

Turfgrass Producers International

Spring Into Early Sales With Seminars

Do you normally wait for your first orders until your customers are ready to install turfgrass sod?

Why not get a head start on the orders and improve your company's reputation and image by conducting a pre-Spring turf seminar, right at your farm? According to Marketing Consultant John Graham, company conducted seminars can be powerful sales tools, especially if they are designed to meet the specific

needs of the customers / seminar attendees.

For a turfgrass sod farm, the process would begin with development of a seminar topic that would be of interest to the attendees. While turfgrass sod could be the exclusive topic, you'll probably attract more attention (and attendance) by focusing on last year's major problem, or something new to your operation...perhaps a piece of equipment or new turf variety.

Next, develop a list of firms and people to invite. Give them at least a couple of weeks notice and ask for an RSVP, but accept anyone who shows up on the day.

Some of the keys Graham suggests include: keeping the presentations timely in light of current developments; be entertaining; be industry specific; keep the seminar to no more than two hours (and make this clear in your invitation); avoid making sales pitches; give each participant something to take

home; send everyone a follow-up thank you letter and ask them how future seminars could be improved.

For most turfgrass sod operations, an early Spring seminar could help position the firm in the customers' minds for the entire season and it could result in several early orders for grass they know they're going to need.

In addition to having the owner or farm manager participate as a seminar speaker, you may also want to include a turfgrass extension specialist or other knowledgeable individual to help round-out the program.

While there are many possible variations on a seminar, it will probably work best if you select a like-minded group, say all landscape architects or contractors, bankers, builders or sports field managers. This will also allow them to exchange ideas between themselves, as they learn from you and your firm's personnel about the topic you've chosen for them to discuss on that day.

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Employee Screening Page 2
How to use background screening to augment your hiring process.

Marketing Tip Page 3
"First and Last Sales"
How to focus your attention and promotion on peak sales periods.

Metric System Page 3
Update and conversion table.

PR Program Update Page 1
News from the PR program front lines.

Seminars Drive Sales Page 1
Using pre-season seminars to increase visibility and sales.

Taking Care of Business Page 2
"Motivate & Keep Employees"
Human resource issue viewed from a historical perspective.

TPI Action Page 4
Spring marketing promotional ideas; New area-code for TPI.

Turf Article Request Page 3
TPI members urged to send turf-related articles to TPI.

3.4 Million See TPI's PR Program

Since the start of the fiscal year, this past July, some 3,440,000 readers have been exposed to TPI's public relations program efforts. At least 118 different articles attributed to TPI or its Turf Resource Center have appeared in 110 publications. This pace will more than double last year's results, demonstrating the increased momentum being enjoyed by the program as more and more writers and editors are becoming aware of TPI and public relations program.

For all of last year, the program's start-up year, 55 publications ran a total of 99 different articles, reaching an estimated audience of 5.2 million readers.

Newspapers ranging from the 1,875 reader Manteno, IL "News," to the 147,175 reader Grand Rapids, MI "Press" have printed TPI's positive

articles about turfgrass and sod. To date there have been 84 consumer publication placements of 81 different articles, including two radio interviews.

On the professional side of the program, "Erosion Control" magazine's January/February, 1996 edition ran a one-page article titled, "The Case for Sod." Other professionally oriented publications printing TPI articles have included "Grounds Maintenance," "Lawn & Landscape," "Texas Water Savers," and "Northern Turf & Landscape Press." 34 articles have run in 29 different professional publications since July.

TPI's PR program is funded entirely by a special assessment on all U.S. Class A (producer) and B (manufacturer) members. Other members are encouraged to voluntarily contribute support.

Taking Care Of Business

By Wally Huggett, Huggett Sod Farm
Marlette, Michigan

Motivating & Keeping Employees

The challenge of motivating and keeping employees is not unique to the nineties. In fact, while a student at Michigan State University, I stumbled onto a book at the library written by a Roman Empire rose grower and merchant. I recall scanning the book and I remember how concerned he was with his changing market conditions. (Sound familiar?)

He was concerned as a citizen of Rome with the growing prosperity, and at the same time, weakening moral conditions. He was most concerned with the trend of his labor sources. His slaves and free laborers alike were, according to him, costing him more and producing less. He feared that the future would not be kind to him if this trend continued.

I shared with you this rose grower's concerns from nineteen centuries ago not to suggest that our present day empowered employees are to be compared to the first century's war captive slave. I do suggest that in any age or economic system a manager's job remains the same: The identification of

goals, and the marshalling of forces necessary to achieve them in a timely and efficient manner. Since most of us have businesses that require hired employees to assist us in serving our customers, we share the common challenge of working successfully with employees.

There are as many possible options as there are TPI members. Generally speaking, I believe that good employees work best at turf farms where there has been a clear explanation of the farm's goals and what their role is in achieving that goal. Training, review and appreciation are necessary to help the employee fill his/her particular role.

Communicating compliments back to the employee is more likely to reinforce positive performance than complaints, which regrettably are also relayed. Monetary rewards are always effective if they are tied to definable, predetermined goals. A profit sharing plan that is well understood is a positive part of the pay package as well as co-pay health insurance programs. A general view on the part of the employee must be that if the farm does

well, they personally will do well also.

What options don't work? Since branding and whipping have been dropped as viable options centuries ago, other options for dealing with unsatisfactory employees must be explored.

I have never been able to make someone work who didn't want to. I always listen to complaints. Sometimes I can address the matter in a mutually satisfactory manner. All too often I must review the employee's role with him and suggest that he seek happiness elsewhere.

We have opportunities for employment, as do you. Some employees last a summer while some last a working lifetime. We truly appreciate the roles each play in the successful development of Huggett Sod Farm. We're proud to see some of our former employees as school teachers and other professional people.

Our present staff, some with over 20 year's experience, are most competent and appreciated. They are literally extended family members

Flexibility Is Key In Changing Economy

It seems more and more likely that interest rates will drop at least slightly and that more "right-sizing" will cause future layoffs, some massive. While this news will be good in some respects, the uncertainty created will also create a need for flexibility to take best advantage of the changes.

Recommendations include:

Don't lock into long-term arrangements, unless they will have short- and long-term benefits.

Keep your workforce lean, relying on temporary or even day labor if the skills you need are available.

Continually rethink marketing and advertising messages and approaches to meet new situations in your market.

Control all in-put costs and adjust inventory toward the "short" side.

Job Applications Provide Background Screening Information

Hiring new seasonal employees requires a lot of time and patience, one way to speed the process is recommended by Edward Andler in the most recent issue of "Bottom Line/Business." He recommends a separate background information form for all applicants that reads as follows:

Your background and work history will be discussed with you during your interview. Please answer all questions with *yes* or *no* prior to the interview. *Have you ever been:*

__Placed on probation or terminated for poor job performance?

__Disciplined or fired for insubordination?

__Disciplined or discharged for violating a safety rule?

__Disciplined or terminated for absenteeism, tardiness, failure to notify your company when absent or any other attendance-related reason?

__Disciplined or fired for fighting, assault or similar offenses?

__Disciplined for discharged for being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or for possession, use or abuse of alcohol or drugs?

__Convicted of a crime?

I certify that the above answers are true to the best of my knowledge. I understand that any falsification discovered before or after I am employed may be cause for my being disqualified or removed from employment from the company.

Employment applicant's signature, date and Social Security Number.

Send All Turf Articles To TPI For Response

While there seems to be a recent lessening in anti-turf articles, the coming Spring season increases the likelihood that some will appear. TPI's position is that this type of information should not go unreviewed or unchallenged.

All TPI members are encouraged to send or fax every positive and negative turf-related article they see in consumer newspapers and magazines. In addition to the article, it is important that the TPI office also receive the complete name and address of the publication, it's editor and even the writer if possible. The article should also show the date of publication.

Upon receipt, TPI will carefully review the contents of the article with known scientific facts. If there is a discrepancy between the two, TPI will either contact the publication directly or prepare a letter that the TPI member may want to forward to the publication.

With direct member involvement, such as this, TPI's public relations and education campaign can be much more successful and effective.

Are You Ready For Metrics?

With 93 percent of the world's population using metric measures, it's probably inevitable that all turfgrass sod producers world-wide will be also. In fact, producers in Canada, the U.K. and other parts of the world already contend with metric measurements to one extent or another.

A driving force, at least in the U.S., is a consistent move among almost all federal construction programs to design and construct in metric units.

The following conversion information and examples may be of assistance:

To Convert THIS		To THAT	
_____ Acres	x 0.405 equals	_____ Hectares	
(250 Acres x 0.405 = 101.25 Hectares)			
_____ Hectares	x 2.471 equals	_____ Acres	
(100 Hectares x 2.471 = 247.1 Acres)			
_____ Square Yard	x 0.836 equals	_____ Square Meters	
(100 Sq. Yards. x 0.836 = 83.6 Sq. Meters)			
_____ Square Meters	x 1.196 equals	_____ Square Yards	
(100 Sq. Meters x 1.196 = 119.6 Sq. Yards)			
_____ Inches	x 2.54 equals	_____ Centimeters	
(12 Inches x 2.54 = 45.72 Centimeters)			
_____ Centimeters	x 0.3937 equals	_____ Inches	
(50 Centimeters x 0.3937 = 19.68 Inches)			
_____ Yards	x 0.914 equals	_____ Meters	
(100 Yards x 0.914 = 91.4 Meters)			
_____ Meters	x 1.094 equals	_____ Yards	
(100 Meters x 1.094 = 109.4 Yards)			
_____ Miles	x 1.609 equals	_____ Kilometers	
(50 Miles x 1.609 equals 80.45 Kilometers)			
_____ Kilometers	x 0.621 equals	_____ Miles	
(50 Kilometers x 0.621 = 31.05 Miles)			

Marketing Tip

By Mike McDermott, Grass Pad
Olathe, Kansas

First Sale / Last Sale

If you sell hot dogs, house paint or sod rolls, the rule is the same. Two sales are important: the first sale and the last sale. For new customers, the critical sale is always the first. We all spend money trying to generate new customer contacts: new builders, new landscapers and new homeowners.

In a seasonal business like ours, every year brings a new growing season and a new sales cycle. Even our best established customers make a new buying decision at the beginning of every season. Seasonal staff changes at your business and at your customer's businesses undermine the personal contacts that are the foundation of long-standing business relationships. Every customer is a new customer at the beginning of the sales season.

As a result, the beginning of the sales cycle is the most effective time to spend your advertising budget: your time, energy and cash. Customers are creatures of habit. If you can get your customer in the door for his first sod purchase in the Spring, chances are you can keep him for the rest of the season. The customer's first buying decision of the year is the one you want to influence.

You should be spending 50% of your advertising/promotion budget in the first 25% of your selling season. For those areas where annual sales run through a double cycle (Spring and Fall,) target early Spring and late Summer for prime sales push. This often runs counter to the efforts of your advertising representative. Most ad reps prefer a consistent ad budget that they can allocate on a monthly basis. That is ok for the bank, but not for a seasonal business like yours.

Mailers, coupons, newspaper ads and radio spots should all be heavily weighted to the beginning of your sales cycle(s.) Repetition sells! Repeat the same material on a two week cycle. Keep the message simple...then play it again.

Telephone contacts should also target this time period. Schedule a telephone campaign two weeks before you think things will bust loose. Call folks when they have time to talk and you are more likely to get results. Likewise, your entire staff can get into the act...not just the sales staff.

Check your budget. If advertising expenses are the same from month to month, your accountant and ad rep will be happy, but 50% of your budget is being poorly spent. Think seasonal, not just for sales, but for promotion too!

TPI Action

THE SPRING SALES RUSH ISN'T FAR AWAY...

Now Is The Time To Begin Planning Your Spring Marketing Campaign

In the hustle and hassle of opening the Spring season, easily overlooked are the tools necessary to get the marketing program underway more efficiently and effectively. TPI's marketing materials, originated by fellow turfgrass sod producers are designed to meet a wide variety of special needs. They can be ordered now from TPI, imprinted with the farm's contact information and be ready for mailings, handouts and general distribution when the season moves into full-scale action.

Four-color brochures currently available to TPI members (at \$75 for 500 or \$250 for 2,000, flat or folded) are:

"Turf Installation Guide" - A step-by-step approach to the beauty and simplicity of turfgrass sod installation.

"The Dream Lawn Is Yours In Hours With Sod" - crisply, cleanly and in full-color, using descriptive cartoons, the advantages of turfgrass sodding are described.

"Self-Scoring Method: How To Establish Your Lawn" - helps homeowners determine the advantages of turfgrass sodding over seeding or hydro-seeding.

"Our Precious Planet" - illustrates and explains the many environmental benefits of high quality turfgrass sod.

To accompany any of these brochures, or useful by themselves are TPI **"Tech Sheets"** that detail specifications and maintenance needs of Kentucky Bluegrass, Ryegrass, Fine and Tall Fescue, Zoysiagrass, Centipedegrass, Bermudagrass and St. Augustine Grass. Sized to fit into a standard business envelope, printed in dark ink on glossy paper, they cost just \$15 for 500.

To receive samples, or to place an order, contact the TPI office.

New TPI Office Area Code

Effective Immediately, the TPI telephone and fax machine area code has changed. Please correct your records for ease of contact:

TPI Current Phone: 847-705-9898

Fax: 847-705-8347

Prepare For Seed Competitors

Apply the Boy Scout's motto to your business, and "Be Prepared" to compete against various grass seeding operations by thoroughly researching your competitors. Be familiar with all of their sales literature, advertisements, trade show materials, even some of their past projects in your market/climate area.

When it comes to head-to-head competition, you'll be prepared to anticipate key points, challenges and questions, without ever even mentioning the competitor by name (why give them free exposure during your presentation?).

By knowing your competition, you'll be able to pre-position your turfgrass sod's superiority and close the sale more easily and quickly. Be Prepared!

**1996 TPI Summer
Convention & Field Days
July 25-27
Sacramento, CA**

**Featuring:
Education, Exhibits,
Farm Tours and
Equipment Demos**

*Watch for more details in
future issues as well as
"Turf News" magazine!*

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