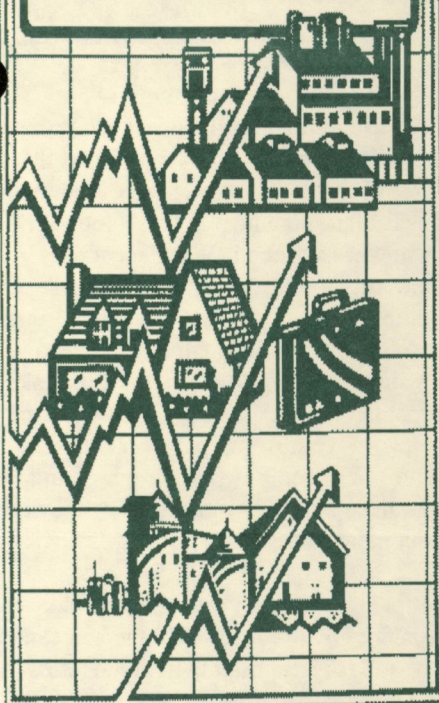


Dec / Jan 1996-97



ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Computer News Briefs Page 3
Tips for Shrewder Computing.

Gallop survey Results Page 3
What do your customers want?

Industry Forecast Page 1
TPI Member Reps report on their expectations for 1997.

Jest for the Fun of It Page 4
New humor section makes its debut.

Marketing Tip Page 3
"Rolling-out the Welcome Mat"
Using your turfgrass sod as your calling card/marketing tool.

Sales Objections Page 2
Technique for addressing objections based on past delivery problems.

Selling Tools From TPI Page 2
Four-color brochures help you sell.

Taking Care of Business Page 2
"Seeking Professional Help"
Selecting a collections company.

TPI Action Page 4
Member renewal notices, ITPF 2-cents worth campaign, Conference and Convention update...plus, PR update on page 1.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

TPI Membership Representatives Report

'97 U.S. Turf Season Shows Promise

Turfgrass sod sales in the U.S. will be up in 1997 according to more than half of the TPI Membership Representative reports compiled for their Midwinter meeting in Savannah. But the group also reported that increased concerns about trucking regulations, worker protection standards and workers' compensation will divert attention from pure production and sales issues.

Economies, building activities and prices that are projected to be greater or equal to last year and reasonable growing weather spell promise for 1997. However, a less promising factor reported by the TPI Reps will be increasing competition.

A compilation of the semi-annual reports from all TPI Member Reps (select TPI members in every state, province and country), shows that 57.1% believe turfgrass sod sales will be up, with an additional 28.6% believing sales will be stable. Over a third (34.5%) believe sod pricing will be up, while another 51.7% believe prices will be stable.

Regarding their area's economy, 44.8% projected it to be strong, while 48.3% reported it comparable to last year. This is based to some degree on the fact that 41.4% reported increased building activity, while 48.3% reported stable building.

Nearly two-thirds (62.1%) predict increase competition, with the remaining 37.9% reporting it stable. Practically three-quarters of the Reps (74.1%) do not see hydroseeding having an impact on turfgrass sod sales.

Regulations Become Issues

Of equal concern to the Representatives (44.8%) are trucking regulations, worker protection standards and workers' compensation. These top issues were followed by immigration and labor, sod pesticide availability, farm taxes, sod as agriculture, and wetlands regulations.

Immigration and labor issues took the greatest jump in importance among the various issues, most likely as a result of reports of increased enforcement activities by the Immigration and Naturalization Service and Department of Labor. (See the cover story of your December/January "Business Management" newsletter for more details.)

While local conditions have a significant impact on an individual TPI member's sales and pricing, the Member Reps projections have been very accurate indicators of nation-wide changes in past years and can be useful in planning.

TPI PR Campaign

Momentum Expands Success

Over 11.3 million readers have been exposed to TPI's "turf-positive" articles and information, in just the first six months of the fiscal year. This compares to 3.4 million readers for the same period last year.

What's even more significant is that at least eight major articles are now in pre-publication form. Professional publications now scheduled to print an article related to turfgrass sod are "Golf Business" (Jan. or Feb. '97) and "Erosion Control" (May/June '97).

In addition, the following six consumer oriented magazines have been working with TPI's "Turf Resource Center" on articles: "Easy Lawn & Garden," (Spring '97); "Woman's Day - Weekend Gardening," (Spring '97); "Fine Gardening," (unknown); "Kiplingers," (Mar. '97); "Home," (unknown); and "National Gardening" (unknown).

For the first six months of the fiscal year, TPI has placed a total of 73 articles in 58 different publications.

Taking Care of Business "Seeking Professional Help"

By Ron Nixon, Cowikey Turf, Ltd.,
Eufaula, Alabama

Choosing Collection Companies

I never meant for my company to become a lending institution. But when I deliver our product with only a promise to pay, in effect I have become a loan officer. Over the years, I have had several sod sales that were expensive and lengthy to collect and some that were never paid. The reason this happened was that I was not acting like a loan officer.

What does a loan officer want before he will loan money? He wants information about whom he is doing business with. This is where an in-depth credit application comes in. Then, check out the potential customer's credit information. You may want to get a credit report from a credit or collection agency.

Then, set credit terms based on the information you have gathered. After this, if you desire to do business together, continue to gather information from your sales and delivery personnel. If the information you have on a customer does not warrant credit, do not extend it...it's that simple. Make the terms Cash On Delivery, or in extreme cases, get payment before shipment.

When you have an overdue account, move to collect in a timely manner. After you have followed your own company procedures, do not hesitate to call professional help in the form of an attorney who specializes in collections or a collection agency, such as the one affiliated with TPI, Milliken and Michaels. Though it will cost to have them collect for you, the benefits outweigh the costs.

Some of my misconceptions about collecting unpaid bills have been proven wrong over time. I have not found that forcing customers to pay their accounts has driven them away. Many return as customers as soon as their account is paid, or you may be able to do business while a collection agency is collecting on your behalf. Some people can not do business on a credit basis, but can make great C.O.D. customers. Taking a firm stand on what is acceptable business ethics has been positive for our company and has not lost any customers that were beneficial to us.

It is not ethical to write bad checks, and it is not OK to promise things you cannot do, and it is impossible to do business if the customer will not fulfill the payment agreement promised.

Overcoming Sales Objections... Delivery Problems

Objection: *"Your last delivery was so late, it cost me money to have my crew standing-by. I think I'll be taking by business elsewhere."*

Response: If you weren't aware of this problem, apologize immediately and ask for all of the details that the customer can recall. Don't push the "problem" back onto the customer because he changed the delivery time on short-notice or contributed to the situation himself. Accept full responsibility.

Next, explain what you are doing today that will ensure on-time delivery. Maybe it's greater dispatch control, different drivers, or whatever you've done, or would consider.

Offer a guarantee on the next 5 or 10 orders...you'll pay his crew stand-by time costs if any load is late. Demonstrate that you're willing to take away his risk.

TPI Marketing Materials

Start Selling in the "Off Season"

Professional athletes may be providing an example turfgrass sod producers can adapt to their sales efforts.

The greatest professional athletes know that they can't wait until game-days to get into shape, they work-out all year, even during the "off season." Turfgrass sod sales would probably also improve with "off season" efforts.

Rather than waiting until the harvesters are cutting and the season is in full swing, producers might be well advised to follow the professional athlete's example and really use what might otherwise be "down time," to build their company's image, develop sales literature, hold on-farm sales seminars, develop sales lead lists and make mailings or in-person sales calls.

By employing this approach, you are getting your company's sales effort into "shape" for the coming season. The efforts may result in pre-season sales, but even if sales aren't closed in advance, the increased level of activity will put the farm ahead of where it

might normally be, and probably ahead of the competition.

To assist its members' marketing efforts, TPI's committees have developed a wide variety of sales-oriented literature that is especially useful with the homeowner market. If a farm focuses on the wholesale market, the TPI materials can become part of a cooperative marketing venture between the farm and the wholesaler's customers.

Included in the selection are five four-color brochures, camera-ready artwork for eight different tech sheets, four sets of 20-slides, guideline sodding specs and several other items.

Samples of the brochures and an order form are being sent to all current members along with this newsletter.

Orders can be placed with TPI by mail, or when paying by credit card by phone (847-705-9898 or 800/405-8873) or fax (847-705-8347).

Sell What Your Customers Are Buying

Are you selling what your customers want to buy? Or are you selling them on what you want to sell?

Scanning the "Yellow Page" ads reveals most turfgrass sod farms focus on "certified sod," "family grown for over 60 years," "forklift service," "palletized sod." This is what the farm wants to sell, but is it what a customer cares about?

As part of the annual National Gardening Association's survey conducted by the Gallop Organization, TPI had them ask consumers who had purchased turfgrass sod to select which reasons they had made their decision. This reveals what customers want to buy.

They selected turfgrass sod because:

1. provides complete and uniform coverage
2. can be walked on in 2-3 weeks
3. installed year-round
4. instantly beautiful and mature

5. no problem with runoff or soil erosion
6. costs more than grass seed, but it is a better value
7. lower water requirements
8. minimal, if any, weed control
9. highest quality, certified elite seed or plant stock.

The top four items all relate to "immediacy," or "beauty" and based on the number of responses these received from consumers, they are what people buy when they decide to purchase turfgrass sod.

The bottom three items relate to "technical" issues that may be of importance to turfgrass sod producers, but clearly, they are not important purchase-making factors for consumers.

By refocusing all selling messages and efforts to the reasons people buy, turfgrass sod farmers should increase sales and distinguish themselves from their competitors.

Marketing Tip

By Dale Barrie, Tuf Turf Sod Farm
St. Albert, Alberta, Canada

Let's roll-out the welcome mat...

Psst. Hey Buddy, want to sell some sod, eh? Well here's a way we have tried to market our turf. Before I tell you what we did, I'm going to tell you what salesmen don't normally tell you...the truth.

This idea doesn't always work. Actually it caused some problems, but overall it was successful. Here it is then...the "Welcome Mat" marketing tip.



Take your best sod and cut it into handleable pieces, about 1/4 yard. Just before people come home from work, set a piece of sod on the step of their houses that need sod in a new subdivision. Leave a flyer that explains that they could have a lawn full of beautiful pieces of sod like this one. Just phone and arrange for delivery.

The problems are you can't get a newspaper boy to do it or the sod pieces may be draped over the gutter-trough or upside down on the driveway. Also, can you imagine what your beautiful piece of sod would look like if the people didn't make it home for a week for some reason: Lost sale.

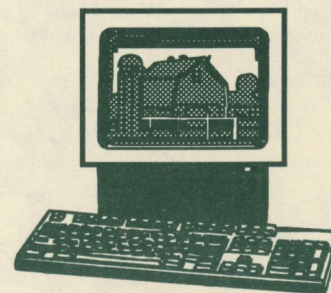
With a bit of planning and care and checking-up-on, this little tip will at least make the phone ring and it's a great way to use up freshly cut scraps of sod.

Give the welcome mat a try this season!

Shrewder Computing

The World Wide Web is receiving far more publicity than any other part of the Internet. But *more useful* for many purposes is *Usenet*, the collective name for more than 10,000 interactive newsgroups on the Internet that cover almost every imaginable topic--business, law, politics, consumer concerns, science, recreation, entertainment, travel--and much, much more.

A newsgroup is a lot like an interactive bulletin board on a particular topic, upon which individuals publish comments, questions and answers to other people's questions.



News groups are typically *free*--included in the basic charge paid for overall Internet access. If you are not familiar with newsgroups, these two Web sites can help you get started with them...

Usenet Launch Pad:

<http://sunsite.unc.edu/usenet-i>.

Deja News:

<http://www.dejanews.com/>.

Lost Files...

It's natural to panic when a computer file is lost. Most users can take some comfort in the fact that today's technology can often recover all or part of it. For minor problems, consider using one of the commercially available data-recovery programs, most of which cost under \$150. Norton Utilities and Central Point's PC Tools are just two possibilities.

The use of regular back-up procedures, anti-virus software and off-site storage of periodic back-ups are also highly recommended!

TPI Action

1997-98 TPI Renewal Notices will be sent to all current members in early May, but members are encouraged to renew as early as possible and to provide continuous up-dates of the species they produce, harvesting capabilities and availability of installation (in addition to phone and address changes), as this information is being increasingly sent to professional and consumer purchasers of turfgrass sod. **As part of TPI's PR program** anyone requesting information from the "Turf Resource Center" is also sent a listing of the TPI members in their state. These lists show all of the information listed in the TPI membership directory and should be as current and complete as possible.

Have you put in your "2-Cents Worth" to the International Turf Producers Foundation (ITPF) first-annual fund-raising campaign? As of mid-January, this campaign had received over \$37,000 in contributions from 42 TPI member firms. Funds raised by this campaign, as well as funds paid by members voluntarily in addition to their annual dues, will be used to support turfgrass sod related research projects. A future issue of "Turf News" magazine will list the projects selected to receive 1996-97 grants. ITPF's "2-Cents Worth" campaign suggests all TPI members contribute an amount equal to 2-cents per pallet of turfgrass sod sold during the previous year. To date, \$20,000 has been the largest single contribution to the campaign. It was made by Ron and Gina Nixon, owners of Cowikee Turf, Ltd., Eufaula, AL (see page 6 of the Jan/Feb '97 "Turf News").

Plan ahead to attend the following TPI Conferences & Conventions

<u>Dates</u>	<u>City, State</u>	<u>Hotel</u>	<u>Room Cost (est.)</u>
July 17-19, '97	Minneapolis, MN	Hyatt	\$125
Feb. 11-13, '98	Maui, HI	Westin	\$169/\$189/\$209
July 16-18, '98	Tysons Corners, VA	Sheraton	\$110
Midwinter '99	Tampa, FL	in negotiations	
July 21-23, '99	E. Lansing, MI	Holiday Inn	\$99 (est)
Midwinter 2000	San Antonio, TX	in negotiations	
July 19-21, 2000	Spokane, ID	Red Lion	\$87
Midwinter 2001	Scottsdale, AZ	in negotiations	
Summer, 2001	Toronto, ON	in negotiations	

New Department:

Jest For The Fun Of It

Starting with this issue, we'd like to interject some humor, fun and lightness into the newsletter. All members are encouraged to send us your jokes, cartoons, comments and real-life experiences, so they can be shared with other TPI members. (Send your "funnies" to TPI or fax them to the office at 847/705-8347)

Name Calling In Green Bay, WI

During his efforts to replace the Green Bay Packers' Lambeau Field in less than a week, in miserable weather and field conditions, TPI member (and past president) Jack Kidwell was lovingly referred to by local media folks as "Rambo of Lambeau" and "The Sod God."

Thanks to the efforts of a lot of Virginia, Maryland and Wisconsin folks, the field was beautiful.

The Best Plates Around

Seen any really good "vanity" license plates on turf-farm owned vehicles lately?

Here are just two that we've seen over the years:

MR TURF on "his" car and

MRS TURF on "her" car

Another that caught our eye...

TURF - JR, apparently, a second-generation family member!

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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

FIRST CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID

Rolling Meadows, IL 60008
Permit No. 662