

Turfgrass Producers International

1997 TPI Midwinter Pre-Conference Efficiency Seminar Details Announced

It doesn't matter if you've had a great year, or a rotten one...if business is good or bad...*efficiency* is the key to increased profitability. "Efficiency" is the central focus of both your 1997 Midwinter Conference, and your TPI-members-only day-long Pre-Conference Seminar.

The Seminar will cover four elements of turfgrass sod farm business efficiency in depth. Each of these four topics will be explored in detail and taken from a

theoretical level, to a "hands-on" practical level. You won't be left wondering "*How does this relate to me?*" or "*How am I supposed to use this information?*" You will discover how to create an Efficiency Action Plan to help implement key efficiency-theories into **your** business!

Key Efficiency Topics will include:

1. Efficiency of Strategy - you'll learn: the benefits of sound strategic planning; how it applies to you and your farm/firm; and how to incorporate efficiency theories into a plan of action.

2. Efficiency from People - discover the value of creating greater efficiency in your work-force through role-definition, individual accountability, developing and growing your employees and reinforcing behaviors.

3. Efficiency in Asset Management - learn the keys to managing your cash, managing your 'hard assets' and managing your prices. Your ongoing performance in these areas will impact both your short-term profitability and your long-term financial position!

4. Efficiency in Time Management - you'll find out that you can 'make time work for you,' and you will discover new ways to better manage your time through the use of a 'quadrant approach' to time analysis.

Before the day is out, you'll be able to develop your own Efficiency Action Plan and begin to prioritize the steps you'll take in implementing your plan!

Michael A. Jackson, founder and president of Agri-Business Group, will lead the Pre-Conference Seminar on February 5. Mr. Jackson led last year's seminar which was widely-viewed as TPI's best ever.

He frequently publishes management and marketing articles in industry and company publications, and he is co-author of the standard agricultural selling textbook entitled Agri Selling. With his strong business background and experience in working with TPI, Jackson is well-suited to help your firm succeed.

Plan now to attend this important event. Full conference details are available by calling Tom at 847/705-9898.

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Computer News Briefs Page 3
Tips for Shrewder Computing.

Client Communications Page 3
Alleviate problems through better customer communications.

Marketing Tip Page 3
"Post Sale Marketing"
Continuing your marketing efforts after the sale.

Price Competition Page 2
How to avoid "price wars."

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

Seminar Update Page 1
Efficiency Seminar detailed.

Study Tour Page 4
1997 Midwinter Post-Conference Tour deadline draws near.

Taking Care of Business Page 2
"Seeking Professional Help"
Process for selecting a lawyer.

TPI Action Page 4
Federal wetland regulations, Savannah committee meetings and TPI Board nominee request.

October "Popular Mechanics" Small 'Home & Shop' Box Draws Big

It's only a four-inch by two-inch item, way back on page 108 of the October "Popular Mechanics" magazine, but it's drawing great attention to turfgrass sod.

Headlined, "Help With Sod," the article advises readers that if they want help improving their lawn, they should consider the TPI's "Turf Installation Guide." The article is illustrated with a 4-color photo of the brochure and offers TPI's address.

Included in the 1.6 million circulation magazine as a result of TPI's meeting

with "Popular Mechanics" editor, Roy Berendsohn, the article has generated nearly 40-50 requests a day during the first two weeks since publication. In addition to sending the requested brochure, TPI sends other positive information about turfgrass and sod, as well as a list of TPI members in the requestor's state.

Now in its 3rd year, TPI's PR program continues to encourage various editors to include positive messages about turfgrass sod in their publications.

Taking Care Of Business "Seeking Professional Help"

By Jean Kellam, Torrington Turf Farm,
Torrington, Wyoming

Choosing Lawyers

Anyone reading this column has probably ALREADY had FAR more experience in choosing lawyers than you EVER WANTED. If not, you'll be pleased to know that there are some cardinal rules...not unlike choosing a doctor.

1. Hire the one who SPECIALIZES in the particular area you are concerned about. If you need legal advice on a particular tax question, hire a tax lawyer with years of experience in representing honest taxpayers like yourselves. The specialist is abreast of recent court decisions and volumes of ever-changing laws in THAT area.

2. Hire one who's breath does not smell of bubble gum. Hire experience and wisdom and yes...a little age so you are not paying for a tadpole's education when your entire financial future depends on your lawyers' abilities. Experience equates with KNOWING the temperaments of local judges and landmark decisions.

3. Hire one who is ETHICAL and devoted to BUSINESS INTERESTS (ie. look to see who insurance companies hire to represent their business interests.) Those lawyers who defend business owners in civil litigation know just how vulnerable you are in a legal system run amuck. They know that you'd like to make a living selling sod, not extracting money from some "deep pocket" in a courtroom or worse...handing all your assets over to someone who thinks you are an easy target.

At least in the United States, you need never worry about choosing a PLAINTIFF'S lawyer...HE'LL FIND YOU!!! He is waiting for that fat contingency fee from a lawsuit he'll joyfully bring against you on behalf of:

a. that employee who has been on the job a mere 2 days when he ruptures a disc in his back while stacking sod...leaving him permanently disabled, with eternal "pain and suffering," completely worthless in bed (so his wife sues you for loss of consortium) and you learn later, was illegally in this country to begin with

(so expect a call from U.S. Immigration and Naturalization folks; or

b. that child who was playing on your newly sodded turf when she has an allergic reaction to chemicals you use in combating all the weeds and insects; or

c. that neighbor who thinks your machinery makes too much noise at 6 a.m. thereby disturbing the peace, creating a nuisance, and devaluing his property; or

d. that customer who suffered "emotional distress and anguish" when you told him your price per square foot and would not lower it because he was a member of some protected class...(and the list goes on...)

SO, YOU ASK, HOW DO I PROTECT MYSELF?

The answer is:

Choose a GOOD lawyer...or do what I did. You encourage your children to marry one.

Overcoming Sales Objection Number 1-Million &

Objection: *"I want to think about it."*

This is nothing more than a polite way of saying, "I'm not sold."

Response: Ask what the person very directly what he wants to "think about" ... price, amount, timing, finances, service, etc., etc., etc.

This approach will yield solid information about what's really holding up the sale's close and you can suggest any number of solutions that will help the prospect become a customer, then and there, without further delay.

Don't Match Low Prices...Ever!

"Your competitors are cheaper!" in whatever words use, is really a test, not a decision, according to Canadian Brian Jeffrey in his publication, "Salestalk."

If the prospective customer truly thought that everything else was equal, except price, he wouldn't even waste his time discussing it with you. The fact that he is talking to you says he feels the two company's products are equal and that he can drive down your price.

One of the best defenses is to show the positive differences between the two products and companies, especially those differences that the customer will find valuable. Although you never want to "put-down" your competition, you can talk about what your product or company does that is meaningful and valuable.

This might include such non-price items as overall uniformity, specific varieties best suited to the need, on-time delivery with freshness, spot-dropping at the site, responsiveness to immediate delivery needs, nearness from harvest field to installation site, strength of sod pieces, etc.

While it might seem easier to agree to match your competitor's lower price, doing that will begin a pattern that will continue, perhaps for years to come. No one can control what someone else wants to sell their product for, nor can anyone else control what other services and benefits come from dealing with your company. But if you sell on price alone, you're certain to get into constant "pricing wars" where the customer wins every time and your business fails!

Head Off Potential Problems:

Positive Customer Communications

As the turfgrass sod seasons comes to a close in many parts of the world, it's a great time to turn potential lemons into real lemonade, with simple and easy, yet positive customer communications.

Appreciation - Thank You

Put yourself in your customers' shoes. Wouldn't it be nice to get a thank you letter from one of your suppliers. It doesn't have to be long and involved, just an acknowledgment of what their business meant to you, and how pleased you are that they selected your company. This could be the start of a single letter, or a series of letters you send during the off-season.

Look Back - Look Ahead

Let your customers know what kind of year you had and what you think the coming year will be. If the weather was a problem at the start of the year, tell them. If your fall seeding is having problems, tell them. If you think there will be an inventory shortage, tell them. If you think you'll be able to supply all of the turfgrass sod they'd ever want, tell them.

Maybe you had one field that just didn't produce the quality of turfgrass sod you want, but it had to be harvested

to meet the total demand. Maybe you had an employee who left you at a bad time of the year, or another who won an award, tell them.

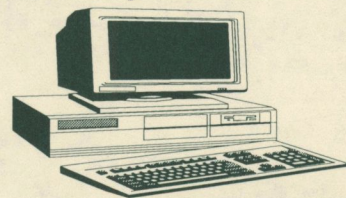
The point and purpose of this is to show you and your company as a human element, not a faceless farmer who's just out to sell grass and forget about the people who make the business what it is. Your effort to communicate to your customers will help them to understand that because you're human, you may run into problems where you need their understanding and even assistance. Without that human touch, you're just a factory producing a product they use some way.

Positive customer communications can be especially helpful if the year has had some problems, and you anticipate new or repeat problems in the future. For example, you can't control the weather, but a wet spring will hurt not only the turf's development and availability, but also its quality. A bad winter could mean the turf is set-back still more. Telling your customers what you project can be a positive. If, for example, you foresee a short supply for next spring, you can put them on notice so they will order turf early and be a bit more prepared if the prices move up. Without advance information, your customers may feel real put-upon later.

Shrewder Computing

Considering advertising on the Internet? Consider this...by the end of 1996, there will be 13.4 million households on-line, estimates Jupiter Communications, a New York research firm. That sounds like a lot of potential customers...too good to be true? Maybe.

People often think of the Internet market in television terms, like Nielson points, a huge audience tuned into the same thing. But that is broadcast thinking, and the Internet is a narrowcast medium — mostly small groups of people tapping into tens of thousands of special interest sites.



How many of these 13.4 million people would see my ad? What will be my cost per customer contact or "hit?" How does the cost of my presence on the Internet compare with other advertising media?

The answers to these questions may help you determine how to best allocate your advertising resources.

Marketing Tip

**By Earl Slack, Pacific Sod
Camarillo, California**

Marketing continues after the sale.

We all want our customers to be happy with their new lawns and hopefully have them share that feeling with their neighbors. Besides the need to deliver the best looking turf possible, you want your customer to know that you are going to stand behind your sod and advise them in its care and maintenance. One way we accomplish this is through our guarantee. In addition to the guarantee, we also include maintenance sheets and other information for the customer.

The design of the bag is consistent with our company's logo and graphics. That includes the graphics on our truck fleet

and fleet of sales vans as well as other sales literature. There can be no doubt where it came from. The bag also informs the customer that important guarantee information is enclosed so that they won't just toss it.

The guarantee sheet describes in full what the guarantee provides. The maintenance sheets are specific for the variety of sod that was delivered. They include information on watering, fertilization and mowing. They allow the customer to give their new lawn the best possible care. All this has helped to insure that the customers are happy and will share that feeling with their neighbors.

The door hanger also allows us to have a cooperative marketing effort with our major re-seller accounts. We are able to put their advertising into the bag in order to get their information out to the new customer. This not only helps them, but we benefit by maintaining good relationships with our major accounts.

All this information is delivered in a nice package that the customer has at hand immediately. When their new lawn is installed and all their neighbors want to know who to call, the information is there.

Don't drop the ball...continue your marketing efforts...after the sale.

TPI Action

TPI SEEKS FARM EXEMPTION FROM REVISED HAZARDOUS MATERIALS TRANSPORTATION ACT because it would cost each farm approximately \$2,100 a year, require unnecessary paperwork and other burdensome responsibilities, without an equivalent benefit. As this issue of the newsletter is being printed, Congress is considering language proposed by TPI and some 44 other farm-related organizations to exempt farm trucks that carry pesticides, fertilizers and/or fuels from requirements to placard trucks, carry shipping documents and provide a 24-hour emergency response phone number. Unless adopted by Congress, a similar type farm-truck-exemption now available in many states would be killed in every state!

AS FEDERAL WETLANDS REGS NEAR FINALIZATION, TPI PREPARES COMMENTS that support its long-held position that turfgrass sod producers deserve treatment equal to all other forms of agriculture and that scientifically based, universally adopted wetlands delineation standards are essential. TPI's comments will be made to the US Department of Agriculture on or before November 5, 1996.

SAVANNAH COMMITTEE MEETINGS REQUIRE MEMBER INPUT if TPI is to continue on its path of industry leadership and advancement. The following lists planned committee meetings and their major topics of discussion.

<i>Committee</i>	<i>Major Topic</i>
Conference & Convention	Future meeting sites & speaker topics
Legal & Taxation	Federal crop insurance for turfgrass sod
Marketing	New marketing booklets & information
Business Management	Newsletter issues, topics & authors
"Turf News" Magazine	Issue themes, advertisers, authors

To receive advance notice of the meeting, the agenda and informative pre-meeting materials, contact the TPI office at 800/405-8873 or 847-705-9898 to indicate which of the committees you want to serve.

TPI BOARD NOMINEES ARE SOUGHT by Nominating Committee Chairman Doug Barberry, for consideration at the 1997 annual business meeting. Call 410/879-8277 to discuss positions, criteria and potential candidates. Individuals are encouraged to recommend themselves for available TPI leadership positions.

November 1 Deadline:

Charleston Tour To Follow Conference

The November 1 sign-up deadline for the Post-Midwinter Conference tour of Charleston, SC may be catching some people by surprise, as registrations thus far seem low compared to initial interest.

The February 9-11 tour of four turfgrass sod farms, a tea plantation and historic Charleston created considerable interest when it was first announced in Sacramento; however, the single promotional mailing made in July may have been lost, misplaced or forgotten by those same people. However, because of required guarantees for hotels, motorcoaches, special events, meals, etc., the November 1 sign-up deadline will remain in effect.

The informative brochure and reservation form are available by calling the TPI office at 1/800-405-8873 or 847-705-9898.

Included in the three-day, two night tour will be motorcoach transportation from Savannah (site of TPI's Midwinter Conference) and tours of the following turf farms: Nimmer Turf & Tree; Walpole & Legare; Ravenswood Plantation and Plantersville Turf Farm. In addition, the group will dine at the famous Middleton Place Plantation after a complete tour and will even have a horse-drawn carriage tour of Charleston. The cost is \$375 per person, sharing a double or \$535 for a non-shared single.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
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