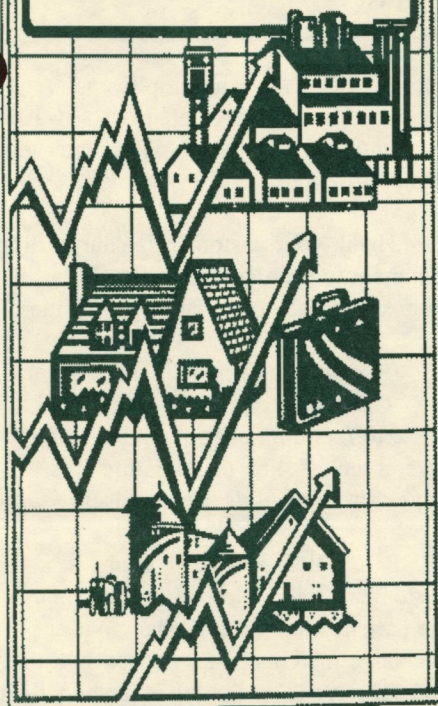


June / July 1997



ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Business Briefs Page 3
Tips for Better Business Operations.

Computer News Briefs Page 3
Tips for Shrewder Computing.

Jest for the Fun of It Page 4
TPI's "funny business" department.

Marketing Tip Page 2
"Customer Service"
Two views on systematically improving your Customer Service.

Membership Renewal Page 1
TPI Membership renewal process briefly reviewed.

Silent Auction Update Page 1
New program offers excitement and new twist to Summer Convention.

Taking Care of Business Page 3
"Seeking Professional Help"
In-House or Out-Sourced Payroll.

TPI Action Page 4
TPI Website progress report; NTEP funding update; U.S. INS stepping-up labor regulation enforcement...plus more.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

New Convention Activity

Silent Auction To Benefit Many

Manufacturers, producers and researchers will all benefit from a new feature added to the 1997 TPI Summer Convention and Field Day...a Silent Auction. Exhibiting and demonstrating firms at the July 17-19 convention are being encouraged to donate equipment, supplies or services to the auction. Thus far, a mower, donated by Mathis Equipment is the largest item contributed to the auction.

Members attending the convention will have an opportunity to bid on the items throughout the in-hotel exhibits or during the demo day activities. High bidders at the close of each auction segment will be announced during the convention. All of the funds raised by the auction will go to support the International Turf Producers Foundation (ITPF) turfgrass sod research.

Tax Deductible Benefits

Because ITPF is an educational foundation, 100 percent of the manufacturer's donation costs will be deductible, according to U.S. tax laws. For successful bidders, any amount in excess of the manufacturer's cost will be a tax deductible contribution to a charity, while the value of the item itself may be deductible as a direct expense or considered a depreciable purchase for the business.

Details, Details, Details

Detailed descriptions of all items, the contributing company and the item's value will be mailed to attendees before the convention, with an additional listing available in Minneapolis.

During the in-hotel exhibit hours on Thursday, July 17 and again during the demonstration day July 18, members will bid on any of the items by writing their name and bid amount on a form located in the contributing company's booth. While there will be no minimum opening bids, subsequent bids will have to be at least \$10 higher than the current bid.

Items available for bidding in the hotel exhibits will not be available for bidding during the demonstration day and vice versa. Winning bidders will be informed about taking possession and delivery of the item when they are announced. Approximately 30 minutes before the close of the exhibits or demonstrations, the bid forms will be collected and the successful bidders announced.

Manufacturers Encouraged

Because of the positive publicity the ITPF Silent Auction will generate, the extra booth traffic it will create and the charitable tax deductibility of the contribution, manufacturers, suppliers and distributors are encouraged to contact the TPI office for additional details and to confirm their plans for this event.

If the silent auction is successful in Minneapolis this summer, based on reactions from the manufacturers and members, it could become a standard element of TPI's Summer Convention and Field Days. Watch for further auction item listings in your July/August "Turf News".

Renewing 1997-98 TPI Memberships

1997-98 TPI membership renewal statements have been sent to all current members.

These should be carefully reviewed and updated immediately to ensure accurate information is presented in the new membership directory and made available to customers who request information from the Turf Resource Center.

To obtain a replacement copy of your renewal notice, contact TPI:

Phone: 800/405-8873 or 847-705-9898 Fax: 847/705-8347

Marketing Tip

Submitted By H Bar H Turf Farms, Inc.
Amarillo and Idalou Texas

The following articles have been submitted for reprint in the "Business Management Newsletter" as they will provide you with a reasonable representation of our effort in marketing turfgrass sod and services. Our organization functions as a team, so no one person is ever responsible for our success. Likewise, the authors of these two articles have been credited as it is their ideas we attempt to incorporate into our business operations.

Your friends at H Bar H Turf Farms

15 Ways to Create "Whatever it takes" Customer Service, by Don Taylor

1. Find good employees, train them well, and treat them like superstars. To your customers, your employees *are* your company.
2. Constantly monitor how you're doing. Ask your customers what they think. Listen and react to the answers. Use 'mystery shoppers,' focus groups and surveys. You'll never know if you don't ask.
3. Keep employees informed. Customers find nothing so irritating as taking time to go to a store that advertises a special on a certain item only to find that employees know nothing about the sale or the location of the advertised product.
4. Find something to do every day that surprises, excites, or delights a customer. If you're lucky enough to be able to shop at Nordstrom's - the famous Washington based department store which sets a high standard for service - and find they don't have the brand you're looking for, don't despair. The clerk might just run to the store down the street and get it for you.
5. Make customer service everyone's job. One of the pet peeves of every customer is that irritating and overused retort "It's not my job."
6. Be reliable, keep your promises - and keep your word. Don't promise what you can't deliver, and deliver more than you promised. In other words: Underpromise and Overdeliver.
7. Apologize when you make a mistake and explain how you'll make it right. Be direct and say, "I'm sorry, we made a mistake and we'll correct it."
8. Don't hesitate to say "I don't know," but always follow it with the words "but I'll find out." One of the big keys to success in the years to come will be the ability of your employees to share their knowledge and experience with customers. In a study by Yankelovich Partners, 55 percent of the people surveyed said they like a great deal of information before they purchase an item.
9. Learn your customer's names and use them. When a customer pays by check or credit card, even megastores take note and call the customer by name when they say thanks. It works. Everyone likes to hear the sound of his or her name.
10. Say thanks to your employees. A feeling of being appreciated is a powerful motivator for employees. Don't ever miss an opportunity to praise.
11. Thank your customers. Your parting comment to each customer should be "thank you, we appreciate your business."
12. Be courteous, friendly and welcoming. Customers dislike being ignored and made to feel unimportant. Make each person feel as if he or she is the most important person on the premises.
13. Be efficient and value your customer's time. No one has the time or the patience to wait and check out or exchange merchandise. A sure sign that you value your customers is to show them that you value their time.
14. Give your employees the authority to solve problems, and teach them how to do it. Your customer service training must go beyond teaching employees to understand, you must teach them to react. In a well managed business, employees take responsibility to help the customer. Customers are looking for two things - solutions to problems and good feelings. Don't be a cause of their problems, and make them have good feelings about doing business with you.
15. Be accessible. Is it easy for people to enter your business? Do you have plenty of parking? Do you have trained personnel to work with customers and answer phone calls?

The Ten Commandments of Customer Service, by Carl Sewell & Paul Brown

1. Bring 'em back alive. Ask what customers want, and give it to them again and again.
 2. Systems, not smiles. Saying please and thank you doesn't insure you'll do the job right the first time, every time. Only systems guarantee you that.
 3. Overdeliver. Customers expect you to keep your word... Exceed it!
 4. When the customer asks, the answer is always yes. Period.
 5. Fire your inspectors and consumer relations department. Every employee who deals with clients must have the authority to handle complaints.
 6. No complaints? Something's wrong. Encourage your customers to tell you what you're doing wrong.
 7. Measure everything. Baseball teams do it. You should too.
 8. Salaries are unfair. Pay people like partners.
 9. Your mother was right. Show people respect. Be polite. It works.
 10. Learn how the best really do it and make their systems your own. Then improve them.
- Warning: These ten rules aren't worth a darn...unless you make a profit. You have to make money to stay in business and provide good service.

Payroll Function Assistance

Most of us who have been in business for many years have recollections of adding-up employee hours for the week and laboriously studying the various tax tables to calculate the appropriate deductions. Then, after writing the payroll checks, you still had to ensure that the withheld-funds were deposited or mailed-off in a timely fashion to the various governmental agencies.

Since that time, two very viable options have become available which save time and improve accuracy. The first is a payroll software program which runs on your computer in association with your general ledger, accounts receivable and accounts payable. Once historical data for the employee is in the system, you can simply enter the hours worked, allocate the different duties, if applicable, and the computer does the rest. A check is printed-out with the appropriate deductions. At year end, W-2's are printed. Each year your software supplier sends you an update as tax rules change.

The second approach involves the use of an outside payroll provider such as ADP which has offices throughout North

America. This is the third year that I have used them and in general I am very pleased. Again, the process starts with setting-up the employees record, then the routine is as follows: Hours worked up to Saturday night are reported via an "800" number at a scheduled time each Monday. (This can also be accomplished via fax or modem.) On Tuesday morning, we pickup a printout at our bank. We have until the end of the day to review this printout and report any changes or adjustments.

On Thursday we can pickup pre-signed checks, ready for distribution, or they can be delivered by courier. Alternatively, the pay can be deposited into each employees bank account (approx. 4 am, the same day.) Employees quickly learn to appreciate direct-deposit, since they may be working late on "payday." The provider also makes most of our remittances to the various agencies at the appropriate time. They provide quarterly statements as well as W-2's and year-end summaries.

There are a number of other pluses, but space precludes me from discussing them here. The cost of the service is \$ 2 - \$ 3 per employee per pay period. We pay bi-weekly and consider this a good value.

TPI Business Briefs

Money Savers...

Are you promoting your business on your fax cover sheets yet? For example, at TPI, fax cover sheets include the dates and site of upcoming meetings. These sheets usually have excess "white space" that is otherwise wasted.

Redesigning cover sheets to include promotional information is a no-cost form of direct marketing - you simply get more for the cost of your fax. Standard cover sheet items can include: hours of operation; order placement instructions; services / varieties available; etc. Update your cover sheets regularly to include special offers.

Only photos or complicated graphics will cause the fax to take longer than usual, and add to your phone cost.

New PC's...What You'll Pay

For a typical desktop system with a 166MHz Pentium processor; 16MB RAM; 1.6GB hard drive; 28.8K bps modem; 8X CD-ROM drive; 15 inch monitor...expect a price tag of no more than \$1,800. Variations:

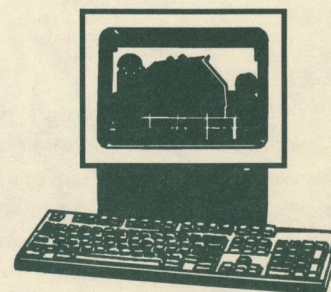
* 166 MHz Pentium; 16 MB RAM; 2 GB hard drive; 28.8K bps modem; 8X CD-ROM drive; 15 inch monitor: \$2,000.

* 200 MHz Pentium Pro; 32MB RAM; 2GB hard drive; 28.8K bps modem; 12X CD-ROM drive; 17 inch monitor: \$3,000.

Some new systems come with software packages pre-installed. You may however require assistance in loading those programs you already use into your new systems.

PC's have become a commodity over the past few years. It really doesn't matter if you purchase a new system from Compaq, Dell, AST or any other major PC manufacturer. The key to smart PC buying now is to shop by features and price. Here's some features to look for in a new office PC:

Processor. While Intel's Pentium processor continues to be the market leader, the next generation Pentium Pro is particularly attractive for graphics-intensive applications. *Best:* Look for a PC based on a 166MHz Pentium or a multimedia enhanced Pentium MMX for general business tasks.



Memory. It is impossible to have too much memory. Without adequate memory, a computer will run more slowly and inefficiently. At least 16MB of RAM should come inside any new PC. Look for 32MB if you need to run many graphics-oriented programs.

Hard Drive. Look for a 1.6 GB drive for general business use. Consider a 2.1GB or larger drive if you store many files with graphics.

Modem. Paying a little extra now for a faster modem will save plenty of wasted on-line time later. Standard 28.8K bps modems are adequate for most users. 56K bps modems are incrementally faster, but not yet supported by many Internet access providers.

CD. Buy a PC with 8X CD drive. Look for a system with 12X drive for video-intensive CD-ROM use.

TPI Action

TPI's Web Site Is Now Under Construction, and should be completed just before the Summer Convention in July. VersaCom, Inc., developers and managers of the very successful "GrowZone.Com" horticultural oriented web page is creating the TPI site and will later offer their services (on a discounted basis) to TPI members. Initial plans call for a two-tiered TPI site that will offer members up-to-date information about the organization, its services and conventions in one section, plus a "Turf Resource Center" site for consumer use. An important part of the TPI site will be a complete listing of current members and their own web sites, with the potential of "hot linking" from the TPI listing directly to the member's web site. An announcement of the site's address will be made once it is up and running.

"Zeroing-Out" NTEP Funding from President Clinton's federal budget has again caused TPI to offer formal testimony to the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee. Similar to last year, when the President first provided no funds to support the industry-important National Turfgrass Evaluation Program, TPI joined with other groups and individuals to successfully restore \$55,800 in support. This year, in addition to seeking restoration of the basic funds, TPI strongly supported establishment of a full-time turfgrass scientist position within NTEP. TPI members may be called upon to contact their own federal officials to support this effort.

Labor Issues "Heat-Up" as the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) increase enforcement activities. One TPI member's farm was "audited" by the INS and told that 19 of its 23 employees were illegal aliens, despite the fact that they had presented acceptable documentation and properly completed I-9 forms. The farm owner was told to "fire" the 19 people, just as his production needs were increasing. Because his paperwork was in order, no fines were levied against the operation, but he lost 19 good employees.

TPI provides its members a number of resources that can help avoid serious problems with these agencies. These resources include not only this bi-monthly newsletter and "Turf News" magazine, but also monthly copies of the "Gempler's Alert," which are sent to all U.S. TPI Class A members as a no-cost benefit of belonging to the organization. **Please contact TPI if you are "audited" or "raided" by either INS or DOL.**

New Department:

Jest For The Fun Of It

Classified Ad Classics*

- > Dinner special: Turkey \$2.35; Chicken or Beef \$2.25; Children \$2.00.
- > Tired of cleaning yourself? Let me do it for you.
- > For sale: Diamonds \$20.00; microscopes \$15.00.
- > Used Cars: Why go elsewhere and be cheated? Come here first.
- > Illiterate? Write today for free help.
- > Mother's helper: peasant working conditions.
- > Lost: small apricot poodle. Reward. Neutered. Like one of the family.
- > Girl wanted to assist magician in cutting-off-head illusion. Blue Cross and salary.

Super Bloopers

We aged a little when we saw this ad: "Our agency has provided home health care to people in need for 125 years."

We'd say they treated only extremely patient patients.

Notable Quotables

"Nothing is less productive than to make more efficient what should not be done at all."

Peter Drucker

* reprinted from GTA Today

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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