



BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

AMERICAN SOD PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION

1855-A HICKS ROAD
ROLLING MEADOWS, IL 60008

FIRST CLASS MAIL

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

Rolling Meadows, IL 60008

Permit No. 662

FEB./MAR., 1994

Rush to:

FILE

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

PR/EDUCATION INITIATIVE will focus sod industry's message and voice to homeowners and landscape contractors, to benefit industry and environment. (Page 1 & 2)

EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION BY MEMBERS is encouraged and needed to program's success. (Page 2)

PHONE WORKER COMP CLAIM to improve results and save. (Page 2)

REFERRALS EXPAND SALES with only minimal efforts and going to easy, but overlooked sources. (Page 2)

'TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS' addresses delivery pitfalls anyone can avoid. (Page 3)

'MARKETING TIP' tells how not to ignore customers. (Page 3)

BETTER BUSINESS CARDS with three easy ideas. (Page 3)

'ASPA ACTION' alerts readers to tax change, methyl bromide ban & safety survey. (Page 4)

SUMMER CONVENTION requires early planning to not miss-out on special meeting. (Page 4)

One Message—One Voice: PR/Education Program Readied

According to ASPA members and officials, it's time to fight back.

In announcing a new public relations and education initiative for the turfgrass sod industry at the recent Midwinter Conference in Scottsdale, AZ, ASPA Trustee David Doguet, who is also chairman of the group's Marketing Committee, said, "we want to position turfgrass sod as the most cost effective, attractive, fastest, environmentally positive ground cover. Our goal will be to have a positive impact on awareness of the turfgrass sod industry and sod sales, both long and short term."

Members demonstrated exceptionally strong support for the program via a postcard survey and during the presentation of the concept in Scottsdale. Just 20 days after receiving information in the mail, U.S. Class A members were voting nearly 9 to 1 in favor of "financially supporting a campaign promoting the benefits of turfgrass sod." During the meeting, a straw vote showed equally strong support for a three-year mandatory assessment that would be in addition to normal dues.

While specific details of the program are still being developed by the Marketing Committee, ASPA Board and Staff, it now calls for a \$100,000 program each year for three years that would focus its messages on homeowners and landscape contractors...the two largest markets for turfgrass sod. To reach these audiences, a wide variety of avenues are envisioned including a new turfgrass sod benefits booklet, consumer newspaper articles, trade advertisements, news releases and media kits as well as articles written exclusively for both consumer and professional publications. Another feature of the program would be a toll-free 800 number going into the ASPA office that would respond to consumer and professional inquiries, direct callers to sod producers in their area code(s) and offer special assistance on technical questions.

According to ASPA Executive Director Doug Fender, who will head-up the initiative and be assisted by a new staff member hired specifically for this program, "this effort will put positive and scientifically supported information about turfgrass sod in front of the buying public. It will focus the energies of this industry, as never

(Please continue on Page 2...One Message-One Voice)

One Message-One Voice

(Continued from Page 1)

before. ASPA is being prepared to step out in front on the issue of turfgrass's benefits to the environment, with a lot of attention on how sod can provide these benefits immediately. With this program, ASPA will react to negative items about turf, but just as forcefully, it will work to get the positive message in front of the public. For too long, this industry has taken a rather passive public relations and education position, but that's coming to a quick end with the introduction of this program."

According to the Board's calculations, a mandatory assessment of Class A members in just the U.S. could raise the \$300,000 of funds and when spread out over three years not be a major cost factor to any member. Using the Board's figures, Members with less than 100 acres would pay \$400 over three years while, those with 100-299 acres would pay \$600, farms of 300-599 acres would pay \$800 and farms of more than 600 acres would pay \$1,000. These amounts would be in addition to normal ASPA dues levels that have not been

changed for five years. No one present in the Scottsdale meeting objected to this method of funding for the program, recognizing that their annual outlay would range from about \$133 to \$333 per year.

Consideration is also being given to financing this program by means of a fund raising campaign that would be conducted by ASPA's newly formed Foundation.

At its April meeting, the ASPA Board of Trustees will review the program proposals presented by the Marketing Committee, consider various funding options and make a determination that will be presented to the membership.

Given the priority assigned to this initiative, a large number of preliminary steps will be taken immediately, so that it can be up and running with full force as soon as the go-ahead is received.

Specifics of the program will be mailed to the ASPA membership, with details and information, as well as ideas for local use being included in "Turf News" magazine and this newsletter.

How Members Can Be Effective Participants In 1 Message-1 Voice

Every member can, and should be an active and effective participant in ASPA's newly announced public relations and education initiative. The geographic reach of the membership and their common interests in the turfgrass sod industry can become a powerful force when combined into a "One Message-One Voice" campaign.

To be most effective, here are just a few things every member can do:

1. Send ASPA complete copies of every article they see that relates to turfgrass, positive and negative, as quickly as possible.
2. Refer reporters and writers to the ASPA office when they contact you while working on any article about turfgrass.
3. Seek out meeting and media opportunities for the ASPA messages. Volunteer to be a speaker, or inform ASPA of gatherings where the positive message of turf can be told.

Phone-In Workers' Comp Reports

Using the telephone, rather than the mail, to report workers' compensation claims leads to faster treatment, earlier enrollment in back-to-work programs and less attorney involvement, according to The Travellers Corp, a major Connecticut-based insurance company.

Reported in "Personnel Journal," the study of 300 companies and 450,000 claims found that half of the call-in claims were reported within 4 days, compared to 14 days for mailed claims.

Looking to a company's bottom-line, this should result in savings and increased productivity as employees are treated and return to work faster.

Expand Sales With Referrals

Few, if any turfgrass sod producers feel that their business has grown as large as they want it to be, yet, it also seems that few use a customer development technique that has been proven so successful in other businesses. . . customer referrals. Those who already work to obtain customer referrals, can probably improve their results, with just slightly expanded efforts.

Behind the whole idea of customer referrals is the concept that you are asking an already satisfied customer to provide you the names of people or firms who may be in the market for your sod, immediately, or at anytime in the future. It costs you nothing and these new prospects are more inclined to trust and believe you when you let them know that you are calling on them because someone they trusted suggested you might be able to help them.

Most companies limit their search for referrals to their actual customer list, most often at the time the sale is made or the deal closed. A question like, "Do you know of anyone else who you think would be interested in buying sod from us?" is about all it takes. But there is a whole range of additional sources for referrals that you may be overlooking...a source that is right at your fingertips...your checkbook!

Look to your suppliers, vendors, bankers, employees and anyone else who stands to gain by referring new business to you, so you and they can grow together. If they have an interest in your success, they too can add to your prospect-referral list.

Taking Care Of Business

By Mike Ward, Eastgate Sod
Loveland, Ohio

AVOIDING DELIVERY PITFALLS

The key factor in avoiding any kind of delivery pitfall is "Information." Every person in your company, involved with a sod order and delivery, must be informed, from the order taker to the truck driver.

The following are some examples of delivery pitfalls that we have encountered and some possible solutions:

Problems

*the truck cannot go up a private road, so the sod must be delivered a half mile by forklift.

*the truck could not use a bridge or road because of the weight, height, etc.

*the customer wants the sod put in the backyard, but their fence only has a three-foot gate. We cannot accommodate the customer's wishes.

*the driver spends excessive time delivering the load due to construction, which makes him late for the next delivery. Who pays for the installation crew's extra time?

*the driver gets to the delivery site and there is no one there or they do not have a check (on a COD order).

*while delivering a load of sod, the forklift runs over an irrigation head, leaks some oil on the driveway or leaves a rut on the driveway or in the yard, etc.

Solutions

+ When taking any order, you need to ask the following questions:

= what are the conditions of the delivery? Roads, bridges, private drives, turn-around capabilities, etc.

= are there any weight or height restrictions?

= where will the sod be placed? What is the access to the area (fences, gates, hills, etc.)?

= when taking directions, determine if there is any construction that may delay the delivery.

+ let the customer know the approximate time the load will be there and that they must be present and must have a check for COD orders.

+ let the customer know the amount of time allocated for this drop and that if there is any extra time, they will be charged.

+ Before unloading any of the sod, present the bill to the customer for their review. On the back of the bill, have the customer sign a disclaimer releasing your company from any responsibility for any damage that occurs beyond the curb.

Remember, information is the key to your success!!!

Make Your Business Cards Do More Work For You

Like most business owners and sales representatives, you probably hand-out hundreds of business cards every year. With a few minor changes, you can make those cards do more work for you. Consider any or all of these ideas:

1. **Put your home phone number on the card**, in addition to the business number. This is especially effective for sales reps who are hard to reach during the day, and their customers have a question or want to make a purchase at night;

2. **Leave space on the front to write customers short notes**, so they can read your brief message and have your name and number in front of them.

3. **Cross-out your name on the card** when you use it to write a note to yourself, so you don't give this important card to someone else by mistake.

Member Marketing Tip

By Chris Hope, Manderley Sod
North Gower, Ontario, Canada

DON'T IGNORE YOUR CUSTOMERS

What well-meaning business person would ignore his customers! Believe it, it is very easy to do. Providing poor customer service is the equivalent of transferring your share of the market to your competition.

With the lingering recession, we have seen an increase in competition levels.

This has induced companies to become very flexible when dealing with customers. The "buyers" market is often resisted by growers who are used to their familiar methods of dealing with customers. This resistance is felt by employees and front-line staff as well.

So, before your employees start putting up "walls" when dealing with special situations, remember that those special situations arise only infrequently.

Going that extra mile for the customer or taking care of those unusual requests can give your organization the message of the importance of the customer.

The small cost of that extra customer service can reap large benefits on the front line.

Don't ignore your customers.

ASPA Action

SPECIAL NOTICE TO 1993-94 U.S. MEMBERS

As a result of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, ASPA members' dues will lose deductibility for U.S. members by a percentage of ASPA's activities related to federal lobbying activities. While ASPA and practically all other not-for-profit associations strongly protest this change and the impractical methods required by the Internal Revenue Service to calculate the percentage, it must be done to stay in compliance with federal tax laws. Having carefully considered the very limited and contradictory guidelines provided by the IRS to date; examining ASPA past histories and projections in the area of federal lobbying, U.S. members are hereby advised: "Dues to the American Sod Producers Association (ASPA) are not deductible as a charitable contribution but may be deductible as an ordinary and necessary business expense subject to the restrictions imposed as a result of ASPA lobbying activities. ASPA estimates that the nondeductible portion of your 1993-94 dues allocable to lobbying is ten percent."

The American Society of Association Executives, in which ASPA has an active membership, is in the process of filing a federal lawsuit to overturn this tax. It is also initiating actions to reverse this law through corrective legislation.

Although the actual amount of deduction that will be lost to any individual member is very slight, questions regarding this area should be discussed with your tax accountant or others involved in filing your federal tax returns.

EPA WILL PHASE-OUT METHYL BROMIDE according to a new final rule identifying this widely used soil fumigant as a Class I ozone-depleting substance. Despite efforts by ASPA and others who represent farmers reliant on methyl bromide to provide high quality products at reasonable production costs, it was nevertheless added to the list of products doomed to extinction. Under the terms of the announcement/rule, production and importation of methyl bromide will be frozen at 1991 levels beginning immediately. It will be full phased-out by January 1, 2001, one year earlier than initially proposed by EPA. Beginning immediately, turfgrass sod producers are encouraged to begin experimenting with other approved and available methods and materials that may provide alternatives to achieving a clean field at an economic and efficient rate.

SOD FARM SAFETY SURVEY questionnaires will be mailed to all U.S. Class A and S members, as well as International Country Representatives in the very near future. Developed by a farm safety extension specialist especially for ASPA at the request of the Business Management Committee, the multi-page survey will assemble a wide range of information about on-farm accidents and safety programs. It will take only a few minutes to complete because of its design; however, the composite information will help guide the Business Management Committee in its intended development of safety training materials for sod farms.

In addition to historic accident information about the farm, the survey also asks respondents to share safety training information and manuals they now find useful. ASPA members are encouraged to begin gathering together these materials now so they can be itemized on the survey form, or sent directly to the ASPA office with the completed survey.

ASPA Summer Convention: Newport's Popularity May Cause Hotel Shortages

Hosting ASPA's July 27-29 Summer Convention will be one of the U.S. most popular summer vacation destinations. And, just when the world's sod producers want to be there, Newport, RI will reach its peak attractiveness. This combination may create a hotel room shortage for anyone who does not plan ahead and make reservations as soon as the housing forms are available to them.

ASPA has contracted for 225 sleeping rooms at the Doubletree Hotel on Goat Island near downtown Newport; however, because all hotels traditionally face nightly sell-outs during this high season, the hotel would not increase this room block and won't be in a position to negotiate at the last minute. In addition, rooms for ASPA guests have also been blocked at the nearby Newport Harbor Hotel and Marina. Shuttle service will be provided between the hotels for all ASPA functions.

Watch your mail and "Turf News" for hotel reservation forms and act promptly.

ASPA Summer Convention: New England Growers Make Special Plans

Members of the New England Sod Producers Association will be working hard to make sure that everyone attending the ASPA Summer Convention has an enjoyable and memorable time when they visit Newport and the surrounding areas.

First, they will provide complimentary shuttle transportation from the Providence Airport to the hotel for everyone arriving July 26 and 27. Next, they'll host a special breakfast at the demonstration day and they'll be very knowledgeable guides throughout the July 29 tour day.

Plan for Newport now!