

Turfgrass Producers International

Magazines Feature Sod Stories

Nothing sells like a great referral, and because of TPI's public relations and education program, several leading consumer (home and shelter) magazines have recently endorsed the concept of turfgrass sodding and even provided step-by-step information to their readers. These publications could be a great addition to any TPI member's sales tool kit: "Weekend Gardening Ideas," and "Additions and Decks, both published by Woman's Day; "Gardens Decks & Patios," produced by Harris Publications

and "Do-It-Yourself Yearbook," published by North Coast Productions. The June issue of "Home" magazine ran a small "News & Notes" item about TPI's brochures which resulted in multiple calls and requests.

All told, nearly 8-million people have been exposed to TPI's positive and informative grass messages this year. Nearly 1,000 individual requests for information (from professionals and consumers) have been generated by this program and shared with TPI members in the requestor's home state.

Broadcasting show, "Home Time," with sod donated by Harley's Sod of North Branch, MN. "Landscape Architect & Specifier News," has scheduled a TPI written article about turfgrass sod's role in the Olympic Games sites.

During the first 10 months of this year's PR program, 163 articles have appeared in 153 different professional and consumer publications, compared to last year's totals of 99 articles in 55 publications.

"Info-Mercials" Set For Summer

Two special paid advertisements have been approved by TPI's Public Relations Campaign committee for placement in the July issue of "SportsTurf," and the August issue of "Landscape & Irrigation" magazine. Both of the ads will address the multiple benefits and advantages of turfgrass sodding to these magazine's professional readers.

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Computer News Briefs Page 3
Tips for Shrewder Computing.

Insurance Program Page 1
Workers compensation and liability coverage available.

Marketing Tip Page 3
"Going an Extra Mile"
How one firm makes an extra effort to serve its customers.

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

Sales Objections Page 3
Putting objections to good use.

Company Sponsorships Page 3
Sponsorships as a promotion tool.

Summer Tours Page 4
Two tours add to TPI Summer Convention appeal.

Taking Care of Business Page 2
"Employee Termination"
Tips for handling a stressful time.

TPI Action Page 4
Winter Tour; Slide Sets; NTEP; and Summer Convention Update.

Future Articles & Shows

If editorial plans are maintained, additional exposure for the turf industry's messages should be appearing in "Better Homes & Gardens," in their home of the year issue, with turfgrass sod donated by Huggett Sod Farms, of Marlette, MI, and the Public Service

Worker Comp & Liability Insurance

TPI Members Eligible For CNA Plan

When shopping for cost-competitive rates for workers compensation or general liability insurance, TPI members may want to contact their local CNA agent to obtain rates for a program sponsored by the Associated Landscape Contractors of America. TPI recently learned through its own agent that turfgrass sod producers are eligible to participate in this program. According to TPI's agent, the CNA program "is

extremely competitive, especially in general liability and workers compensation coverage sections.

Although TPI is not directly involved in this insurance program, as long as 75% or more of a firm's payroll or sales are generated by sod sales or production, the firm could be eligible for coverage. To learn more about this program, TPI members should contact their local CNA agency.

Renewing 1996-97 TPI Memberships

Dues statements for 1996-97 TPI membership renewal have been sent to all current members. These should be carefully reviewed and updated immediately to ensure that accurate information is presented in the new membership directory and made available to customers who request any information from TPI or its Turf Resource Center.

To obtain a replacement copy of your renewal notice contact the TPI office by calling 1/800-405-TURF or 847-705-9898.

Taking Care Of Business

By Earl Slack, Pacific Sod
Camarillo, California

Stressless Terminations

Termination of employees is often a stressful time for both the employee and the supervisor. In a sense, we are admitting a little failure in that we were unable to have an employee realize his/her potential.

This stressful time can be avoided upfront through proper hiring practices and training procedures. However, if you find that it becomes necessary to terminate an employee, there are some things that may help this to go more smoothly.

First of all, your company should have a written policy regarding employment terms. This will include a statement that employment is based upon an "at will" relationship. This means that either the employee or the company may terminate the employment relationship at any time, with or without cause, and with or without prior notice, at the option of

either the employee or the company. The written policy should also include actions that will result in immediate termination as well as those that will bring about a progressive disciplinary process.

Documentation Is Vital

The key here is to document everything that leads up to the termination. This helps to reduce possible wrongful-discharge claims by the employee. If you have followed a progressive disciplinary process and have documented each step, the termination should come as no surprise to the employee.

During the termination discussion, it is wise to have a checklist to ensure that you cover everything that is required. This may include the reason(s) for termination, final pay explanation and continuation of insurance benefits (COBRA form.)

Also, an exit interview, in which you discuss the reason for termination and give the employee an opportunity to explain his/her side, should be a part of your termination procedure. This will give the employer a chance to discover if a wrongful-discharge situation exists so that he/she may respond accordingly. It is wise to have a second company representative present during the discussion, and imperative that everything is documented.

We all hope that we can avoid the stress of terminating an employee. Sadly, this is not always possible. Sound hiring practices and training procedures upfront can alleviate many problems down the road. However, if it becomes necessary to terminate an employee, make sure that you have documented everything that has led up to that point. Your procedures and your documentation will each serve you well in the end.

Increase Name Recognition

Sponsorships Can Yield Results

How many times have you been asked to "sponsor" some type of program or event? Everything from walk-a-thons to high society benefit programs have discovered the value of sponsorships for them, but how many times have you been satisfied with the results that were achieved for your company? The following tips may help you and your company.

While many sponsorships are purely a means for a company to make a contribution to assist a group or organization they believe in, the fact is that successful sponsorships also provide return to the company, usually in the form of increased name recognition and therefore increased sales. The first thing to decide is, why are you even considering being a sponsor? Making a direct contribution is admirable and oftentimes necessary for the recipient group's financial well being, but if you want more, take some steps to ensure it will happen.

First, get all of the details about the program, to determine if it's something you want to associate your company name in the first place. Next, get the agreement in writing. Both parties should agree on what's being given and what will be received. As part of this process, ensure that you will be the exclusive sponsor in your category. Sharing the glory with your major competitors will diminish its value to you.

Follow-up before, during and after the event to seek-out greater name recognition opportunities. There may be ways to expand this, with only minimal effort, such as being involved in media events, at award ceremonies, etc.

Independent of planned events, do your own "sponsorship," by awarding a scholarship, underwriting a public radio program, donating turf to a special project or hosting a summer internship on your farm.

Chinese Sod Farm Manager Seeks Summer Training

The farm manager of a new sod farm in Ningbo, China is seeking to spend some time this summer on a TPI-member sod farm to broaden his understanding of turfgrass sod production. Mr. Li Jian has a masters degree in horticulture, has studied in the Netherlands and has good English skills.

His farm will be located in an area of China with similar climatic conditions to those in many parts of the Southern U.S. Given this, his training would be most productive if undertaken at sod farms in this geographic area.

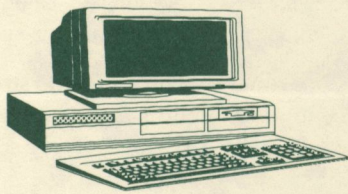
Should you be interested in assisting Mr. Li in his training, please contact:

Jeanne Bartholomew
Linking the World
7657 Twp. Rd. 234
Logan, OH 43138
Phone: 614/385-8363
Fax: 614/385-1954

Shrewder Computing

Trade-ins of computer equipment

are becoming more common. Increasingly, computer retailers will accept used computers when a firm buys new ones. Trade-in values range from \$100 to \$800 for IBM-compatible PCs and \$50 to \$1,500 for Macintoshes. Major computer manufacturers like Hewlett-Packard and IBM will also accept used equipment from customers, but only for recycling, not for credit toward new units.



Dust the inside of your computer every three months — more often if it is left on 24 hours a day. The cooling fan in the back sucks in dust that slowly coats the machine's parts and could eventually cause it to "crash." *Key:* First, back up all data. Then unplug the central processing unit and take it outside. Once outside, use a can of compressed air, available at computer and camera stores, to clean out the dust.

Form letters kept on a computer can quickly be customized for each recipient. Just keep a file of personal form letters on your computer for thank-yous, past-due reminders, announcements, promotion efforts and so on. Frequently-sent faxes stored on computer also save time and may be personalized too.

Learning From Sales Objections

"We're really pleased with our current supplier..."

...probably the most common response or rejection every sales person hears, but is this a close to the conversation, or an opportunity to advance?

In many instances, the statement is another way of saying, *"changing suppliers now would be too much trouble"*, but it may also be a means of gaining valuable knowledge for all future sales. There are at least two different, yet positive, approaches that can be taken whenever this statement comes up.

Match Or Surpass

By asking why the customer is so pleased with the current supplier, you can learn a lot about your competition. Probe for specifics such as price, service, quality, diversity, or so on. With this information, you can decide if you can surpass what is now making the customer so satisfied. It's highly unlikely that a simple offer match will

be sufficient to cause a customer to change suppliers, so you know from the very start that your offer will have to be an improvement over what is currently available. But, keep in mind that if one of the reasons for not wanting to change is nothing more than laziness, you will have to work hard to make it easy for the customer to make the switch.

Gaining Valuable Insights

What you learn while probing the "satisfied customer's" reasons may reveal any number of possible changes you need to consider to become more competitive. It may be impossible to make all of the adjustments right away, or even for a single customer, but with the information, you can make more intelligent and well-informed business decisions for your company.

"We're really pleased with our current supplier," should never be the end to a sales-oriented conversation, rather, it should become a conversation starter.

Cable Television Advertising

Low-Cost Image & Sales Booster

One of the lowest cost forms of advertising available today is through local cable television stations. Often less expensive than many forms of print advertising, cable stations may also offer a target audience specifically suited to your farm's needs. For example, a program on gardening, home repair or any of the do-it-yourself formats would most likely also have viewers interested in turfgrass sod.

In addition to airing your sod-selling message, a presence on television will give viewers the impression that your farm is a stable, large operation capable of providing the grass needed for their home or business requirements.

Marketing Tip

By Ronald D. Nixon, Cowikee Turf
Eufaula, Alabama

Going an extra mile

Our marketing effort is directed toward keeping our best customers and cultivating new customers that fit within our company's chosen direction.

Having established name recognition, we have enjoyed a working relationship with several of our customers for many years. When sales are good, as they have

been this year, we do not always have sod to supply those customers' needs.

When that occurs, we freely share information about where they might find good sod. We have even assisted in phone calling, forklift unloading and trucking if there was a need.

In the long term, if the landscaper keeps working...so will we.

Service...?

Service is a word so broad that it has become meaningless. It means a lot of different things. Companies that want to be service leaders have got to focus on what they mean by that term.

What specific aspect of service do they want to be a leader in? It's like saying "I want to be a value leader." It's meaningless unless you know what kind of value you are choosing. Service, when it's not defined, is like "Motherhood."

TPI Action

FOUR PROFESSIONAL QUALITY TURFGRASS SLIDE SETS, resulting from TPI's public relations program, were recently made available to TPI members. Each set of 20 slides focuses on a single theme...environmental benefits, installation steps, beautiful lawns or sports actions. Ideal for use in educational slides shows, they can also be used in company brochures or mailers, exhibit booths and company newsletters. There are no duplicate slides between any of the four sets. Costing only \$15 per set, post-paid orders can be placed with TPI by calling the toll-free number 800/405-TURF (8873) or 847-705-9898, or by faxing orders to 847/705-8347. Additional copies of the order form are also available from TPI.

A POST-SAVANNAH TOUR OF CHARLESTON, S.C. is now in the final planning stages with a formal announcement expected to be made at or before the TPI Summer Convention in Sacramento. As now outlined, the turfgrass sod farm based tour will depart after the Midwinter Conference on Sunday, February 9 and conclude in Charleston mid-day Tuesday, February 11. In addition to visiting several turfgrass sod farms, the tour will include numerous historic sites and offer an overview of Charleston. TPI's members in the area of Charleston have been coordinating with the staff to help ensure the mini-tour will be informative and enjoyable. Specific details and reservation forms will be mailed to all TPI members as soon as all arrangements and costs have been finalized.

TPI IS ASSISTING NTEP RECOVER ITS FEDERAL FUNDING which was deleted from President Clinton's budget for the USDA. The National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) establishes turf evaluation plots across the U.S., helping turf producers and others identify the varieties most suitable for a given need. TPI and its Washington, D.C. lobby firm, is working closely with NTEP officials as the House and Senate take action on the budget.

SUMMER CONVENTION MEETINGS REMINDERS

In making travel plans for the July 25-27 TPI Summer Convention in Sacramento, CA, the following special meetings/events should be kept in mind:

Wed., July 24: International Member Breakfast, Pre-Convention tours

Thur., July 25: Committee Meetings, Education, Business Meeting, Exhibits

Fri., July 26: Seed Test Plot Viewing, Exhibits, Demonstration Day

1996 TPI Summer Convention Tours Add Interest to Show

Two Pre-Convention tours offer TPI members another excellent reason to attend the 1996 Summer Convention & Field Days.

Wednesday, July 24

Sod Farm Tour to depart Hyatt Hotel at 9 am, visit University of California at Davis and two area sod farms. Lunch is included in this **free** tour! Buses return to Hyatt by 5 pm.

Napa-Valley wine-country tour departs Hyatt at 8 am, visits wineries, shopping areas, and returns to Hyatt by 6 pm. This tour costs \$45.00 per person.

For more info, call or fax Tom at TPI: Phone: 800/405-8873 or 847/705-9898, FAX: 847/705-8347.

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

**Featuring: Education,
Exhibits, Seed Test, Tours
and Equipment Demos**

*Watch for updates in the
mail and in the Sept./Oct.
"Turf News" magazine!*

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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