

A shift in today's landscape

Let me start out by saying that this title is a play on words. Day in and day out, you and other industry professionals are making a great impact on residential and commercial landscapes. Your job is to make them more beautiful, essentially give the properties more value and curb appeal and give homeowners a visual result that brings them satisfaction.

This is definitely not an article about customers perspectives on changing their landscaping. It's about the ever-evolving economic landscape that we are all a part of. While it would seem that we are stuck in a cycle of "bad news comes in threes" perhaps that's not the case. I would encourage you to view and to process the "bad news" of today and the past two years through the lens of shifting priorities / problem solving.

After navigating the never-ending rule changes of the Covid pandemic, we have been thrust into a new realm of challenges; supply chain issues are threatening our industry on a daily basis, control products are increasingly harder to find, employees are in major short supply and if you can find them, wages are at an all-time high. Additionally, inflation challenges and fast-rising gas prices have taken so many by surprise. This rapid change has also made many realize how at risk their businesses actually are.

As with any business, the gold standard for preservation is either: (A) raise your prices to cover your cost or (B) cut operating costs to improve profit. While I believe everyone has gotten to the point of realizing that pricing increases are an absolute necessity, I'd like to talk on the second one for just a moment.

In a recent conference I hosted, I asked the room of about 60 business owners if they were concerned about raising prices on their customers. This led to a very enlightening discussion about the value of the services they



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provided and what their true value as a service provider was. Many business owners expressed concern with raising prices on their customers. The cost of doing business has increased so much in the last six months that without at least passing on these increases, there is likely little chance that a company would remain in business.

Most service companies seek to cut/control costs with improving operational efficiencies and cutting marketing costs. Manpower and hard costs are currently on the rise, so that is at present not an area where additional funds can be found. Since starting my own lawn care company in the early 2000s, I have given an equal level of priority to controlling my product and operational efficiency.

It was this mindset that had me looking at ways to lower my fertilizer cost without sacrificing results. It was back then I stumbled upon the benefits of using humic substances alongside fertilizer. Move forward a few more years and the understanding deepened to see that not only could there be a reduction in total nutrient load, but also a big chance to save money. My first experiences with the high cost of fertilizer came in 2008. At that time, urea was as much as it is now and adjusted for inflation, quite a bit more. It was then that I realized how much nitrogenous material I could cut and how much money I can save and maintain beautiful and healthy lawns.

Since then, a core focus of mine has been teaching other lawn care operators how they can have beautiful lawns on less cost per thousand and less nitrogen. It has been well documented how much humic acid can help in the efficiency of fertilizer and now with prices skyrocketing, this is an excellent way to save money.

I feel very confident in saying that nitrogen prices will come back down. On the flipside, I don't expect any operators or service providers to lower their prices based solely on that discount. Since every other cost of good has been on the rise, this is the one area where you can actually save money and perform a greater service to your customers.

While times may be presenting challenges on several fronts, and the economic landscape is shifting, you are not in this boat alone and the need for greater conservation has come into play for everyone. Simply implementing techniques into your lawn care program that will not only lower your cost per thousand square feet, it will also be doing a greater benefit to the soil and therefore the plant that occupies it. Perhaps it's time to shift our perspective to opportunities rather than frustration in this new economic landscape to transform our physical landscapes for the better.

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