

# Successful selling

## Mining your best customers through integrated services By Tom Crain

Google “integrated landscape management” and you’ll find LawnTailors consistently landing near the top of the page. Look for any advertisement or printed piece pushed out by LawnTailors and you’ll find “integrated landscape management” branded alongside its name.

Jarlath Connolly brought this carefully-orchestrated marketing strategy to LawnTailors when he rejoined his father’s landscape company seven years ago as president. He continues to focus sales efforts on upselling these services to the company’s loyal customer base.

“After spending a dozen years as vice president of sales and marketing for a start-up software company, and growing my horticultural chops at UMass’ Green School for Horticulture where all I heard was integrated solutions and IPM, it was a natural philosophy to bring this new branding strategy to my dad’s landscaping business,” he says.

Over the years, Connolly finds it holds up well. “It’s the right approach in terms of what’s right for the landscape,” he says. “Simple example: the appropriate timing of fertilization applications with mowing and irrigation. It’s right for the client. They want the one-stop-shop convenience and the reduced budget that results from having one vendor.”

### THE 80/20 RULE GETS MIXED REVIEWS.

This business strategy is nothing new. In fact, it goes back more than 100 years when Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto created a mathematical formula to describe the unequal distribution of wealth in his country, observing that 20 percent of the people owned 80 percent of the overall wealth.

Over the years, this viewpoint has been refined by economists and business strategists to become what is popularly known as The 80/20 Rule.

This states that 80 percent of your revenue will come from the top 20 percent of your customers. But not all experts agree that this strategy is prudent.

“I don’t like 80/20,” says Judy Guido, president of Guido & Associates, a Moorpark, Calif.-based business consulting firm for the green industry. “It can be a very dangerous principle.”

Guido, who works with clients on mergers and acquisitions, would rather see them with a more balanced portfolio, which demonstrates stability.

For example, if a company has four different markets, Guido would like to see 25 percent of the revenue coming from each market and spread over several good customers in each market. When Guido examines an acquisition, she doesn’t want to see one client, or a small concentrated group of customers, generating most of a contractor’s revenue. That is too much of a business risk, she says.

“Diversification in customer base, along with a variety of good customers, makes for a healthy business,” Guido says of a solid client portfolio.

“Anyone can cut grass, but the profitability comes in when landscapers devise the right packaging systems with

A balanced and diversified client portfolio is a key element to every successful company. Landscape contractors should consider a mix of commercial and residential clients.



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the right message to upsell their customers,” says Alan Rigg, president of 80/20 Sales Performance, a Scottsdale-based sales management company.

Kim Demott, president of The Power of No, a St. Louis-based sales management company, believes there are only two ways to improve your topline: Sell more to your existing customer base and/or steal your competitors’ customers. Cementing your relationship with existing clients is easier than stealing, Demott says.

**EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY.** Get in front of your existing customers whenever you can, Demott says. “Make telephone calls to them,” he adds. “Knock on their doors. Ask them if they are satisfied. Provide windows of opportunity by listening to them. If they tell you something like, ‘Our current landscaper can’t get to us for three weeks,’ then there’s your window of opportunity.”

Being proficient at property analysis and identifying problems increases your reputation and credibility in the eyes of your customers, Demott says. “When this is securely in place, your competitors can’t dislodge you,” he says.

Most experts agree on the old adage that acquiring new clients costs far more than keeping an existing one and selling additional services to them.

Here’s how LawnTailors upsells its clients on additional services. First, dedicated account managers conduct in-person visits, horticultural monitoring and quality control surveys.

Then, as part of their duties, they respond to additional requests from clients. By noticing potential problems in the landscape, they share their ideas on what additional services may be required. Field specialists also suggest opportunities to the account managers based on their involvement in the accounts, as do crew leaders who make

recommendations from their weekly or daily service visits.

**MANY WAYS TO DO IT.** Pudenz Irrigation, Eau Claire, Wis., went one step further in pushing integrated services to their current customers. “When we started our company, we were strictly lawn irrigation contractors,” explains Hanna Pudenz, who co-owns the company with her husband, Ross. “We designed, installed and serviced lawn irrigation systems for years, unable to take advantage of additional service requests.”

Two years ago, they purchased a lawn care company in their area, GrasScapes Lawn Services, to add eight additional services, including mowing, snow removal and weed control, for their existing irrigation customers. Likewise, they added irrigation services to GrasScapes’ existing lawn care customers.

“Selling the lawn care services to our existing customers was much easier and

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more cost effective than getting new customers in irrigation,” Pudenz says.

After completing one season servicing GrasScapes clients and gaining their trust, Pudenz sent its first direct mail piece to both its irrigation customers and lawn maintenance customers explaining its expansion and bundling of services. Within a few months, Pudenz had a 30

percent return on clients who wished to upgrade their services even without price reductions for bundling services.

“When clients get more value at less cost than they can get elsewhere, they are going to keep coming back,” Connolly says. “We chose to invest heavily in this model years ago and it is paying significant dividends. Clients win when

they consolidate services like this because they get more value at less cost.”

Minneapolis-based EnergyScapes made a bold toward integrated services. For years, it had been one of the pioneering landscaping companies bringing sustainable landscapes to upscale suburbanites and inner-city homeowners with a “going green” consciousness.

Douglas Owens Pike, CEO – in this case, the chief ecological officer – is banking on the fact that the years of quality service and personal client interaction will give his company an opportunity to extend to all of his customers other maintenance needs, including home exteriors and hardscapes.

“It’s still too early to tell if this strategy is working, but based on the inquiries and customer requests over the years, it makes sense to pursue this,” Owen-Pike says.

He will provide these integrated services through qualified subcontractors with whom he has established working relationships.


**LOYAL CUSTOMERS AREN'T ALWAYS GOLD.**

Business strategists caution that every customer, long-term or new, still need to be evaluated regularly.

“You should always be looking at your portfolio of customers, and evaluating their value to your organization,” Guido says. “You need to prune your high-maintenance clients who tend to drag you and your profits down.”

Today’s economy has forced many to step down a few rungs on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Demott says. “When you are starving, you can’t say no to any business,” he says. “Until you are reaching capacity or fulfillment of obligations, you shouldn’t say no to any business.

Demott admits that he can’t put out the same just-say-no message in 2010 as he did a few years back.

“The message is the same,” he says. “It’s now just a matter of loosening up the adjustment on the filter.” 



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