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Dropped

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

Association Coalitions'

The Power Of 'More'

One of the easiest, most inexpensive and effective ways to improve your business and it's future is through coalitions.

Chances are that within your market area there are associations for landscape contractors, architects, nurserymen, lawn care professionals, garden center retailers, irrigation specialists and others related to the green industry. Partnering with these associations or individual members can help you and them. It's the power of more...more exposure, more contacts, more knowledge, more funding, more results, more influence, etc., etc., etc.

TPI is a great example of putting coalitions to work. The ratio between TPI's size and its overall effectiveness would seem out-of-balance to most people. So much is being accomplished with a comparative small membership, budget and staff.

The fact of the matter is that TPI's relationship with other groups allows it to surpass it's own capacity and capabilities. The same can happen to individual turf producers or their area association if there is a conscience effort to seek-out

partnerships and a willingness to take a share-and-share-alike attitude, through thick and thin. You also need to accept that your partners won't always agree with you on each and every point...that's healthy because you gain an appreciation for a different point-of view and know how "the other side" thinks!

One great TPI example, (you can define your own situation): partnering with the Irrigation Association, Associated Landscape Contractors of America and the American Nursery and Landscape Association to create a web-based, landscape water-crisis manual. Each of the associations could have done it on their own, but by pooling resources, the results will be better, have a broader base and cost only quarters on the dollar!

To put the power of 'more' to work for you, start with casual conversations with your current business contacts. Define the common concerns you both have and begin exploring ways to coordinate and cooperate. Take it to the respective groups when you are ready to advance to the next level.



Look Ahead to Bad-Debt Issues

It's the time of year when successful turf producers start to focus on possible season-ending bad-debt.

By now, trends for the year have been established and you can tell which of your customers pay on time and which are slow or actual dead-beats.

Why wait until the season is over to start addressing the potential of bad-debtors? Start now, when there's still enough season left so the firm will generate cash-flow to meet its financial obligations to you.

Steps to take:

1. Establish who is 30-60-90 days late
2. Make in-person contact with the owner to reach a "catch-up" agreement

3. Tighten credit policies or require cash-on-delivery for new orders

4. Follow-up every week or two to ensure the agreement is met

5. Consider filing liens or taking other hardline collection actions immediately

6. Don't be bashful about sharing the name of your bad-debt accounts with others in the industry...and hope they'll do the same for you.

The longer a debt remains unpaid, the greater the likelihood that it will never be paid. Acting early and from a position of strength ensures payment, while the fear of acting or losing a sale is the worst action possible. Remember, the real sales aren't made until payment is in your bank account.



2004 TPI Midwinter Conference

Tuesday, February 17

ITPF Al Gardner Memorial Golf
Tournament

Wednesday, February 18

Seminar
Exhibits & Welcoming Reception

Thursday, February 19

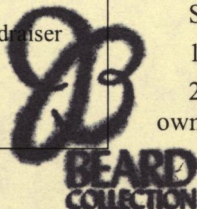
General Education Assembly
Exhibits & Lunch
Polo Club Tour

Friday, February 20

General Education Assembly
Roundtable Forum
ITPF Banquet, Awards, Fundraiser

Saturday, February 21

Farm/Ag Tour



Taking Care of Business

By Dave Dymond
H&H Sod Co., Inc.
Kenansville, FL

Water Problems...Never in Florida...Until Now!

Just a few years ago, when TPI was rolling out its *WATER RIGHT* book, I was impressed with the effort and information that was put together by the "Water Committee." I fully supported TPI's initiative to educate members and bureaucrats about water conservation. But, deep down inside, I thought, "Man, I'm glad we have 50-60 inches of rain a year in Florida. I won't have to worry about water issues like my fellow members in the dryer climates of the world.

Times Have Changed

If a guy is allowed to eat his words, or in this case thoughts, then please pass me a fork and some salt and pepper. I was very wrong to be complacent about the possibilities that water issues would affect our sod industry here in Florida.

The "Big Drought"

During the years 2001 and 2002, most of Florida experienced two of the driest years in history. This drought occurred while our state's housing industry continued to grow at an extremely high rate. That was great for our business but not so great for some county and municipal water systems where usage soared and panic set in. Florida was running out of water!

It seemed unbelievable because Florida is loaded with water. We have many lakes, canals, bays, rivers, swamps and even the oceans. However, the problem with much of this water is that it is not potable because of high salt content. Drinking water, or municipal water supplies, comes from inland well fields.

In many cities this good water is also used for irrigation. There in lies the problem. Water policy decision makers were declaring a panic about water becoming depleted by the year 2020. The answer to the problem, according to them, was to mandate the writing of landscape irrigation conservation ordinances. All of these "conservation initiatives" were efforts to attack the green industry in three ways. First, they mandated a reduction in the amount of "permanent in-ground irrigation systems" to only 30 to 50 percent of the landscaped area.

Secondly, they mandated the usage of "Florida Friendly Landscapes" (code

name for "native plants") because they don't need any irrigation. And third, they enforced the xeriscape law which clearly states in its verbiage that "turf areas" are to be reduced.

These new laws were aimed at the homeowner, the end-user of our products. It did not affect production agriculture irrigation. But what good is growing a product, if it can't be properly irrigated or maintained?

Hitting a moving Target

To make this bad news worse, these conservation ordinances were not statewide but written by each affected county or municipality that chose to. We have 63 counties and over 700 cities. Our challenge was figuring how to fight or get involved in a battle that can take place in 63-plus locations.

Getting Political—Not me, I'm just a sod grower!

Just like I had previously thought "...water issues won't affect us here in Florida," I have also said many times that I did not want to become political. I just wanted to grow sod! I was not alone in not wanting to get involved. Most all of the Florida sod growers felt the same.

These threatening new laws were a direct attack on our industry. We had to get political! We had to find a way to get our side of the issue heard.

How to start?

The first place we turned was to TPI where Doug Fender was very helpful. He urged us to get moving and be prepared for a long and tough battle. He shared experiences from other growers located in the dryer parts of the world. From those we formed our first template of what to expect.

Time for Action

Fender also reminded us about the water conservation related materials, including the *WATER RIGHT* book which became the foundation for most all of our talking points.

Individually and through our state turfgrass sod grower organization we began spreading the word to make other growers aware and get them involved. We attended, met and talked with city

and county government officials.

We also contacted other green industry firms, including those in the irrigation industry, lawn care and maintenance, and plant nursery growers, to form an alliance. Our goal was to glean any information, resources and support they had that could help.

Next, we solicited support from the university system and the extension service for information and data we could present to the decision makers.

We contacted others in the agriculture industry including the citrus, sugar, cattle, strawberry and even watermelon organizations. We were looking for names of anyone they knew who had experience in dealing with water issues and/or local governments. This yielded a list of lobbyist who are very knowledgeable about water issues and current legislation on a state-wide basis.

We formed alliances and became recognized by statewide agricultural organizations such as Florida Farm Bureau and the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association. These organizations were not aware of the size of our industry and its economic impact.

We contacted our state's Department of Agriculture commissioner. We learned of a water task force and a water policy department the commissioner had formed.

We alerted the state's turfgrass association, an all-encompassing organization that includes golf course superintendents, lawn spray, lawn maintenance and other turf professionals.

We spoke with water management district officials to gain information on "water wise" landscapes and their theories about irrigation conservation.

Summary

All the above actions are in place and on-going. Some have yielded tremendous support; some did not. The Florida Farm Bureau has shown support by providing some manpower and political experience in dealing with these issues.

Our state organization, Florida Sod Growers Cooperative (FSGC), has decided to help by getting more organized.

(Continued on adjacent page ➡)

Marketing Tip

By Gordon Millar
Red Hen Turf Farm
New Carlisle, IN

"Market" Like It Is Your Job!

Where do you make your money? Where do you perceive your time generates the highest returns for your business? This question probably brings different answers based on each person's character and the size and scope of each operation. I believe marketing must be placed high on the list.

As a senior at Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, I enrolled in a Marketing Strategies Class—Agec 427 class that selects an agriculture related product each fall as a way to teach students how to develop effective marketing plans and strategies. The class selects an existing agricultural product and performs market planning, research and analysis. Later, a strategic marketing plan is developed.

For this year's project, the class did market research for the Midwest Sod Council (MSC). MSC is a group of growers from the states of Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana organized for the purpose of marketing sod. A full report of the plan can be accessed at the following website <http://www.agecon.purdue.edu/academic/agec429/> (and select "Last Fall's Marketing Plan").

After creating the fall plan and pre-

sending our ideas to members of the MSC, a second marketing plan was created in the spring semester with a different focus. This project required a fictitious product be used in a marketing plan that revolves around true market research. In April, our class, along with those from 30 other colleges and universities, traveled to San Diego. There, we presented our plan as part of a competition at the National Agri Marketing Association annual convention (NAMA) www.nama.org. The other students and I are grateful to the following groups for their financial support which made the trip and competition possible: Midwest Sod Council, John Deere, Indianapolis Chapter of NAMA, Purdue University, and Dr. Joseph Uhl, Advisor.

I believe many turfgrass sod producers think they can't do "marketing" because it's too complicated. Please go to the Purdue University website and look at our project; you will find how we broke turfgrass sod marketing down into several smaller, easier to understand parts. It really is easy to do. Create and implement a marketing plan for your own farm and you will find it was a good use of your time.



(Water Problems cont. from page 2)

The FSGC hired its first-ever executive director. Her job is to become a "point source" to help funnel information and to help coordinate FSGC members' efforts about these water issues. The state's turfgrass association gave us a forum to make all other turf professionals aware.

The Florida Nursery and Growers Association, a huge organization, has been very supportive in sharing all new information. However, some of their members grow "native plants" and so their direct help is limited. The Commissioner of Agriculture and his department have been a great source of help in securing water for our farms, but are not as effective in helping consumers get water.

Although there is an organized statewide irrigation society, they are not very active politically and potentially stand to lose a lot. The university and extension service have been giving consumers a

mixed message that supports mostly xeriscape and native plants as *the way to go* in many of the more metropolitan counties. The university, at our industry's urging, is now actively researching turf and water usage relationships. This may be helpful later. The water management districts have not been open to our side of the issue. They believe landscapes waste precious water and turf leads that wastefulness. They are pushing counties to hurry up and write these new laws. It is very tough to combat the speed and diversity of their efforts.

Many of our growers have gone the extra mile to stay informed and get involved. We have not yet won the war or even any of the battles. We know we have lots of work to do. This all indicates a new direction for us sod growers. It's a new chore added to growing our product. But in these new times, we must become political and remain activists in order to take care of business.



Shrewder Computing

E-Mail Tips that Help Keep Customers

E-mail is convenient and fast, and its informal format has become widely accepted in today's business environment. However, it's important to remember that "informal" does not mean casual to the point of ignoring proper word usage, typos and other details that could project a less-than-professional image and mean the difference between a sale and a lost customer. Here are e-mail mistakes to avoid in business:

- ♦ **Typos in proposals or follow-up e-mails**—Typos, poor grammar and/or misspelled words indicate the person sending the e-mail doesn't care enough about the recipient or his/her business to pay attention to details. About 30 seconds to run a spell-check eliminates most typos.
- ♦ **Too casual in tone**—Even though e-mails tend to be informal, if it's a business communication, it should be treated as such.
- ♦ **Unsolicited e-mail with attachments**—Attempting to promote your product in a clever Word or PDF attachment to potential customers could be blocked by firewalls, or recipients may simply delete them without opening for fear of a potential virus. However, if the recipient is expecting your information, sending an attachment is acceptable.
- ♦ **Company domain names**—Be sure the e-mail account you use for business is affiliated with your company's name (e.g., your-name@yourcompany.com). Using a personal e-mail account lowers your business credibility.
- ♦ **Bulk e-mail with headlines in all caps**—If it looks like SPAM, it will probably be deleted.
- ♦ **Prompt customer response**—What sets successful organizations apart from their competitors is their ability to answer not only routine but also difficult questions correctly and swiftly—and the fact they pay attention to details requested by customers.

TPI Action

'Water Right' Books Free to Members

Dave Dymond's overview (page 2-3) of water restrictions in Florida shows the value of ITPF's *WATER RIGHT* book. Because of TPI member donors' generosity and the Foundation's foresight, TPI members can obtain reasonable quantities of the book free-of-charge for use in their own landscape water education efforts. It can also be downloaded from www.TurfGrassSod.org. To obtain free hard-copies of the book, simply provide TPI with a list of those (general categories or positions) you wish to receive the books. Members requesting a book for the same recipients will be asked to coordinate their efforts. Members' on-going financial support of ITPF's multiple program efforts will help ensure success, now and in the future.

The Power of Syndication

Positive media coverage for TPI often begins with detailed articles sent to editors or phone interviews with reporters developing a story. The results of these efforts are carefully traced back to its source to determine a pattern of success or areas for improvement. For example, a reporter from the *Wall Street Journal* interviewed Doug Fender for a story designated for a Sunday print issue. Several months later TPI's analysis showed the article appeared in the *Wall Street Journal's* print and on-line versions in addition to 85 other U.S. newspapers with a total circulation of 11 million readers. Learn more about this power of syndication in the September/October issue of *Turf News*.

Bylaw Amendment Passes

By a vote of 84 to two, TPI's bylaws have been amended so that the business meeting quorum will now be a majority of those voting members present. Proxies will continue to be available for those who can't attend in person.

September 1 – Non-renewing members dropped

Call TPI to ensure your dues were received and your membership continues.

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

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

Water Awareness

Is Water Rights Insurance The Answer?

In response to recent drought conditions in the western United States, a Houston, TX, title insurance company is offering water rights title insurance, along with the traditional title service of checking water rights ownership changes to assure certain rights are not tied up in any ownership disputes, according to an article in the *Amarillo Globe-News*.

Stewart Water Information President Joe Knox said that the water rights title insurance works the same way title insurance does in the sale of a home or other real estate.

In January of this year when the article was published, the company had not filed any forms or rates with the Texas Department of Insurance, which regulates title insurance. Knox advised that Stewart Water uses forms and rates already filed with the state for other title insurance. He declined to comment on how many such policies have been sold.

Generally water rights in Texas have been linked to surface ownership and were not severed from surface rights. Amarillo, TX, City Attorney Marcus Norris said he would have to see a sample policy before considering recommending the city to obtain insurance on its water rights purchases.

Some skeptics compare this type insurance to mineral rights insurance which ran into trouble 30 years ago.

Business Management

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