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BIG DATA LANDSCAPING



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Ready for **change**

Technology touches every facet of our lives. It has changed how we work, how we socialize, how we communicate. Technology has also changed the products we use day in and day out. Computers are faster, cars are safer, you get the idea.

At Nufarm we focus on chemistry technology. Innovation is at the core of every new solution we create and that is why we are especially honored to sponsor Technology Month 2014.

When it comes to plant protection products we understand that performance, cost, image and the environment are all very important considerations. Our dedicated chemistry labs are leaders in formulating solutions to fit these ever growing and changing needs. And, with an expanded portfolio, we now offer more chemistries than ever to help lawn and landscape business thrive. Two recent product additions include Last Call and Change Up herbicides.

Last Call herbicide delivers powerful control of more than 40 grassy and broadleaf weeds, but the beauty of Last Call is in the flexibility it offers. Developed with a proprietary mix of fenoxaprop, fluroxypyr and dicamba, Last Call kills crabgrass at most growth stages – including mid-tiller – and it can be applied to most managed cool-season and Zoysia turf areas.

Accounts sensitive to 2,4-D now have more options too. Change Up premium selective herbicide strikes out more than 200 weeds without 2,4-D and it does it quickly to help reduce callbacks. This dependable post-emerge product is labeled for many cool- and warm-season turfgrasses.

Each day is an opportunity to reach for something new. Whether your goal is performance, sustainability or anything in-between, our promise is to deliver more options in quality solutions to help you achieve the best possible results. Chemistry technology is at the forefront of making our products better and your days brighter.

RICK FLETCHER,

Nufarm Technical Services Manager
Turf & Ornamentals





Landscaping by the NUMB3R5

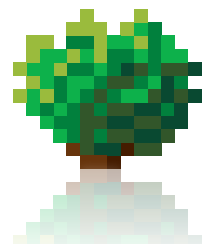
Taylor Milliken mines his company's data to grow the bottom line. **By Julie Collins**

Like so many green industry entrepreneurs, Taylor Milliken, president of Milosi in Hendersonville, Tenn., kept a lot of vital business information in his head. And on white boards. And legal pads. And in Microsoft Word and Excel documents. The informal system meant a lot of double-entry and, sometimes, a lot of scrambling to find necessary information.

One day, shortly after maintenance division manager Chris Williams came on board, he asked Milliken for a list of properties that required winterization. As Milliken pulled out a yellow legal pad and wrote down all of the property names by memory, they joked about the fact that they might need a new system.

And, Milliken then realized, they did.

SMART SHOPPING. The transition didn't happen overnight. In fact, the Milosi team began looking for software four years before they ever made a decision on which one to use. Milliken did some trial runs of different software but, at that point, nothing he tried fully met his expectations.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MILOSI INC.

+ ON THE WEB

To see screen shots of how Milliken uses the software, visit **www.lawnandlandscape.com** and search "Milosi screencaps."

"They might do really well in one area but fall short in the other. Nothing filled all of our needs. Plus, we weren't really ready for the software at that point," he says.

But in early 2012, as the full-service residential and commercial design-build and landscaping company continued to grow – and as software options improved – it was time to make a decision.

Milliken's team decided that Boss LM was the best fit for the company's needs and, after spending most of 2012 in discussions with the Boss sales team, Milliken signed a contract near the end of the year. One of many business management software options on the market, Boss LM consolidates all business systems in one place and displays key business data via performance dashboards. The cloud-based software is available on any web-enabled computer, smartphone or tablet.

A CAREFUL TRANSITION. Getting to the point where the company was ready to transition to the new software took time. Milosi began implementation in winter 2013 but didn't go live until the spring. The implementation process required customizing the software to match company services, properly entering information into the system and training employees on how to use the software.

Milliken admits there was definitely a learning curve – especially for a company that hadn't ever used business management software. That inexperience also made it tricky to set up the software on the front end. "When we were getting it set up, I had to predict how we were going to use it," Milliken recalls. "To be honest, I didn't know because I hadn't used it before. There are things I would change now in how we set it up, but it takes a tremendous amount of resources to go back and make changes afterward."

Megan Lowe, sales and marketing coordinator, says some of those changes revolved around how the company inputted some of its services. For example, the company offers mulching up to two times a year. But if someone only gets it once, the software doesn't know whether it was in the fall or spring.

"Now we wish we would have set up separately for fall and spring," Lowe says. "There are just some little tweaks we would make knowing what we know now. We



"We're looking at efficiency ratings because they tell you how close you are under or over your budget on a given day, week, or month. It's a transparent way of telling crews and staff how they're doing."

– Taylor Milliken



From left: Shannon Warner, June Hawkins, Chris Williams, Megan Lowe, Taylor Milliken and Tina Kizer.

would've changed some wording." She says inputting chemical application also posed a problem.

"We put all the chemicals in and estimating takes forever," she says. "If you have five chemicals, you have to price them all individually. I just went in yesterday and took all the chemicals out and it's just one lump item for chemical application.

"So we put all this information in there,

but now we need some of those things simplified, and some things we didn't do enough detail on and now we need more detail now. We did the best we could at the time knowing what we knew then."

DAILY USE. Crew leaders, field supervisors, sales staff and management all log into the software each day. The interface is customized for each user so, for instance, adminis-

trative staff will see the area of the software they access most frequently – purchase orders, invoicing and payroll.

Lowe spends a considerable amount of time on customer relationship management, so she uses the software to qualify leads, identify the value of the lead and assign it to a salesperson.

Operations managers primarily use the software for scheduling crew and technicians. Business development and sales people use the software to produce bids and estimates for customers. Meanwhile, account managers run reports for job costing, renewals and enhancements sales.

Milliken pays particular attention to the profitability and efficiency of his crews. "We're looking at efficiency ratings because they tell you how close you are under or over your budget on a given day, week or month," he says. Efficiency ratings are posted in the shop every Tuesday. "It's a transparent way

of telling crews and staff how they're doing. It's a weekly scorecard." In addition, Milliken regularly accesses a variety of reports – particularly to examine the year-to-date budget versus actual costs, as well as to look at gross margins and hourly rates – and also hops into the software to approve tickets for billing purposes.

The "issues area" is a key feature used by a number of team members. If a customer calls with a special request for a property, an employee can enter it as an "opportunity" in the system and assign it to a team member so it is addressed in a timely manner. The same holds true with a complaint – the concern gets assigned to the appropriate account manager, and the issue can be tracked until it is resolved and then saved for future reference.

BIG BENEFITS. One of the biggest benefits of the business management software, Milliken says, is how easy it is to access key information quickly "We used to spend a tremendous amount of time reconciling an account to find out if it was profitable," he says. "Now we have an abundance of stored data available to make decisions on."

The big change has been the ability to streamline operations and get everyone on the same page. Before the software, employees estimated in Excel, and each person estimated and packaged their bid a little bit differently. Now everybody uses the same proposal.

"Company-wide it has streamlined the information," Lowe says. "Once the contract is signed, before we went live with Boss ... if someone had a maintenance agreement ... I would go into Excel and manually create every ticket to be scheduled. Now all you do is hit accept and it's ready."

Milliken says the software has revealed where the company is making money and which crews are the most profitable. "In the past, I didn't really know whether I was making money or not until I got my profit and loss statement," he says.

"Now I'm able to look daily, weekly, monthly – whenever I feel like it and can see how we're doing." As a result, Milliken says he can forecast and plan more effectively. "If

MILSOI INC.

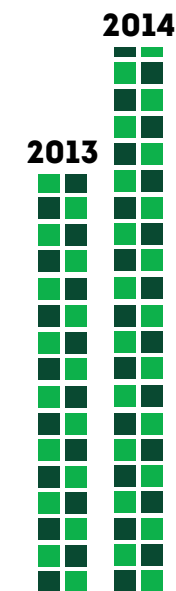
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NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

SERVICES: Full-service design-build and maintenance firm (including irrigation, installation, low-voltage lighting installation and maintenance, snow and ice services, full grounds maintenance and lawn care); design-build is 30 percent of the business.

COMMERCIAL-RESIDENTIAL

MIX: 50 percent residential and 50 percent commercial (revenue)



REVENUE: \$2.15 million in 2013; target for 2014 is \$2.8 million

we're hitting budgets and bidding projects based on the correct margins, we're able to make money. I think the transparency it has provided has increased profitability and allowed us to focus more on our areas of inefficiency," Milliken adds.

For instance, Milliken's team discovered that crews were consistently coming in under their estimated pruning hours. "That's an area we found we can actually tighten for upcoming bids and estimates," Milliken says.

At the same time, the company also found it was under-bidding hours for aeration and overseeding, so they now add time to those bids. This more accurate job costing has been a boon to the company. "It allows us to get more aggressive on certain services or tells us we need to put more time into other services if we are constantly going over or under," Milliken says.

Information culled from the reports also led the Milosi team to realize irrigation installation was one of the company's least-profitable services. "It caused us to take a real hard look at whether that's a service we want to continue to offer," Milliken says.

"We're still offering it, but most of our irrigation installation is now bid as part of a larger construction project where we're able to bundle it as a package and make a higher profit, rather than as a standalone service where we're bidding against other irrigation contractors."

Data mined from the software has also helped rein in material costs by documenting when crews are coming back to the shop with leftover mulch, for instance. "If the salesperson bid 50 cubic yards of mulch and they get out there and it only takes 35, we have a place to document it so we don't order 50 again the next time," Milliken says.

Milliken has found that the software makes planning for upcoming services easier in terms of estimating man-hours and purchasing needed materials in bulk, too. "We can go to the vendor and ask for a bulk price rather than buying as we go," Milliken says. "By buying pine straw in bulk, we have more control over our material and save money on overall material cost." **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Lincoln, Ill.

COST CONSIDERATIONS

A full-service business management software like Boss LM can cost a pretty penny, which, Taylor Milliken of Milosi says, is one of the biggest challenges of taking the plunge. Different software companies set up pricing in different ways – some charge by monthly subscription, others base fees on the number of users, some require a flat one-time fee and then charge extra for training costs and technical support.

For Boss LM, Milliken paid a one-time deployment cost and then pays a monthly fee based on a percentage of the previous month's gross sales. In other words, Milliken explains, "the larger your company gets, the more you pay." ■



Put your website to
WORK

Three steps to get qualified leads online.

By Chris Heiler

The days of viewing your company website simply as an online brochure are over. A five-to-10-page “online brochure” was once effective – it gave you credibility when your competitors didn’t have their own website. This is just no longer the case with a majority of your competitors now having websites.

Consumer habits have changed considerably in the past five to 10 years. Homeowners and property managers aren’t answering their doors or phones like they once did. They don’t want to be bothered now that they have firm control of the buying process.

According to Google’s April 2011 Zero Moment of Truth study, “Shoppers today use twice as many sources to arrive at a decision and use each source almost twice as heavily as in the past.”

Herein lies the opportunity for your company: You can’t reach your prospects directly as easily as you once could, but these same prospects are in search of more information than ever before. And you can be the company they go to for that valuable information.

Helpful content on your company’s website can draw in your prospects and engage them on your site long enough to motivate them to take some sort of action, whether that be filling out a contact form or picking up the phone. We call this action a “conversion,” and in this article we’ll dive into the basics of creating a “conversion path” on your website that will turn interested visitors into qualified leads that you can follow up with.

STEP 1: THE OFFER AND CALL-TO-ACTION

An offer, or call-to-action (CTA), invites visitors to perform an action on your website. The most common CTAs we see on green industry company sites are:

- Phone number prominently displayed
- A Contact Us page with a consultation and/or quote request form
- E-newsletter subscription form
- Links to company’s social media sites

If this is the extent of your offers and CTAs on your site, then your company is missing out on prospects. The phone number and

Contact Us page (along with consultation and quote requests) only appeal to the very small number of visitors who are ready to take action right now. We call these bottom-of-the-funnel (BOFU) offers.

Typically, 75-90 percent of your website visitors are not ready to pick up the phone or request a consultation – they are simply in research mode. This is especially true for companies with long sales cycles and big ticket items like landscape design/build firms.

E-newsletter subscription forms are worthless. If your company is active on a variety of social networks, it’s best to include links to these from your website. I consider these to be very top-of-the-funnel (TOFU) CTAs. It’s nice that a website visitor may choose to become a fan of your Facebook page but that’s not as valuable as them filling out a quote request form (BOFU offer).

Your opportunity to spark action on your website lies in the middle. Your site needs to generate qualified leads from the large pool of visitors that are currently in research and fact-finding mode. This is the pool that 99.5 percent of green industry companies don’t understand how to fish from.

So I’m going to teach you how to fish.

Think about a visitor who may be lurking

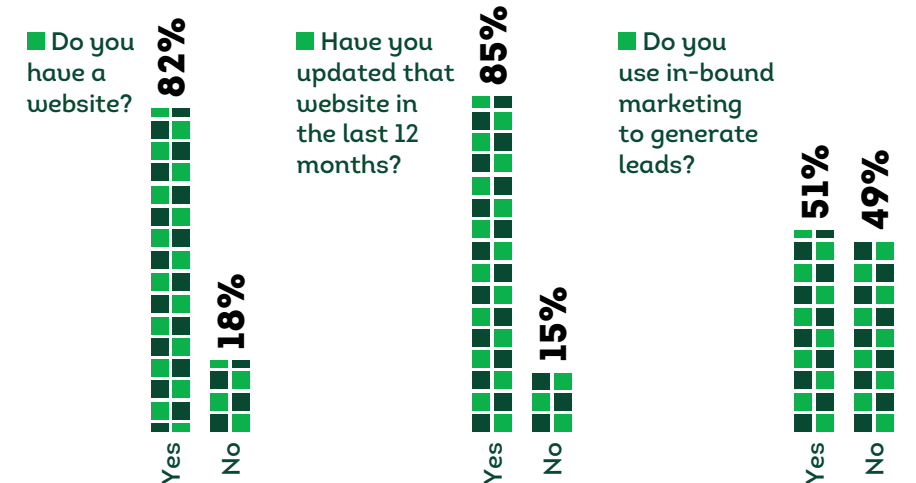
on your website right now. Let’s call this person Mrs. Jones. Mrs. Jones and her husband are building their new dream home. In fact, their architect just finalized the plans.

Mrs. Jones is on your site (and has visited your competitor’s sites) doing a little research. What you need to understand is that she is not yet ready to pick up the phone and call you. She’s not ready to email you or fill out a form to request a consultation. What are you going to do? The majority of companies do absolutely nothing, and Mrs. Jones bounces from your site, forgetting she ever visited in the first place.

Imagine if anonymous Mrs. Jones could access valuable content on your website that actually helped her with her research. It seems like such an obvious concept, yet most companies in our industry fail miserably at this.

This is where top-of-the-funnel and middle-of-the-funnel (MOFU) offers and CTAs come into play on your website. Valuable content like case studies, buying guides, hiring guides, tip sheets and infographics are used to educate your website visitors and position your company as the local expert. Oh by the way, if that’s not enough, these offers can generate all the leads you need to keep your sales pipeline flowing.

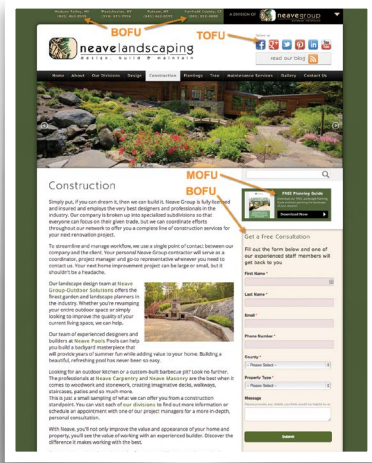
L&L surveyed more than 100 contractors on how they used technology. Below are the numbers related to marketing and inbound marketing.





STEP 2: VISITOR-TO-LEAD
CONVERSION WITH LANDING PAGES

Let's imagine that Mrs. Jones lands on NeaveLandscaping.com (a division of Neave Group Outdoor Solutions and a client of my company, Landscape Leadership) while doing her preliminary research. Here, she'll not only find the most common BOFU CTAs like local phone numbers and a consultation request form, she'll also find a comprehensive, middle-of-the-funnel 32-page Landscape Planning Guide (essentially an e-book). Most likely, that's exactly what she needs to do her preliminary research.



In this case the conversion path begins when Mrs. Jones' interest is piqued and she clicks on the graphic (the call-to-action button) found in the sidebar of Neave's site promoting the helpful guide. From here, the CTA leads to a unique landing page where Mrs. Jones can download the Landscape Planning Guide in exchange for the contact information Neave requires. Content placed behind a simple web form like this is often called gated content and is considered a best practice for visitor-to-lead conversion.

Upon filling out the web form, Mrs. Jones has the helpful Landscape Planning Guide to continue her research and Neave has turned an anonymous visitor into a real prospect their sales team can follow up with and nurture through the sales process in a very subtle way.



Let's take a step back and define what a landing page is. According to HubSpot, a true landing page is any page on your website on which one might land that has a form, and exists solely to capture a visitor's information through that form.

The majority of green industry websites have only a single true landing page – the Contact Us page. That's it. It's difficult to convert website visitors into new leads with only a single landing page, especially when it's a BOFU-type landing page like a contact page.

We find that a typical green industry company with a single landing page, like the Contact Us page, will convert visitors into leads at around .03 percent, if they're lucky. That's three new leads for every 1,000 visitors. It can take many companies three months to hit 1,000 visitors, so we're talking about one measly new lead each month from your website. I don't know about you, but that sounds pretty miserable to me.

The more landing pages you have on site, the more leads you generate. It's as simple as that. Your conversion rate also increases because you have more relevant content on site that appeals to more visitors. The goal

for our clients is to convert visitors into leads at around 1.5 percent to 3 percent.

Here's a tip to keep in mind when creating landing pages. The more information you ask for in your web form, the lower your conversion rate will be. Because of this, only ask for the information you absolutely need to qualify and follow up with the prospect.

STEP 3: THE FOLLOW UP

Upon filling out a web form on a landing page, the best practice is to send the visitor to a unique Thank You page where your new prospect can download the content you promised. This is the final stage of the conversion path.

Beyond making the content easily accessible on the Thank You page, you can also use this as an opportunity to direct your new prospect to other pages on your website or include another call-to-action or offer like a consultation or quote request.

Another best practice is to immediately send an automated follow up email to the prospect with a link pointing back to the Thank You page where they can download and access the content they requested whenever they choose.

Does this sound like a lot of work? That's because it is. Welcome to marketing in 2014, where the name of the game is educating your potential customers with helpful and useful content – not harassing them by banging on doors and hammering the phones. **L&L**

Chris Heiler is the founder and president of Landscape Leadership, a digital marketing agency for green industry companies. He's a former landscape designer and frequent contributor to Lawn & Landscape.





Inside tech sales

How Noon Turf Care leverages technology to run its business. **By Stacie Zinn Roberts**

You'll never see a salesperson from Noon Turf Care make an in-person sales call to a potential client, walk the lawn with a tape measure and provide a handwritten estimate.

Instead, a salesperson sits in front of a computer and calls a prospective customer to follow up on a lead. While on the phone, the Noon Turf Care staffer explains the services the company offers. Since his computer has access to the potential client's address, he can look up and instantly measure their lawn via Google Earth Pro satellite data, and deliver a quote right then. He closes the sale and starts service.

It's this kind of efficiency that has helped Noon Turf Care, based in Marlborough, Mass., grow 206 percent between 2009 and 2013, ranking the company among Inc. Magazine's 5,000 fastest growing companies for three years straight. The company's focus on technology also earned it a 2008 Lawn & Landscape Innovation Award.

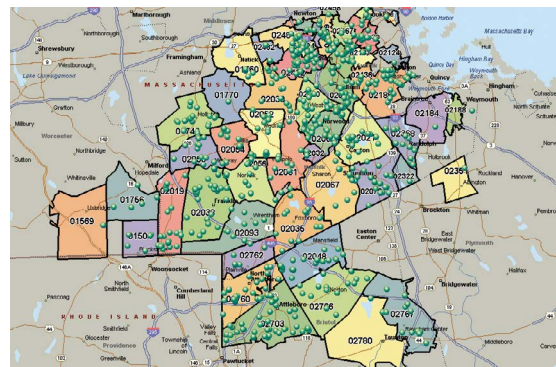
Along with the headquarters in Marlborough, the company, founded in 2001 by brothers Christopher and Matthew Noon, runs three service centers in Massachusetts and one in Connecticut. Altogether, some 50 employees contribute their efforts to manage 10,000 accounts and grow the company to a projected \$8 million in 2014 annual revenue.

MONEY WELL-SPENT. Christopher Noon, CEO, spearheads the design of the systems. He joined his brother, Matt, at the company after cutting his teeth in the advertising industry.

"A lot of companies are built over 20 years and are slow to adapt. We never had that problem," Noon says.

The Noon Turf Care office can be noted as much for what it doesn't have, as for what it does:

- There are no ringing phones in the office. All salespeople



Top: A look inside the Noon sales room.

Above: A map of all property locations serviced by Noon Turf Care in the southern part of Massachusetts.

use Bluetooth headsets tied directly into their computers. A customized version of Spitfire software prompts the salespeople to read from pre-written scripts. A customized version of Real Green software tracks all of the customer information, storing snippets of recorded phone calls, customer information, service notes and GPS data of the lawn measurements.

- The office is paperless. There are no file folders and no sticky notes. Instead, every note and client contact is entered into the customized computer system. All contracts are signed digitally through email using PDFs and a software called DocuSign that allows for the collection of digital signatures. All computer data is integrated to work seamlessly to allow any of the employees to access important data.
- There are no white boards to track service calls. All trucks are tracked in real time on large flat screens throughout

the office using Fleetmatics GPS tracking software.

- There are no paper forms in the service trucks. Every vehicle is outfitted with a Samsung tablet loaded with interconnected software that allows a technician to report to the office. If a challenge or problem is found at a job location, a salesperson is alerted immediately.

Of course, this level of technological innovation doesn't come cheap. Noon says the company has invested "hundreds of thousands of dollars" to create and refine its systems. The phones and tablets alone cost about \$60,000, according to company CFO Stephanie Lee. By alleviating the need to send out trucks and personnel to measure lawns and write estimates, Noon says the company has dramatically shortened the time it takes to close a sale and saved "millions of dollars in the past six years" on outside sales wages, vehicles, gas and insurance.

HUMAN TOUCH. Still, for all of the technological innovation involved in the sales process, Noon says he learned the hard way that the human element is still important.

Customer retention is the best way to create stability in an organization. To do this, Noon technicians attend winter classes to learn the basics of agronomics. They also attend a month-long training with Noon Turf Care managers in February that not only teaches them their routes and technology, but it also teaches them customer service techniques that help them to establish a personal rapport with clients.

There was no one incident that caused Noon to make this change. Noon crunches numbers and looks at trends. He realized the industry model was about the number of jobs a technician completed in a day. And that in the industry, most technicians are paid by how many jobs, they do in a day. It does not emphasize quality.

"We realized there was a disconnect (between technicians and clients)," Noon says. "We had to dial it back. Let's get this interaction with the client and the employee right and do a good job the first time."



Matthew Noon, left, and Chris Noon

Employees are encouraged to establish a relationship with the clients. Noon used the example that if the technician's name is Bob, and the customer knows Bob, knows he has two kids, Noon says, "it's easier to fire a company than to fire a person." Since the training program began, customer retention is up seven percent.

The value of the human element also became apparent in 2009 when Noon launched a fully automated website called SmartLawn.com. The website allows a person to input all of their information, phone number, address and, using a formula similar to what's used in the office, the website spits back an instant quote.

"We thought we'd sell more work than we can handle. It generated a lot of activity and leads, but did not close sales," Noon says. "I was naïve to think someone would go online

and sign up." Instead, the leads generated by the website were routed to inside salespeople who follow up with a phone call. "That upped our close rate to 85 percent from 35 percent over the internet," Noon says.

"Isn't that funny? I thought they'd go online, have everything at their fingertips, they fill it out, and boom, you have all this business. No."

The lesson Noon learned was that the human element — people talking to people, no matter how much technology aids in the process — is still critical.

"You can't alienate people with all of this information," Noon says. "If I know every blade of grass on your property but if I don't know how to talk to you or communicate that, then it's worth nothing." **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Mount Vernon, Wash.



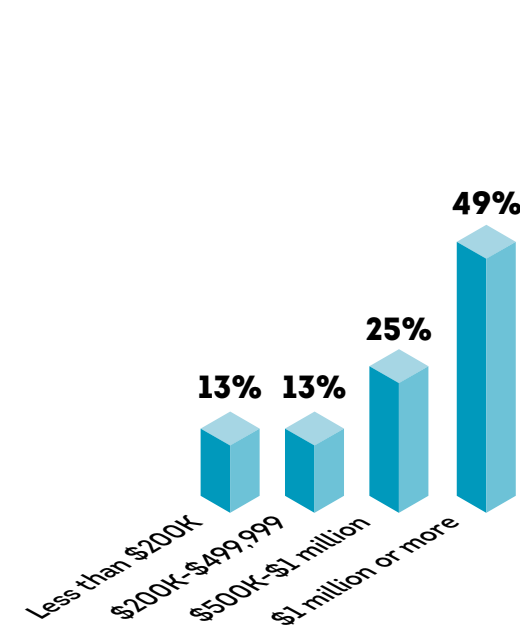
Technophiles

Our exclusive research looks at how landscapers are using technology in their firms.

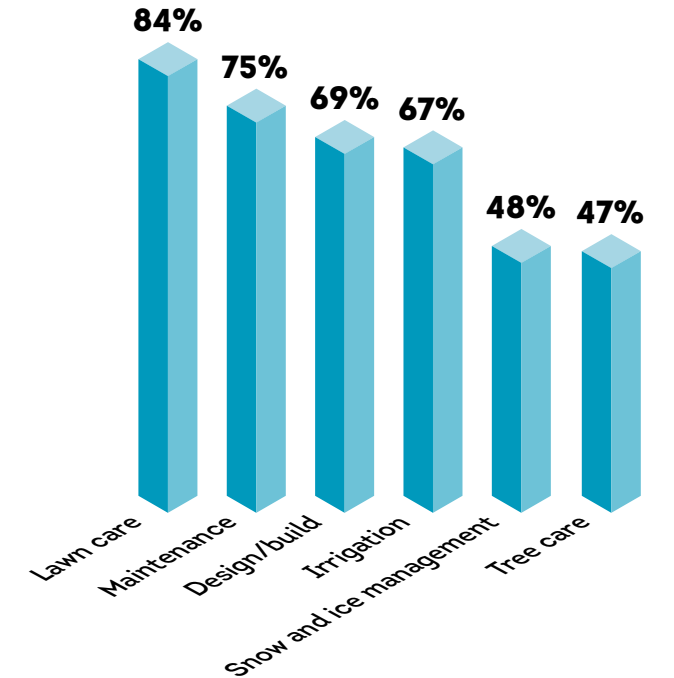
The stereotype of the Luddite landscaper doesn't hold up. They've come a long way from back-of-the-napkin designs and pen-and-paper timesheets. Based on research we conducted for this special report, sponsored by Nu-farm, we've learned that not only are landscapers fairly wired, they've widely adopted mobile and software solutions to help them run their businesses.

The top five software programs landscapers use, in order, are: Quickbooks, RealGreen Systems, Sage, Service Autopilot and CLIP. Most often, contractors are using these tech tools to run payroll, handle job costing and track vehicles. More than three quarters have in-house email systems to improve communication, and half use in-bound marketing in some capacity to boost their sales prospects. **L&L**

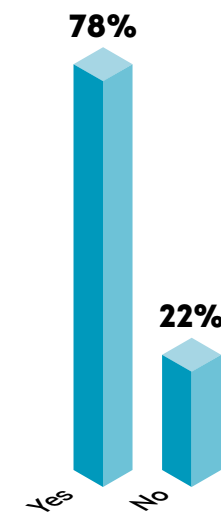
What is your annual revenue?



What services do you offer? Choose all that apply.



Do you have an in-house, company-wide email system?



What do you use software for in your business? Choose all that apply.

