

JUNE 2022  
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# Lawn & Landscape®

Leading business media for landscape contractors

2022

# TECH REPORT

LANDSCAPE BUSINESSES OF ALL SIZES  
ARE LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO RUN  
MORE EFFICIENT COMPANIES.



EXCLUSIVE  
RESEARCH

PG. 4

TECHNICALLY  
SPEAKING

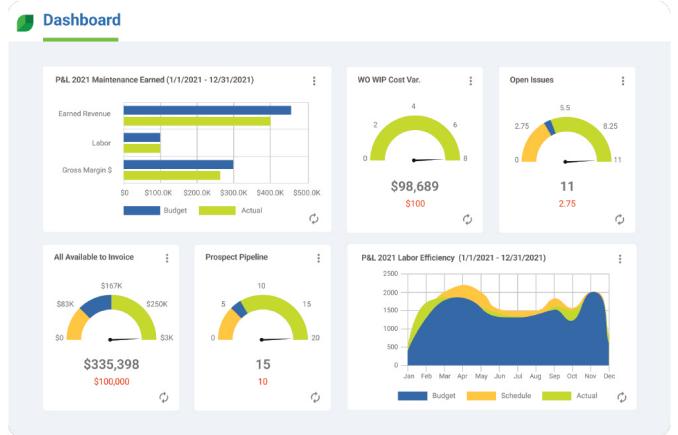
PG. 6



## The right tools to power growth

Since 2009 the story for Arizona-based DBL Landscaping has been one of skyrocketing revenue, from \$2.5 million annually to triple that today.

Founder Aric Budden credits two things for his company's monumental growth. First, they began specializing in commercial properties. Second, they found the right software to help them grow.



**“I’ve seen our gross margins increase 18% since using Aspire. That’s significant.”**

**Aric Budden**

President and Founder, DBL Landscaping





# Boldly innovating the lawn and landscape industry

**S**imple tools like mowers, trimmers, and shovels certainly ease the load when your field crews perform manual labor for clients, but are you using the right tools when it comes to modern technology and learning to grow your business?

As many business owners face labor shortages, price inflations, supply-chain issues and other uncertainties, it's never been more critical to understand what's driving growth (or hindering it) for your lawn and landscape business. To do that, you need data. For instance, does your work-ticket process flow smoothly? Are you offering a fair price for great value? Do you consistently invoice customers as soon as the job is done? Are your profit margins on target?

Technology helps automate data collection, offers real-time insights into your company's full financial picture, and clearly shows you how to streamline operations for best efficiency. At Aspire Software, we're always looking to boldly innovate our business management technology to arm lawn and landscape company owners with the best tools to operate optimally, make course corrections in real-time, and perform better.

I'll never forget a conversation I had with an Aspire client which shows the impact technology can have on a business. He said, "Bryan, I never thought I would be giving away a quarter of a million dollars to my employees through profit sharing because of how much profit we've made. Thank you so much, Aspire, for helping us do this."

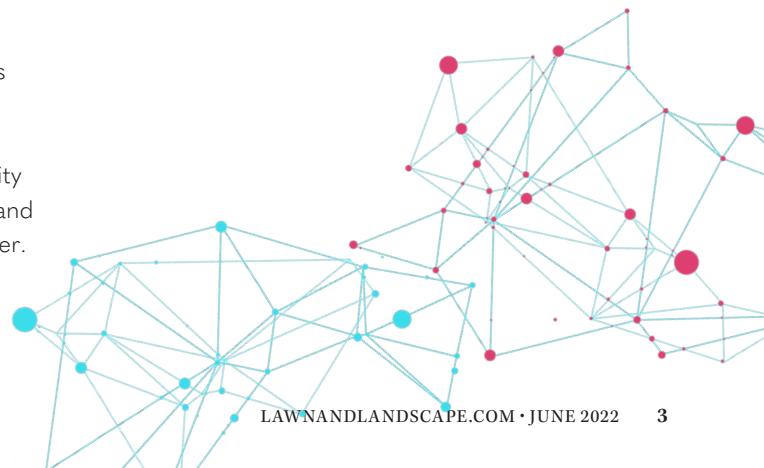
We know change can be hard. But if you work hard at something, you're going to reap the rewards from it. That's why Aspire Software works every day to improve its technology options, partner with the best consultants to gain knowledge, and offer various integration options for the best software solutions. It's about building a community where lawn and landscape professionals can grow, learn, and interact with one another. Now, that's a true game-changer.



**BRYAN MOURS**  
Vice President of  
Customer Experience,  
Aspire Software

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# TECH TRENDS

**THE GREEN INDUSTRY CONTINUES TO**, in certain areas, embrace technology to run more efficient companies. One area that showed growth was battery-powered equipment with 13% more landscapers saying they use it compared to last year's report. Another area of growth was use of online marketing, which grew from 44% to 53%. However, in some cases, our 2022 Technology report show a step back like with mobile technology use dropping from 79% to 74%.

What was your 2021 revenue?

25%

UNDER \$200,000

5%

\$200,000-\$299,999

9%

\$300,000-\$499,999

6%

\$500,000-\$699,999

7%

\$700,000 - \$999,999

12%

\$1 - \$1.9 MILLION

10%

\$2-\$3.9 MILLION

7%

\$4-\$6.9 MILLION

19%

\$7 MILLION OR MORE

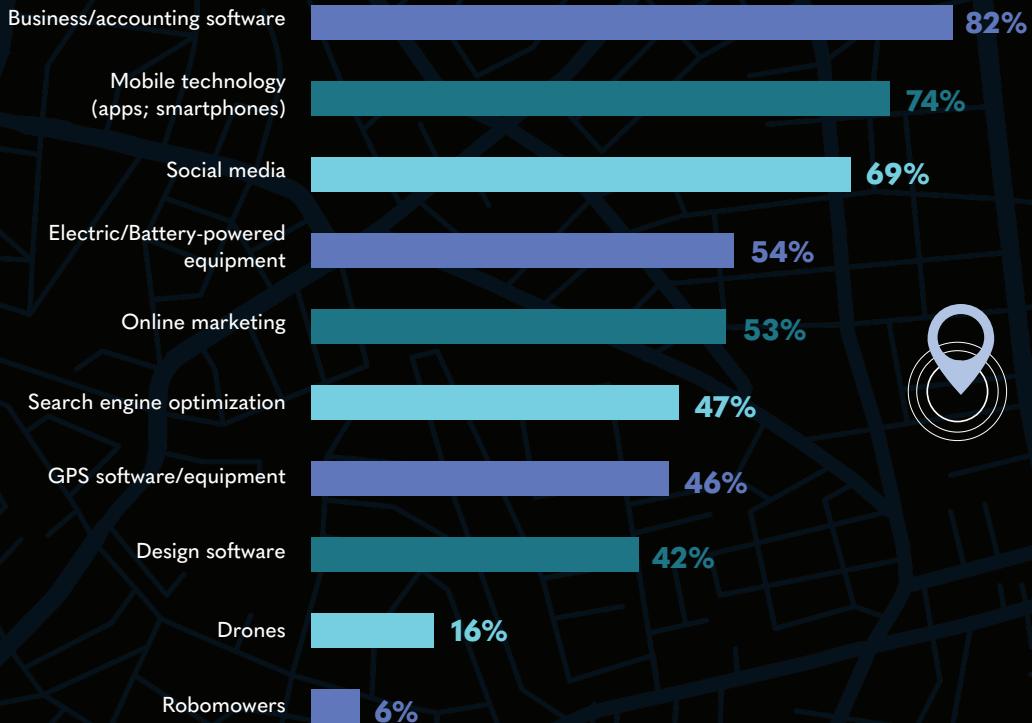


**ABOUT THIS SURVEY:**

Lawn & Landscape surveyed readers in April 2022. The results are based on approximately 175 respondents.



## Which of the following do you use at your company?



## Do you feel the technology or software you use as a company makes you more attractive to potential customers?



### RESPONDENT COMMENTS

- Target demographic is no longer 55; it's 35 and they are technological. You have to "meet them where they live."
- I believe clients these days are looking to work with companies that are quick at turning around estimates and have great ways to communicate.
- Having an online portal, digital proposals and invoices, and an interactive website creates a great customer experience.
- No, ours doesn't, but I think that this is a true statement. We are just on an older outdated software.
- By having technology manage our scheduling/estimating/invoicing, we come across as an advanced landscape company that cares about how we manage these key elements of our business.
- I feel like parts of our technology package are more attractive to potential customers, but I feel like our main operations software is antiquated and makes us look like all the rest of our competition and many times less attractive than our competitors to our potential customers.

## How would you describe your company's use of technology and software compared to your competition?

26%  
ADVANCED

41%  
IN LINE WITH MY  
COMPETITION

26%  
BEHIND BUT  
CATCHING UP

7%  
BEHIND AND STAYING  
THAT WAY



# TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

COMPANIES LIKE YOURS ARE ADOPTING SOFTWARE PLATFORMS AND TECH TOOLS TO EVOLVE AND GROW PROFITABLY.

by Kristen Hampshire

It can alleviate the labor burden, taking over rote office tasks like making follow-up phone calls. It can allow you to adjust for inflation, so project estimates don't reflect outdated costs. It can give you a real picture of how your business is doing financially and operationally. **We're talking about technology** — and this year's report provides insight into how landscape firms of all sizes are leveraging systems to run smarter.

## TECH TRANSFORMATION

*Southern Sun Landscaping is committed to leveraging its tech tools to grow a profitable business.*

**TECHNOLOGY DRIVES NEARLY** every aspect of operations at Southern Sun Landscaping in Cave Spring, Va., which serves a dozen communities across the state. Owner Andrew Grider started the company in 2017 during his second year at Virginia Tech University. "I grew up gardening my whole life," he says. "I love plants, I love beautifying the environment and I have a lot of fun doing it."

When the business took off, he decided to commit 100% to growing the firm. Today, the business serves residential, commercial and municipal clients, and the service mix includes everything from mowing and snow removal to plant installations, mulching and pressure washing.

Technology is integral from the time a customer

calls the Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) phone system to automated invoicing. Ultimately, the systems in place save time, money and labor — an especially precious commodity in the current market.

"Technology has transformed my business," Grider says. "There's a learning curve and a scare factor involved, but when you commit to a (system), it will change your life."

**KEEP IT SIMPLE.** Initially, Grider went with a customer relationship management (CRM) program that promises "no software experience required." It includes capabilities for estimating, creating quotes, scheduling jobs, invoicing and payroll. Then in 2020, Grider switched to a more complex software

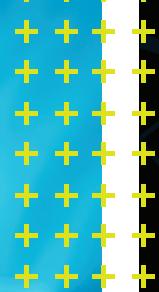
How much have investments in technology or software helped you recruit and retain employees?

12%  
A lot

34%  
Somewhat

35%  
Not really

19%  
Not at all



## TAKE-AWAY TIPS

### Ask for a demo.

Software companies' sales representatives can demonstrate how their programs work and walk you through the various functions. "Do your research and narrow it down to three, then let them go through the demo process," Grider advises. "That has been tremendously helpful for us."

### Go all in.

"Once you choose a system, fully commit," Grider says. That includes enlisting in team members to help with the integration. A consulting firm, family and operations managers helped Grider move data to the new system and complete back-end tasks before they launched it. "It's a group effort."

### Show and tell.

When training your team to use new technology platforms, give them hands-on lessons and oversee their progress as they grow more comfortable with systems. Technology can be second nature to some and foreign territory to others, though the use of smartphones has fast-forwarded tech adoption. "Once we feel employees are competent, we let them go off on their own and we keep an open line of communication," Grider says. "Every employee has my phone number so I can answer questions on the fly."

### SOUTHERN SUN LANDSCAPING

Andrew Grider, president  
**Location:** Cave Spring, Va.  
**Founded:** 2017 • **Employees:** 8-12  
**Services:** lawn maintenance, landscape installation, snow removal, tree and shrub maintenance, spring and fall cleanup, mulching, light grading, pressure washing, junk removal, window cleaning

[SouthernSunLandscaping.com](http://SouthernSunLandscaping.com)

designed to "automate everything." He committed to it for two years, and both programs were effective, though different.

But ultimately, there were functions in the more robust software that Grider wasn't using. "It was a little more complicated to train new employees and (the other program) is simpler," he says, comparing it to Google vs. AOL.

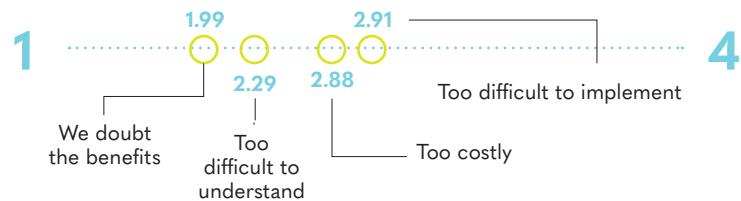
So, in January this year, Grider began moving data back to the previous system. "They are both great software programs," he says. "It's about finding the right software for you and your company."

Oftentimes, that means diving into a program with the understanding that as your company evolves, you might need to make a change. Also, your team's comfort level with technology and how they use it in the field factors into software decisions. For Grider, the fewer "clicks" to accomplish tasks, the better.

"Software needs to be a company-wide decision, not just my choice," he says, noting that his operations manager was deeply involved in the selection and integration of technology platforms. "While a big part for us was cost, also how simple it is to train employees and how easy it is to get it up and running, the functionality is what adds value for our company."

Both programs integrate with QuickBooks, which is how Southern Sun Landscaping runs reports for its accountant. But otherwise, the company had to shift its data back to the program it was using before — and start from scratch. "There is a lot of time involved with setting up the behind-the-scenes before you can launch the CRM," Grider acknowledges.

Rank in order the factors that stop you from investing in new software with 1 being the major factor.



“Do as much of that as you can before you switch over.”

Essentially, Grider, along with his operations manager and accountant, began inputting information into the software while continuing to use the existing program. Training also took place before the launch.

“Typically, I show the team members, then I have them show me,” Grider explains of the process. “Then, when they feel comfortable showing me how to do a task like write an estimate, I let them go off on their own and ‘stage it,’ so to speak. Then they will run it by me or an operations manager before they can send it to the customer so we can double-check it.”

After a few rounds of this, team members — crew leaders, in particular — are ready to use the CRM on their smartphones in the field. “They have the app so they can check off the jobs and task lists related to each one,” Grider says.

**TOTALLY TECH-ENABLED.** Beyond the company’s CRM software, technology rules the road with vehicle tracking software and GPS. “It helps us know where our crews are at all times and keeps down the theft of vehicles and trailers,” Grider says.

Front-facing dash cameras are “critical,” Grider says. “If there is an incident and it’s a he-said-she-said situation, we have the proof right there on camera.” Grider has also caught employees driving vehicles to locations that are not on the day’s schedule.

The software details fuel consumption and maintenance expenses — plus, the program is connected to the company’s WEX fleet cards.

Overall, customers appreciate how technology can give them a “feeling of control over their services,” Grider says. “They like having a client portal where they can see past invoices, current due invoices, past estimates and past work done. They can pay online, so that reduces the time we spend calling customers.”

Even the phone systems are set up to record and transmit data. “Our VOIP system helps rewind phone calls so we can get information input into our CRM software before an estimate is ever sent out,” Grider says. “From there, we do the scheduling of crews so we can make sure we have the most efficient routes to reduce drive time, which saves on labor and fuel,” he says.

In fact, the labor savings from various tech tools has been tremendously helpful. “Technology has reduced a lot of positions — it’s forcing us to think outside the box,” Grider says. “I think this is a great time to experiment with new and different technology.” ●

## A PLATFORM FOR PRODUCTIVITY

*By integrating disparate systems into a single dashboard, GreenGrove Outdoors has a 360-degree, real-time understanding of time, labor and expenses.*

**AFTER USING CRM SOFTWARE FOR EIGHT YEARS,** GreenGrove Outdoors had moved well beyond training wheels and was accustomed to managing the business from a tech platform. The company was ready to delve into a platform that would amplify job costing and pull together all of the company’s operational pieces.

“We wanted something to consolidate all of the different aspects of the business — we were using one system for asset tracking, QuickBooks for invoicing, and we weren’t doing a ton of job costing,” says Brian Vint, operations manager.

“In the past, we didn’t have a lot of detailed information for quotes — what we spent on a job and what we ‘missed,’” he adds.

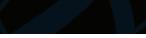
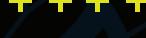
Founded in 1979, GreenGrove Outdoors in Tinton Falls, N.J., mainly focuses on commercial maintenance with some design/build projects and construction like drainage, decks and patio spaces. Commercial snow removal is also a sizeable chunk of the company’s revenue.

Last winter, when the software platform GreenGrove had been using for years increased in price, leadership decided to shop around. “We were looking for something that would get detailed and granular on everything from work tickets to time and materials tracking,” Vint says.

Vint along with Rob Denton, sales manager, and Vint’s parents who started the company, reviewed software options. They decided on a system, and the training provided has been a real game changer for integrating the platform. GreenGrove Outdoors went live in March, and here is how they prepared for launch.

**TECH SUPPORT.** In-depth training was a selling point for the GreenGrove team. The software company provided a go-live checklist that included roughly a month of onboarding. “We did test contracts and work orders, and it all happened virtually,” Vint says of the twice weekly webinars. “We had Q&A classes on Wednesdays — and we are still learning.”

GreenGrove has a one-year “break in period” with access to support. “When we reach out, someone gets back to us in 10 minutes or less



### TAKE-AWAY

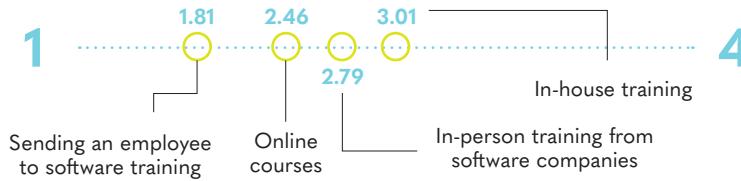
## TIPS

#### Support, please.

Integrating a multi-faceted software program requires preparation and training. Access to pre-launch learning

webinars, Q&A sessions and crewmember training videos eased the transition for GreenGrove. Managers can submit a support ticket and get answers quickly as they get used to running the business on the platform.

**Rank in order the most effective way of training yourself and your team on software with 1 being the major factor.**



with either an answer or confirmation that they are looking into the issue,” Denton says.

Crewmembers can learn how the system works by watching videos designed just for them. And with the app, employees can clock in by smartphone. Overall, the organized preparation for launch and ongoing training has eased the greatest hurdle when adopting a new system: figuring out how to use it.

“The learning process isn’t easy, and it’s something we will continue because the platform is so detail-oriented,” Denton says, adding that he had just submitted two support tickets. With a program that offers the level of tracking GreenGrove wanted, implementing the system requires an investment in time along with some patience — and the tech support was a must.

“That is the biggest thing, knowing the support is there,” Vint says.

**THAT’S THE TICKET.** While cost factored into why GreenGrove chose a different platform, scalability was also important — and the ability to add more users without driving up expenses. The previous system charged a fee per user, so if GreenGrove brought on another crew leader or salesperson who would need access to the app, there was a bigger price to pay.

The system GreenGrove migrated to this year is for “unlimited users.”

“And it’s scalable, so if we bring on new salespeople or crew leaders, all of the information is in one spot so they can access it and go,” Vint says, relating the ultimate goal of shifting to a different platform. “It has the ability to scale and to help us scale. And when new hires come on, they have the

support there, everything is one spot, and they are not jumping into different systems to figure out what goes where. Everything is in one portal.”

Now, software training is part of onboarding crew leaders. “On day one, we go through the properties, walk through the yard and shop, and then at the end of the day, we sit down and watch a few videos on the software program and how to use it, answering any questions about time keeping, starting and ending tickets, and other tasks,” Vint says.

The company still uses QuickBooks for tracking indirect costs and payroll. But the new platform manages tracking, job costing, estimates, labor hours and invoicing. “From there, QuickBooks picks it up on the payroll and indirect costs.”

Vint walks through how crew leaders can now seamlessly start and stop jobs, track time and stay on schedule. “When they arrive on the property, the crew leader starts the work ticket and they complete the tasks assigned for the job,” he says. “After they finish, they hit ‘stop’ on the ticket.”

All of this happens through the smartphone app.

“If it’s a ‘per service’ like weekly lawn mowing, the service visit will generate an invoice that will accrue for the month,” Vint says, adding that automated invoicing saves time and keeps accounts receivable on track.

“So far, the system has helped us see the weekly schedule and fill in the blanks with smaller jobs, along with bulking jobs together,” Vint says. Before, the company used a white board. “There were a lot of blank, open spaces.”

Running real-time profit and loss reports is a real eye opener.

**Inform clients.**

Once launching the new platform, GreenGrove sent an email to customers explaining the portal they can access to request service, pay bills and view past work. Since it’s a transition for everyone — the company and its clients — there’s no requirement to use the online feature. But as Vint says, “it’s a nice-to-have” for those who appreciate the convenience.

**Time the transition.**

GreenGrove set a new platform launch date of March so training and integration could be accomplished before the hectic summer months. “Luckily, we started the whole process in winter when we were not crazy busy and that was important for getting it up and running,” Vint says.

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

**87%**  
Payroll/  
accounting

**67%**  
Job costing/  
estimating

**61%**  
Field service/  
scheduling

**59%**  
CRM/sales  
management  
and tracking

**55%**  
Property mapping

**47%**  
Landscape design/  
drawing

**47%**  
GPS/fleet  
management

**40%**  
Material  
inventory

**13%**  
Water management

**GREENGROVE OUTDOORS**  
A Four Seasons Contracting Company

Audrey Vint, owner; Brian Vint, operations manager; Rob Venton, sales manager  
Location: Tinton Falls, N.J.  
Founded: 1979 • Employees: 15  
Services: landscape management, design/build, drainage solutions, snow and ice management, seasonal color, power washing, lot sweeping

[ggoutdoors.net](http://ggoutdoors.net)

## AUTOMATIC VALUE

*Automation features that free up time and reduce the labor burden are a real selling point for Ohio Green Works.*

**LABOR SAVINGS IS A MAJOR** benefit of the CRM system Ohio Green Works implemented, from automated follow-ups to assure clients receive estimates to online bill pay capabilities. “I can pick and choose which estimates I follow up on and focus on the bigger projects that fit into what we do best,” says Drew Parramore, president of the Waynesville, Ohio-based company. “And with the customer portal, it doesn’t tie up anyone in the office to get payment.”

While Ohio Green Works has 15 employees on payroll, “we don’t have enough,” Parramore says, echoing the sentiment of most businesses in the industry. So, any tools to alleviate labor pains are essential, and during the six years the company has used its current software system, new features and automations are helping it run profitably and efficiently in spite of the “help wanted” and rising cost of materials.

Parramore reflects back to the early days. “We were basically using QuickBooks and Excel spreadsheets,” he says. Today, the company is tech-driven, crew leaders are equipped with the CRM app with a dashboard detailing jobs, customer communications are streamlined, and Ohio Green Works can capture sales opportunities because of the data on record.

“We can take before and after pictures on the job and make notes, so if we look two months later and see that something was not addressed, we can say, ‘This needs attention’ and try to upsell the customer on whatever it may be,” Parramore says.

**Who on your staff has a company smart phone or tablet? Please choose all that apply.**

**94%**  
Owner

**69%**  
Management

**60%**  
Foremen

**46%**  
Sales team

**46%**  
Administrative staff

**42%**  
Account managers

**36%**  
Crew members

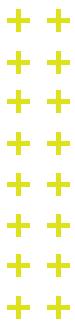
**OHIO GREEN WORKS**  
 Drew Parramore, president  
 Location: Waynesville, Ohio  
 Founded: 2009 • Employees: 15  
 Services: maintenance, lawn care, landscape installation, landscape lighting, drainage, snow removal, grading, fall and spring cleanup  
 Ohiogreenworks.com

Automation advances the way Ohio Green Works conducts business. Here’s how Parramore and his team put technology to work.

**ACCOUNTING FOR PRICE INCREASES.** With inflation and constant price hikes for materials and fuel, adjusting estimates to account for those increases is now easy. But first, the back end of the system had to be built out with data — costs for every material, fuel, labor and so on. “You have to go full boar with it,” Parramore says.

He advises dedicating a block of time, such as a week devoted to technology, in order dive deep into uploading data for job costing, tracking time, creating estimates and so on. “We are always improving and still entering information on the back side to help it improve the company’s operations and profitability,” he says.

Currently, the system is set up where job costs can be figured based on square feet or linear feet. “I can go into the system and pull a measurement and say, ‘This property measures at X square feet for mowing grass,’ and enter that directly into the estimate,” Parramore explains. “And if I have a job we have been bidding for many years, I can adjust the pricing for material and I don’t even have to go out and look at the job as long as the pricing is updated in the system. It saves a lot of time.”



**Story continued from page 9**

“We can see where we are per division,” Vint says. “Each day, we put receipts in, and we run reports to see what is being costed, what time is allocated to those job and labor rates.”

**BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER.**

The integration piece was a

priority. “The biggest challenge for us has been the change of having everything in one spot, and it’s much more precise when it comes to jobs, tickets and making sure employees are clocked in and out at the right time,” Denton says. “It’s a habit-based thing.”

As with any software, the

output is only as valuable as the input. So, the company dedicated time during the slower winter season to drilling into time and materials prices to feed into the job costing aspect of the system. This winter, “we got lucky,” Vint says of the lighter snow season.

They are already seeing a

payoff. “We are able to see more precisely if we are leaving money on the table while before it felt like a guessing game,” Denton says. “Now it’s down to the minute.”

The system has a fleet component for managing and maintaining vehicles and equipment with tracking. This also had to

With frequent price increases, this assures that all costs on a job are accounted for so the company can maintain expected profit levels. "We are constantly updating pricing," Parramore says, adding that there is some trial-and-error with inputting information into the system. "It takes time, and there are three of us who consistently work on the back side of the system."

Basically, an effective CRM platform must also be fluid in the sense that it's never a "done" implementation. "We continue to build the system," he says.

**SELECTING A SYSTEM.** Research and product trials helped Ohio Green Works select the best platform for the business. "A lot of systems will give you a month trial for free, so do those and implement it with a couple of customers to try it out," Parramore suggests.

Primarily a residential maintenance business, Ohio Green Works was looking for a system that would manage estimating, scheduling, billing and customer communications when it chose a platform six years ago.

"There is not a system that is perfect for every business," Parramore says, adding that companies should make a list of priorities and really zero in on how the system will function for day-to-day operations.

Once you decide on a system, stick with it. "I have thought about shopping around sometimes if the system is running slow, and there are days you'll get frustrated," Parramore says. "But step back. If 98% of the time, it works well..."

**ALL ABOUT AUTOMATION.** Initially, Ohio Green Works provided crew leaders with tablets for using the CRM app in the field. "But

we pretty much found out that they do not use their tablets and prefer their personal phones," Parramore says.

The extra technology just bogged them down. With the app, crew leaders can start the day by bringing up all listed jobs on the docket. "They see job notes, customer contact information — and they can see what they are doing for the day and the week," Parramore says.

This way, crew leaders can prepare their teams to anticipate what the day will bring, share notes in advance and plan a productive week. Parramore appreciates the photo-taking feature. Before and after shots show customers progress on a property — and adding notes reminds crews of tasks to be completed during upcoming visits.

Clients can access notes and pictures on a password protected portal. "This helps with streamlining phone calls that come into the office," Parramore says.

Meanwhile, Parramore can create and send an estimate within 15 minutes. "Every time an estimate is sent, 24 hours later, an automated email goes out to the customer that asks, 'Did you receive the estimate?' and they can reply yes or no," he says. "And if a client does not accept an estimate within a certain time frame, another automated email goes out that says, 'It's been a week since we bid your project. Do you have any questions?'"

This time-saving tool prevents Parramore from dialing for answers.

And at the end of the day, time and money are reasons to implement a CRM system and deploy tech tools. Parramore says, "If you are still on Excel sheets and you want to grow your business, you've got to get into a CRM system. I can't imagine doing what we do today without it." ●

be put into play and was part of the pre-launch checklist.

"We had been using a fleet service for years, so this was a bonus to have it under one roof," Vint says. "It's replacing what we previously used, and having the ability to go in, see when service visits were completed or fluids were checked

has helped us keep on top of that more."

The customer-facing aspect of GreenGrove's system should improve efficiency, too. The company sent out an email to its client base to explain the portal, how they can request services, pay invoices and view completed work.

Overall, Vint is looking forward to the way the technology will provide a 360-degree view of operations and financials. He says, "Seeing the bigger picture in real-time, tracking our labor expenses and what we can bill for and having a real idea of what we are spending will be valuable." ●



## TAKE-AWAY TIPS

**Study and stick to it.** There's really no one-size-fits-all system, Parramore says. Consider your company's scope, growth trajectory, customer base and comfort with technology. "Do your research, pick a system, stick with it, build it up and it will help you tremendously," he says. "If you're going to switch from the software you're using, think about what you don't like about it and be sure the new system will do that."

**Set a tech week.** If possible, identify a block of time such as a week when you can focus intently on tech integration. When you're constantly pulled away from the task, getting started can feel like mission impossible.

**Capture time savings.** Time is money, and automation can alleviate administrative chores like making follow-up phone calls or cut down on field tasks like measuring existing properties to create project estimates. "When the system we used came out with automations a couple years ago, we started focusing on that," Parramore says, adding that he receives those responses and doesn't have to rely on office staff time.

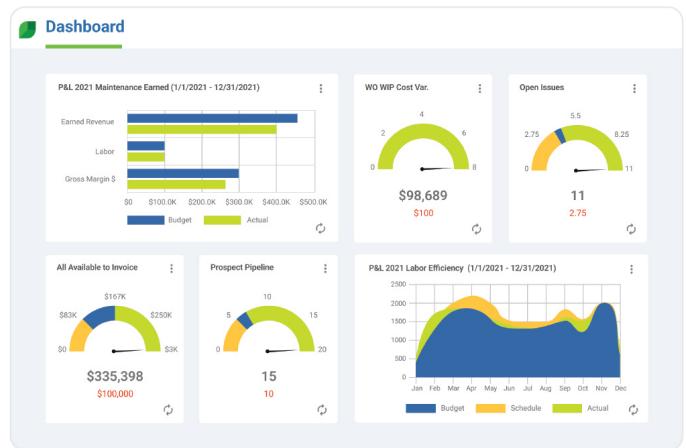


A ServiceTitan Company



# More than software, Aspire is a business partner.

Grow faster, increase profit margins, and improve processes with an end-to-end landscape business management platform.



## Aspire by the numbers

Trusted by more than

**70,000**  
users

Utilized in more than

**1,500**  
locations

Used to manage over

**\$4.5 B**  
in client revenues

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