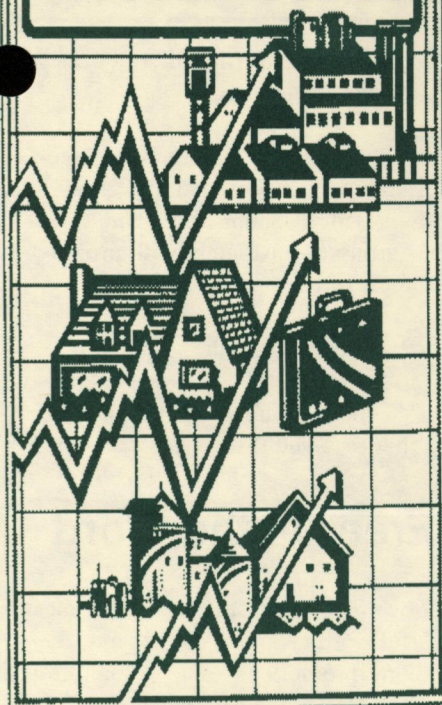


Dec / Jan 1997-98



## ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Computer News Briefs Page 3  
*Tips for Shrewder Computing.*

Criticize Effectively Page 2  
*Guidelines for Employee Criticism.*

Jest for the Fun of It Page 4  
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*Member Survey to Build Industry Profile & Guide Association.*

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*Membership update; Website news; TPF Annual Campaign around the corner; Recommend TPI Board of Trustee candidates; Midwinter Committee meetings...plus more.*

# BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

## Turfgrass Producers International

### TPI Industry Profile Survey & Needs Assessment

### Results Will Guide Members and Leaders

For just the third time in its 30-year history, TPI is preparing to conduct a membership profile survey and needs assessment. The consolidated results will help members compare their operations with others and provide TPI with a solid database of information for representing the industry to government, regulators, exhibitors and advertisers.

Results will also help guide the elected leaders, committee volunteers and staff design programs and benefits that more closely meet the members' needs.

However, all of this will be possible only if there is a sufficiently high response rate from the members.

According to TPI Executive Director Doug Fender, "At first glance, the questionnaire looks intimidating and complicated, but based on tests run by the Board, the fact is that it can be completed in about an hour. Also, we've know that estimates are sufficiently accurate. Members won't have to tear apart their records and financial statements to complete this survey."

### Turf Industry Gets 'Wired'

## TPI Leads Way With Website

With the introduction of TPI's website (<http://www.TurfgrassSod.Org>) just over a month ago, the turfgrass sod production industry is getting "wired" on the web in a big way, thanks in large measure to an agreement TPI reached with its website design and management company.

VersaCom, Inc., based in Austin, TX, as part of its agreement with TPI, will create and manage TPI member sites, register individual domain names and help members increase their marketing reach via the website. In addition, the firm is offering "state sponsorships" on its own horticultural themed site, at

Fender also pointed out that in order to obtain an accurate profile of the industry, many financial and operational questions have to be asked. "Confidential treatment of every response is an absolute guarantee," Fender noted. "You may not tell your spouse, but you can tell TPI because your answers are mixed with all other responses and no single farm can ever be identified. We protect the privacy of these responses and no one is allowed access to them or the computer data."

One TPI Board member, after completing the test survey said, "I really hate giving out all of this information about my farm, but I know that unless I'm willing to trust that it will be treated in confidence, I'll never be able to get an industry-wide report that can be very important to my operation."

Once compiled, the survey results will be published in "Turf News" magazine and shared with committee and board members. In addition, the results will become the basis for representing TPI's interests on issues such as wetlands, labor and chemicals.

<http://www.Growzone.Org>. Members can contact the firm at its website or by calling toll-free 888/800-5904.

To ensure complete and accurate TPI website listings, **members should regularly inform the TPI office of any changes they want to make.** This would include species and harvesting types as well as email and website addresses. In the near future, TPI member websites will be "hotlinked" directly from the TPI site to the members' site.

**TPI email address:**

**Turf-Grass@ MSN. Com**



# Marketing Tip

By Jeffrey Hum, Green Valley Turf Farms  
Canfield, Ohio

## Promotions

We spend money each fall buying promotional items (give-aways) for our customers. Each item has our name, address and phone number on it.

Some examples of past items include:

- \* tape measures
- \* clip boards
- \* pens / pencils
- \* letter openers
- \* tree caliper tapes

Our customers really appreciate these items, according to the positive comments we have received. We always try to buy items that will be used frequently, and by doing so, ensure that our name is in front of them on an on-going basis.

## Promotions create more repeat business than discounts.

Alice Kendrick, associate professor of advertising at Southern Methodist University found that promotional items

do a better job of ensuring future business than offering discounts.

**Case:** A dry-cleaning store and a take-out restaurant each provided one group of customers with discount offers and another group of customers with promotional items of the same value.

**Result:** In each case, the group that received the promotional items generated over 25% more future business than the group that received the discount coupons.

## Managing: 12 Ways to Criticize Effectively

Here are 12 guidelines to remember the next time you have to tell someone that he or she has done something wrong. Each item serves an important purpose, and will make this often unpleasant task more productive.

1. Identify the behavior that you want to criticize. Direct your criticism at actions, not at the individual. Making this distinction, you will lessen defensiveness in your employee.

2. Make criticisms specific. Not "You always miss deadlines"; But: "You missed the March 15 deadline for your report." This not only targets problems, but allows for more specifically-targeted solutions.

3. Be sure the behavior you're criticizing can be changed. Foreign accents, baldness, and other things tangentially related to some business dealings cannot always be changed.

4. Use "I" and "we" to stress that you want to work out the problem together, rather than making threats. If you discuss the consequences of failing to respond with change, ensure that the consequences fit the situation.

5. Make sure the other person understands the reason for your criticism. Discuss how the criticized activities impact the firm, and how a change will mitigate that impact.

6. Don't belabor the point. "Short and sweet" (avoiding extensive lectures) will convey your point effectively while lessening the strain on your working relationship.

7. Offer incentives for changed behavior. Just as there may be adverse consequences for a failure to change, so should there be positive outcomes for positive changes. Also, offer to help the person correct the problem where possible.

8. Don't set a tone of anger or sarcasm since both can be counter-productive. A calm demeanor will make for a smooth interchange, and lessen the potential for hurt feelings.

9. Show the person you understand his or her feelings. Remember, it is possible to empathize with the feelings of others without condoning his or her actions.

10. If you're putting your criticism in writing, cool off before writing the critical letter or memo. Be sure only the person it is intended for sees it.

11. Start off by saying something positive about the person, their value or accomplishments.

12. At the end, reaffirm your support and confidence in the person and their value to your company.

## "Free" is the Word

The word 'free' is still one of the most powerful words you can use in your marketing promotions. Direct mail guru Bob Stone tested the following offers:

A) Buy one year for \$99, get the second year for \$10.

B) Buy two years, get 50 percent off.

C) Buy one year, get the second year free.

With an annual subscription rate of \$109, all three offers are really the same price, yet the 'free' offer (C) pulled in 40% better than either (A) or (B).

## Printing & Postage

**Size matters.** Always consult your printshop before finalizing the design of your publication to find out which "trim sizes" are the most economical. For example: A 7-by-9 inch booklet may cost as much as 40 percent more than a 6-by-9 inch booklet with the same number of pages.

Printing a non-standard size? Try using larger-size paper and printing two-up.

**...Consider trying to get your promotional mail to arrive between Tuesday and Thursday.** *Why?* There's a chance your prospect will look at it more closely because you'll avoid the "Monday morning mail clutter," and the "Friday before the weekend apathy."



## Taking Care of Business: What Do You Call What You Do?

By Mike McDermott, Grass Pad  
Warehouse, Olathe, Kansas

### What's in a name?

To what extent do sod producers use brand names in the promotion of the products they sell? In the age of Coke, Lexus and Big Mac, are you being left behind by the marketing juggernaut sweeping the sod industry? Well, don't worry just yet.

As a general rule, sod growers use traditional and unpretentious language in describing themselves and their products. Some of us grow "sod," others "turf" and still others grow "grass." We grow a bluegrass blend, or a fescue blend or Bermudagrass. Rarely are brand names used. We may think ours is better than anyone else's, but we are reluctant to brag about it.

Sod growers are plain spoken with humble roots. We have a healthy respect for dirty overalls and a drenched shirt on the back of a sod cutter. We're proud of what we grow and we expect our product and our service to speak for itself. Rarely do sod growers make elaborate marketing claims for their product. There seems to be a certain distrust of marketing and advertising jargon as being unworthy or unnecessary.

There are several exceptions. Names like Super Sod, Superior Sod and Rapid Turf have a promotional spin, while Mr. Turf, Green Genie and OK Doke show more flair. Slogans are more popular: Green side up, High on grass, Great green grass and Tough turf are

routinely used even when brand names are not. In California, competition between "Medallion Turf" and "Marathon Turf" is an example of brand name promotion that is rarely seen in our industry. Art Campbell in Kansas has recently decided to begin a brand name marketing program based on "Majestic Turf." Ask Art how it's going.

The most commonly used brand name is that of our business. What we call ourselves as individual growers says a great deal about how we perceive ourselves and what we sell. The vast majority of growers use the word "farm" in their title logo. Many farms are called by family names whether it be Meyers, Briggs, Huber, Keeven or Nunes.

Others choose regional titles such as West Coast, Southland, Sunbelt or Sierra. Still others choose some variety of "Green" such as: Green Valley, Greenhaven, Emerald or Shamrock. The most common descriptive names for sod farms take their names from the water: Riverbend, Twin Lakes, Coon Creek, Beaver Run, Delta and Elkhorn Springs.

Like Medieval craftsmen, we take our names from our families, from what we sell and where we sell it. In all cases, we're proud of our family history and our product. In time, customers associate our farm name with the history of the quality turf we sell and our name becomes synonymous with a quality turf product. Even in the age of Coke and Big Mac, this is still the best kind of marketing.

## Customers, Pricing & Profitability

### \* Low prices don't create loyalty.

A business that sells on the basis of price will be vulnerable if its costs rise or its competitors manage to lower their prices. Customers drawn to you by low prices are being loyal to their pocketbook, not you!

### \* Low prices don't build satisfaction.

Customers who buy on the basis of price are more likely to complain about the lack of service, options, accessories and so on. If they relate their complaints to others, they can harm your firm's good name.

### \* Consider dumping costly customers.

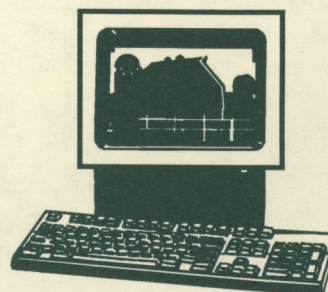
Recognize that some customers are not worth keeping. Determine who they are by reviewing your customer list to identify high-margin, low-margin and loss-creating customers.

Identify your "good customer's" traits (loyalty, quality-consciousness, relationship-orientation, etc.) Strive to recruit new high-margin customers (perhaps using referrals from present "good" customers) to replace cost-creating ones.

## Shrewder Computing

**\* Improve computer system performance** by adding more memory to computers, rather than buying expensive new machines. You may get a similar improvement in performance at a fraction of the cost.

This is especially true if you are trying to connect to the Internet using a computer that was designed before the graphics-intensive World Wide Web became popular. By adding a graphics card with extra memory, you may double or triple the speed at which the computer processes Web pages. And the cost may be substantially less than that of a new computer - \$150 to \$250 versus \$1,500 to \$2,000.



### \* Reduce users' eye strain.

1) Position your monitor slightly below eye level.

2) Reduce the intensity of bright overhead lighting - instead, illuminate the desktop with task lighting.

3) Tilt the monitor away from artificial light sources.

4) Don't let the monitor face a sunlit window.

5) Reduce glare with an anti-glare filter that fits over the computer screen.

6) Blink often & rest occasionally.



# TPI Action

Turf Foundation's "2-Cents Worth" Campaign is officially underway, with the mailing of fund-raising fliers in the November/December "Turf News" and separate fliers going to all TPI members via direct mail. Last year, TPI members contributed over \$40,000 through this campaign to help establish a long-term endowment and fund immediate research. Tax deductible contributions can be calculated based on a donation equal to two-cents per pallet (or big roll) of turfgrass sold during the year. An ITPF booth at the Maui Midwinter Conference will recognize all firms who have contributed to the Foundation's success...**will your firm's name be listed?**

**TPI's Public Relations and Education Program**, now in its fourth year, continues to capture space for the benefits of grass and the immediacy of turfgrass sod. Between July and October of this year, the efforts have resulted in 21 professional publication articles and 45 consumer articles with a **combined circulation of 10.5 million!** Throughout January watch PBS show, "Home Time," for a segment on turf installation arranged by TPI.

A "Grand" TPI Membership and \$1,000 is within everyone's reach, as the organization strives to break through the 1,000-member mark and is offering \$1,000 to the individual who recruits that 1,000th member. See details of the program on page 7 of the November/December "Turf News" magazine.

**TPI is going "Down Under"** October 30-November 15, 1998 to visit members and view the sights of New Zealand and Australia. Promotional fliers and reservation forms have been sent to all current TPI members for this special trip arranged by TPI's Study Tour Committee. Additional copies of the details about this potentially tax-deductible trip are available by contacting the TPI office.

**Midwinter Conference Maui Hotel is nearly "full,"** because of the exceptionally high turn-out; however, even when it's totally booked, alternatives will be available. For information about housing alternatives, contact the TPI office.

#### Future TPI Meeting Schedule

July 16-18, Summer Convention, Tysons Corner, VA (suburban Washinton, D.C.)  
February 3-5, Midwinter Conference & Seminar, Tampa, FL  
July 21-23, Summer Convention, East Lansing, MI

## BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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

## Jest For The Fun Of It

### *Real Bumper Stickers...*

Out Of My Mind. Back in 5 Minutes.

Be nice to your kids. They're the ones who will choose your nursing home.

Where there's a will...I want to be in it!

As long as there are tests, there will be prayer in public schools.

Ever stop to think & forget to start again?

### *Business Buzzwords*

**Assumption** - a premise used to construct annual budgets and market forecasts when you are too busy to do research

**Bankruptcy** - life after debt

**Body Shop** - an employment agency

**Competition** - principle of economic behavior stoutly defended by businessmen for all industries except their own

**Expense Account** - corporate food stamps

**No Brainer** - a decision which, viewed in retrospect, is "obvious" to those who failed to make it in the first place

**Steer** - once optimistic "bull" who has been cut down to size by too many market reverses

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