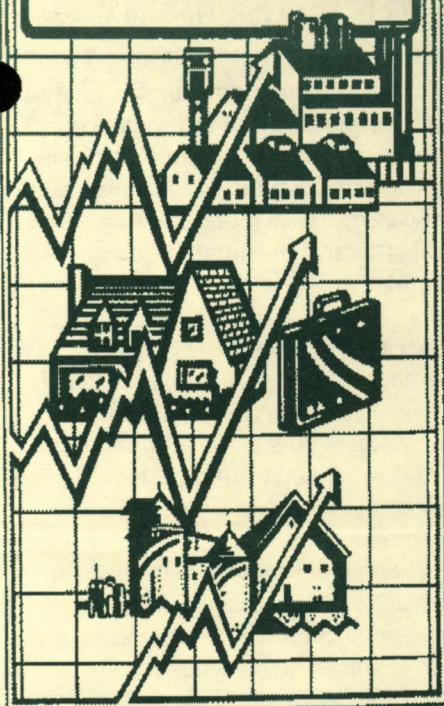


Feb / Mar 1998



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Recruitment Program...plus more.*

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

Five Easy Ideas

To Make Your '98 Absolutely Great!

A new year is a great time to consider trying some new approaches. This is especially true if there's a good chance these new methods will increase your profitability. The following are a few suggestions to consider:

1. Begin employee recruitment and training earlier than normal. The dollars spent on having employees start earlier in the season will be recovered quickly because you'll have a greater choice in a tight labor market. You can use the "slow" times early in the season to train everyone for maximum productivity when the season really hits.

2. Market early and often to old and potential customers. While it may seem that you have told everyone what you have for sale, consider all of the new people in your marketplace who may not know your company even exists. TPI has a variety of low-cost marketing brochures that can be personalized with your company's contact information to give you a high quality look, at reasonable prices.

3. Cold-call leading landscape architects and contractors on cold and wet days. Although its common practice to order turfgrass sod just days or even hours before it's needed on a site, the decision to seed, sod or use ground

covers are made months ahead...by architects and contractors. Personal, face-to-face meetings with them at times when they are available can dramatically increase the quantity of turfgrass sod used and put your company at the top of the list when the order is placed.

4. Before you cut season-opening prices to generate cash-flow sales, consider a bank loan. The interest paid on a short-term loan will be insignificant compared to the long-term consequences of cutting prices early and then trying to move them up once your cash flow needs are met.

5. Prepare your customers for rising prices. Supply and demand establish prices, not how efficient or inefficient you operate your farm. If you sense a tight supply situation happening at any time during the year, let your customers know in advance that demand may out-strip supply and that costs will be going up, or offer a guaranteed price for guaranteed purchases, backed-up with deposits.

Remember the adage, "If we always do what we always did, we'll always get what we always got." To make your 1998 great, why not try to do things a bit differently.

TPI's PR Program

Positive Articles Hit 13.8 Million

More than 13.8 million readers and viewers have been exposed to TPI's turf-positive messages during the first six months of the fiscal year, according to the latest reports. Specifically, TPI's "Turf Resource Center," has been responsible for 119 articles in 107 consumer and professional publications.

For the same period last year, there had been 73 articles in 58 publications, with combined circulations of 11.3 million.

Member Survey Forms Deadline Approaching

TPI members who have not completed the 1997 Member Profile and Needs Assessment Survey have only a few days left to do so.

Because the extensive survey is only conducted every four or five years, it is important that all members complete the survey so their firm's profile and needs from TPI will be known.

Call 800/405-8873 or fax 847/705-9898 to obtain a survey form.

Taking Care of Business: Getting Your Name in the News

In-House Public Relations... You Can Do It, With this How-to Guide

Every time that you open the local newspaper and see a favorable story on an area business, you might find yourself wishing that you could figure out a way to get a story about your own company in the news. The fact is, that with a little effort, it may be possible to have that wish.

If your company has not been in the news lately, it is probably not because you are too small or because you do not have a public relations person on your staff. It's likely due to the fact that you haven't made a sufficient effort to introduce your firm to the news media.

On a daily basis, newspapers, radio and television are featuring stories about growing companies. And if your firm is not one of them, you could be missing out on valuable opportunities to promote your business. So how can your company break into the news? By getting the right story to the right media and by learning how to handle reporters and editors with skill.

Reporters and editors are constantly in need of interesting story ideas. This is especially true today, as many newsrooms are struggling with reduced staff, making them increasingly dependent on outside sources for their story ideas.

To propose a story idea to the news media, your company will want to write a news release to send out. Good press releases grab a reporter's attention. Bad press releases get lost in the clutter, or worse, thrown out. To prevent the latter, here are a few tips on writing an effective release:

*** State the most important message or idea up front.** Editors and reporters do not have time to search for a buried message. Put the most important thing you have to say in the first three or four sentences of your press release. This is called your lead.

*** Organize your message.** It is not enough just to catch the editor's eye... you've got to hold it too. Follow your "lead" with a few detailed paragraphs that build on your main idea and conclude with a summation that ties everything together. Always type your press release and use double spacing.

*** Be accurate.** Make certain that all facts and figures, as well as grammar and spelling, are correct. Even small errors will detract from your message.

*** Include the name and phone number of a contact person.** Make it easy for the reporter or editor to get more information. Be sure to also include your company name and address as well as the date the release was sent.

Before you propose a story to the media, however, you should carefully assess its news value. For the most part, editors look for timely stories that involve or affect their audiences. The newer the story and the more unusual or unique the circumstances, the better. To pinpoint a newsworthy story in your company, ask yourself these questions:

*** What are you doing that no other business is doing? Do you have a service or management approach that is interesting and unique?**

*** Is there anything new in your product line?** Introductions of new products, (i.e. cut size, delivery options, turfgrass varieties, installation assistance/advice) particularly unusual or unique ones, are often attractive to editors for news coverage.

*** What are your employees doing?** Consider unusual skills or backgrounds of any of your employees. Be sure to send releases on significant promotions, awards or special training achieved by your staff.

*** What has your firm recently accomplished?** Have you acquired any new noteworthy contracts, taken part in any joint ventures, made donations to charitable projects, or significantly expanded your operation or your market-area?

*** Has your company achieved any significant milestones?** Are you about to celebrate a business anniversary? Have you reached a sales (rolls, pallets, etc.) milestone? Have you set a new sales record for a given period of time?

Just as in any business transaction, there is no such thing as too much preparation or knowledge. The more you know about what the media wants and needs from you, the more successful you will be in getting your company covered favorably in the news.

TPI will send you samples of several releases upon request. These releases will clarify page formatting and give you examples of press release content and structure. Call Tom at 800/405-8873 or 847/705-9898 to request the releases.

More on News Releases in your next issue of "Business Management" - watch for "Press Release No-No's"

101 Secrets to Direct Success. Considering a direct mailing? Learn simple hints for creating winning brochures... reply envelopes...letters...as well as shrewd pricing.

*From: Lakewood Publications,
50 S. 9th St., Minneapolis, MN 55402.
800/707-7776. Free.*

D & B Report. See what others are learning about your company. Get the D & B report on your firm's finances... legal actions...management profiles and major changes affecting the business.

*From: Dun & Bradstreet,
3 Sylvan Way, Parsippany, NJ 07054.
800/333-0505. Free.*

Human Resource Products Catalog: Personnel forms, compliance products and software to track attendance, create job descriptions and keep COBRA records.

*From: G. Neil Companies,
720 International Pkwy., Box 450939,
Sunrise, FL 33345.
800/999-9111, request #K1801. Free.*

Marketing Tip

Mike Ward, Eastgate Sod
Loveland, Ohio

In reviewing how our operation deals with buying goods and services, I have come up with a few simple marketing tips. Mainly, I discovered that most of the long term successes revolved around the basic day to day things we should all be doing. It's easy to get caught up in the more complicated programs and forget that the simple things mean a lot.

All of the following thoughts are pretty well known, but sometimes we just need a little reminder.

- * People buy from vendors they like. Get to know your customers and encourage your employees to do the same. Always thank your customers for their business!

- * People buy from vendors who make it easy to buy from them. Does a real, live person answer the phone, or does a machine pick up the call?

If you answer the phone, can the person answering the phone give pricing information and/or arrange pick-ups and deliveries? Is your farm easy to find, or do you have convenient pick-up locations? Are you open when the customer needs you to be?

- * People buy from vendors they trust. A trust must be established between the customer and the vendor, whether it's an issue of quantity, quality or price. The customer wants to be comfortable.

- * People buy from vendors who offer superior service. "The customer is always right." With stores like Nordstrom's, who will even take a return from another store, customer service is critical. Do you work hard to accommodate that special customer request? When we promise a delivery, do we have the sod there on time? Above all, don't overlook the value of doing the basics right!

Management Ideas: Short Lessons in Leadership

Some of the best companies today have turned themselves upside down. They've found that the old top-down pyramid style management chart doesn't work. So they've flipped the pyramid over, giving employees more say in what goes on. And it works, as evidenced in improved sales and increased earnings.

Interested in inverting the pyramid in your operation? Here are some tips:

Challenge employees to come up with their own better ways to do their jobs. You may be surprised at how valuable some of their suggestions are.

Seek out ideas from everyone, not just those who have a direct involvement with the job. Sometimes, good ideas come from unlikely sources.

Spread authority around. If the largest part of the pyramid is to be at the top, the top people should have authority. By giving employees more control, you tap a valuable source of ideas and productivity; and that pays off for everyone.

Benjamin Franklin's method of persuading others to his point of view took patience and endurance. It assumed that people are won over slowly, often indirectly. If you don't win the bargain today, Franklin would say, go after it again tomorrow --- and the next day.

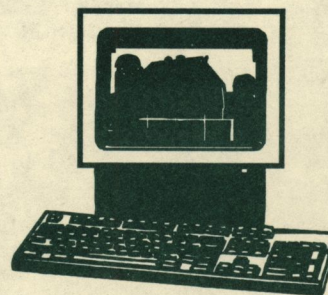
Here are a few of Ben Franklin's bargaining tips:

1. Be clear, in your own mind, about exactly what you're after.
2. Do your homework, so that you are fully prepared to discuss every aspect and respond to every question and comment.
3. Be persistent. Don't expect to "win" the first time. Your first job is just to start the other person thinking.
4. Make friends with the person with whom you are bargaining. Put your bargain in terms of his or her needs, advantages and benefits.
5. Keep your sense of humor.

Shrewder Computing

*** Millennium Update** - On the morning of January 1, 2000, untold numbers of PC users will find that many of their programs have travelled 100 years into the past.

Reason: Most PCs manufactured before 1997 include internal software that blocks the computer's operating system from recognizing dates after 1999. This oversight will make it impossible for programs that draw date information directly from the operating system to function properly. As you might imagine, this will wreak havoc on bookkeeping, scheduling and other types of software on a major scale. You should immediately contact your PCs' manufacturer to learn if your systems are affected and need to be updated.



Self-Defense - To determine if your PC is affected, reset its date and clock to December 31, 1999, 11:57 p.m. Then power down the system, wait a few minutes and restart it. If you're greeted by an incorrect year (typically 1980), plan on replacing the PC - or its "motherboard" - within the next two years.

And more worries? - for those PC's that are Year 2000 compliant, start now to determine if *software* being run is susceptible to the Millenium Bug. It's virtually impossible to tell if a software program is Year 2000 compliant just by looking at it. Contact each program's developer for definitive information. Act now and avoid a rude awakening January 1, 2000!

TPI Action

Over \$26,500 has been contributed to ITPF's "2-Cents Worth" campaign by 49 TPI member firms in just the first month of the annual turfgrass sod research funding effort. (See a complete listing of contributors in the next issue of "Turf News" magazine.) Minimal contribution rates are suggested at a rate equal to 2-cents for each pallet of turfgrass sod during the past year, making it possible and reasonable for every TPI member to support important research that specifically addresses producer's concerns. Last year, the campaign raised over \$40,000.

TPI is actively opposing FQPA implementation plans that could jeopardize sod farm chemicals by joining forces with the Minor Crop Farmer Alliance and the Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE). TPI and others in the two groups are strongly against the USEPA's current methods of assigning risk to chemical groups as it begins to implement regulations for the new Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA). TPI's fear is that the EPA's actions could result in many chemicals being barred from use or withdrawn from production by chemical companies. TPI's Legal and Taxation Committee will remain actively involved in this issue.

Will you recruit TPI's 1000th member and win \$1000?

"Going For The Grand," TPI's membership recruitment program, is proving to be very successful, with a record-breaking membership of 917. In December alone, 18 new members joined. TPI's Summer Convention this July 16-18 is the target date to reach this new membership high-point. For information on how to become involved in this industry and world-wide campaign, call TPI.

Future TPI Conventions & Conferences

July 16-18, 1998, Suburban Washington, D.C. Tysons Corner Sheraton

February 3-5, 1999, Tampa, FL, Hyatt Regency

July 21-23, 1999, East Lansing, MI, Holiday Inn

February 10-12, 2000, San Antonio, TX, Adams Mark

July 19-21, 2000, Spokane, WA, Doubletree

February, 2001, Santa Barbara, CA (tentative)

July 19-21, 2001, Toronto, ON, Westin

Midwinter, 2002, Orlando, FL (tentative)

Summer, 2002, (host farms needed)

Jest For The Fun Of It

Notable Quotables...

He lost his job due to illness and fatigue.
His boss was sick and tired of him!

Loony Laws

Did you know it was illegal to:

- * Set a fire under a mule in Ohio.
- * Fish in your pajamas in Chicago.
- * Peel oranges in California hotel rooms.
- * Shoot open a can of food in Indiana.

I just realized...all these
years I've been working
two shifts!



BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International
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