack—that's in addition to the cost of lost work hours and productivity.

For security reasons, the Federal Trade Commission recently announced the possibility of requiring patch installation for companies. In doing so, its intent is to prevent worldwide virus spread. Banks and other financial institutions are currently required to have such safeguards.

For more information about the latest security alerts, regulations and such, contact: Cert.org (CERT Coordination Centers site for the latest security alerts); Wired.com, Cnet.com, Zdnet.com and Internet.com.

TPI Action

MEMBER INTEREST / ACTION SOUGHT ON U.S. ISSUES

Currently, a growing number of issues are coming from various departments of the U.S. government that may have an impact on turfgrass sod producers. The amount of resources TPI devotes to any of these issues is determined by the level of member determined interest or importance, as determined by the TPI Board.

Please advise the TPI office if you believe the following issues are of significance to you, and indicate how personally involved you may be prepared to become if necessary:

Methyl Bromide: USEPA is now finalizing the processes required for exempt uses either for "quarantine and pre-shipment," or one-year "critical uses." While the application paperwork and review processes seem monumental and the likelihood of success small, some producers may conclude the effort is essential.

Pesticide Drift: new labeling requirements are being drafted by the USEPA that would establish an impossible-to-meet "zero-drift policy." Other issues include defining "sensitive areas" and wind speed limits and direction.

Ergonomics: OSHA continues to develop workplace standards that would address issues of "repetitive motion," lifting weight limits and requirements for owners to identify and correct problem areas, without specific guidance from OSHA. Although an "ag exemption" is being discussed, it may not be applied.

Seasonal/Foreign Workers: while some farms are looking to the H-2B temporary seasonal worker program (which cannot be used by ag operations), others are looking to the H-2A program to remedy labor shortages. Since the Sept. 11 attacks many mixed messages are going to Congress and President Bush regarding immigration lock-downs, food safety, etc., and the need for H-2A reforms.

USDA/Ag Research Service: talks are already underway to possibly create more turf scientist positions within the USDA, perhaps working with the current National Turfgrass Evaluation Program. Could result in better science and agronomics as well as more varieties. Concerns have also been raised about promotion of sod production as an alternative crop and the increase in competition.

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: info@TurfGrassSod.org

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

Water Awareness

Landscape Water-Conservation Techniques for Pre-drought/Pre-maximum Heat

- ◆ Increase water infiltration with dethatching or hollow-core aerification
- ◆ Irrigate all plants infrequently and deeply
- ◆ Fertilize all plants (when soil temperatures reach at least 50° F (10° C) with a balanced plant food that contains nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K), based on soil testing
- ◆ Sharpen pruning shears and mower blades
- ◆ Begin regular mowing
- ◆ Raise mowing height as summer progresses to encourage deep rooting
- ◆ Perform irrigation-system maintenance to ensure maximum uniformity of coverage
- ◆ Upgrade inground irrigation systems by adding soil-moisture meters, rain shut-off devices or evapotranspiration-based controllers
- ◆ Relocate drip emitters, particularly around trees to outer edge of drip lines
- ◆ Confirm water-application rates
- ◆ Water in early morning

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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