



President's letter

by Robert Boyle, IANY President

It's the end of another season. It's time to kick back and get some well-deserved R&R.

Having some downtime also gives us extra time to be more proactive. It's a good opportunity to get your staff and crew to learn more about irrigation.

They can check out a seminar or webinar online at the Irrigation Association website (www.irrigation.org), or consider getting involved in your local irrigation association.

Get away from the cold and possibly snow by attending the Irrigation Show and Education Week in San Diego on December 6-10. Take a class, get certified and celebrate at the Craft Brewfest!

Even though it's the offseason, it's advisable to continue your marketing. People are spending more time indoors

and may have more time to read emails. There is no need to spend lots of money on expensive advertising — just more efficient advertising. Informative emails or newsletters sent to your prospects and existing clients provide an opportunity to remind them of other products you offer they can benefit from in the spring.

Reach out to your happiest clients and grow your Google reviews, keep your Facebook page current and make sure your website is up to date with photos and new information that would be of interest to your visitors.

But most of all, enjoy the extra time you will have with your family and friends and have fun creating memorable moments.

RB Boyle is owner of RB Irrigation and president of the Irrigation Association of New York.



Renew Your IANY Membership

The 2021 membership year is coming to an end and IANY membership renewal notices will be delivered by mail and email by November 30. Renew and:

- Expand your knowledge.
- Grow your professional network.
- Address your business issues.

IANY is excited for a productive year and looks forward to working with you in 2022. Please renew your membership prior to December 31 to ensure you don't miss out.

Not a member? Join online at www.iany.org or via the membership application on page 8.

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Make a plan for a booming 2022

by Jeff Carowitz, Strategic Force Marketing

The busy season is wrapping up. Start planning now for a record-breaking 2022.

Starting your 2022 plan now gives you the advantage of having the entire winter to conduct research, to develop action lists and, most importantly, to get things DONE.

The process of business planning is valuable to contractors of all sizes. It requires leaders to step back from the day to day and consider the big picture. Where are we now? Where do we want to go? What do we seek to achieve? How will we get there? What needs to change? What actions need to be taken to implement the strategy?

Block some dates on your calendar and start your planning as soon as possible. Here are a few things to get you thinking:

It's time to invest. Decide which opportunities and challenges you'll work on this winter. Prioritize for greatest impact: 1) things that will mitigate pain experienced in 2021, and 2) things that will deliver real ROTI (return on the time you invest) and ROMI (return on the money invested). Avoid trying to do too much. Most companies can push through one or two major changes in the off-season (a software upgrade, a new website, etc.). Choose wisely!

What trends are your friends? When you're preparing your business plan, remember the acronym PESTE. It stands for political, environmental, social, technological and economic. It's a handy way to frame your thinking about macro trends that might impact your business, both positive and negative. For example, water restrictions are more influential than ever. They're an opportunity if you pursue them in the right way.

The rearview mirror doesn't show you where to go. Beware of the fallacy of using past results as a base for the future. For example, setting a sales goal by adding an arbitrary percentage to the prior year's results is only

relevant in a linear-growth market. In an industry buffeted by alternating headwinds of economy, competition and weather, next year isn't likely to look like this year. Conduct a deeper analysis this year before setting targets.

Setting marketing goals and tasks. Set key objectives before you start making lists of tasks (e.g., "We need a new website."). What do you want to accomplish? I bet you really need outcomes like greater market awareness, more sales leads, improved sales growth and better customer loyalty. Set objectives that are SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely). Your objectives will help you decide which tasks and tactics are REALLY important.

Stop with the sameness. Doing the same things as last year seldom makes sense, especially if they didn't work very well. In a highly competitive market, you need to think differentiation. Think about the unique advantages you have in products / experiences / services. Then decide which of those represent real business opportunities with a ready base of buyers.

Jeff Carowitz is enjoying his 17th year as an independent marketing consultant in our industry. Connect with him on LinkedIn or at Jeff@StrategicForceMarketing.com.





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Modernize your website

by Lorraine Hart, President of Ideal Consulting Services

Your website is an investment, your most important marketing tool. It promotes your business 24/7.

Modernizing your website for function and usability can better help you achieve your business marketing goals. As the number of online visitors has increased, so have their expectations for website appearance and functionality.

There are several reasons to redesign your website. Usually, it starts with appearance. Website designs change very frequently, and your website becomes “outdated” in about three years. Visitors notice this when your website is compared to your competitors’. That is why having a modern-looking, engaging, easily navigated website is important so your visitor’s expectations are met.

Customer retention is another reason to update your website. Content should be meaningful, clear and concise and represent your company accurately, the way you see it.

What good is it if your content is meaningful but prospects cannot find it? Your desktop and mobile website should provide simple and effective navigation.

It is important to establish credibility and build trust to get customers. Most visitors will judge your business creditability based on your website. If their first impression is poor, they likely will not return which means a lost opportunity.

Having a modern, attractive and easy to navigate website alone is not helpful if search engines like Google can’t see you. When you are redesigning your website, that is the time to build in search engine optimization (SEO). SEO is fundamental to a successful website. Without it, your digital marketing efforts will fail. Building an SEO-friendly site requires careful planning and a structured approach to representing your business and the services you provide. So, working with a developer who can think like your customer and has experience with your type of business is recommended.

Think of your website as a house you are trying to sell. If the shingles are falling off the roof and your windows are boarded up, no one’s going to stop by. Sometimes it takes a little remodeling to get things going again.

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Labor, infrastructure and conservation: Highlights from the 2021 Long Island Water Conference Symposium

by Michael Dwyer, CIC

Emerging contaminants 1,4 Dioxane, PFOS and PFOA remain the focus of many water districts.

PFOS and PFOA are easily removed from the water with the existing technology of granular activated charcoal. 1,4 Dioxane requires an advanced system. Most use a system called advanced oxidation process, which is very sophisticated and requires extensive testing before designing and putting into service. Due to COVID-19, prices for materials and labor are going up. Companies that build and install this technology are having the same labor problems we all have.

Infrastructure is aging out. Most of Long Island Water District's water mains were put in the ground in the 1950s. That means they are at least 70 years old. Water mains have a life span of 100 years. Districts are planning to replace 1% a year. Water wells are also reaching the end of their useful life. These were all in the pipeline for replacement until the emerging contaminants became more important.

Lead water service lines to customers are on the fast track for replacement. Districts have some legacy lead service lines. When identified they are placed on a list for replacement. Customer cooperation is necessary as a missile or trenching is required to install new copper service.

Water conservation is becoming more important as time goes on. The New York State Department of Conservation wants water districts to reduce the amount they pump. The cost of producing quality drinking water is increasing.



(left to right) James Neri of H2M Engineers and Architects speaks on emerging contaminants, with Jason Belle of West Hempstead Water, and Michael Alarcon, Nassau County Department of Health.

The advanced oxidation process systems, discussed earlier, require more electricity than a regular well site. More frequent testing is required to make sure systems are operating correctly.

In an effort to reduce water use, districts are trying many things. Customer education is paramount. The "Our Water Our Lives" website is designed to help educate the public that water is a precious resource. The website is helping clients find leaks in toilets and sinks and recommending the installation of low-flow shower heads, low-flow toilets and water-efficient appliances.

Irrigation is the biggest user of water in most households. It strains the capacities of many districts to keep up. Water use is steady in many districts through the summer. It increases during heat waves or droughts and slightly declines during rainfall.

In an effort to get customers to use only the water they need — and not more — smart irrigation controllers are being required in certain districts. You can find rebates at some water districts to encourage the installation of this water-saving device.

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Guide your growth

Part 1 - Choose your focus

by Kyle Brown

For many smaller landscape and irrigation contractors, the past season has been another opportunity to take on more work than they could have expected. That influx can be the start of a growth phase, but it's important to know how to put the right pieces in place to support expansion.

When Josh Wilson, president of Dixie Lawn and Landscape in Cochran, Georgia, started out cutting grass out of high school, he didn't give much thought to the sustainability of the business or how it could grow. He remembers reading stories in industry publications when he was in college about green industry companies that had expanded to take on huge amounts of business.

"There would be a picture of a company that's got 20 trucks, and I'd think, 'Oh man, is this something that could happen?' That's kind of what got the vision rolling for me," he says.

Seasonal Solutions in Overland Park, Kansas, began as an all-inclusive landscape grounds maintenance company

covering mostly residential properties while trying to break into commercial. "It was the typical story of how landscape companies get started, with just a guy in a truck," says Barry Wolff, president. "We soon discovered that we were far too spread out and were trying to do too many things for too many different types of people."

When it finally attracted a few high-profile accounts on the commercial side that enhanced the company's portfolio, it was a spark that started a drive for expansion, he says. "It gave us some bragging rights and some legitimacy in the market as a real business that could handle the tough stuff."

It can be difficult to recognize the indicators that your company is ready to do some growth, but a major one for Wilson is taking note of how many responsibilities you're currently covering. "I was wearing a lot of hats. I did everything," he says. "I had probably six crews at the time, but I was the sales guy. I was the operations manager."

After pushing for a while to keep up with the workload, Wilson realized that he was clearing enough to support an office staff when he was netting upwards of 15% to 20%.

"That's what one of the biggest indicators was for me, that I was netting enough money to afford some freedoms," he says.

Continued on page 7



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Continued from page 6

As a company pushes through the \$1 million to \$2 million mark, it can be tough to move on from that point because of the familiarity of the sense of control in handling everything yourself. "I think it's a big struggle for some," Wilson says. "It can be a very difficult place to be." If a contractor is the main driver of the company and still isn't making enough to hire a staff to support growth, "you need to make sure that your price is correct."

Choose your focus

CDI Environmental Contractor, Sedalia, Colorado, was originally founded as an erosion control company, with landscape and maintenance more as an afterthought. Though the company had been expanding into other services, it faced a rough year in 2018.

"We had a few service offerings that we ended up cutting to get back to basics," says Zacc Wair, vice president and chief operating officer. Because it had reduced the overall number of services, CDI focused more on a few key services, such as landscape work.

One of Wair's favorite sayings is, "Not every opportunity is a good opportunity." It can be easy to continue taking more varied or secondary projects as your clients request them, especially if they already like your work in another area. "But that doesn't mean that you're going to be good at it."

Wair and his team looked hard at which services the company excelled in and brought in the most revenue. They also considered opportunity cost, determining how expensive it was to be able to offer a particular service. "For landscaping, the barrier to entry isn't very big," he says. His regional landscaping market also wasn't oversaturated, so there would be room to grow in the future.

Instead of developing both the residential and commercial side of the market equally, Seasonal Solutions has reduced the number of residential customers over the past several years until finally closing that door completely. The company has always had a practice of looking at and possibly cutting the lowest 20% of its client base each year based on low profits and high difficulty.

"So we started weaning residential people off year after year as well," Wolff says. "Finally, we felt like we had

gained enough of a reputation and enough business on the commercial side to replace all of that residential business."

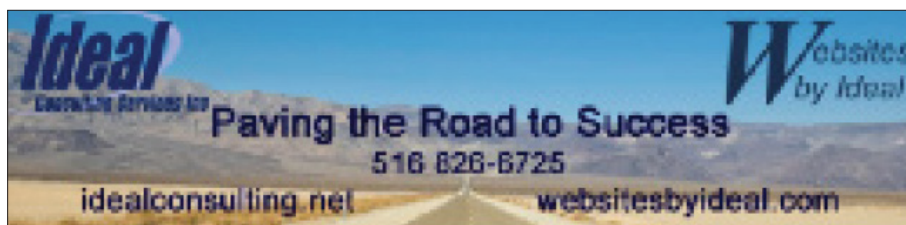
While it's tough to turn down the possibility for work, one of the main parts of a growth strategy is narrowing a company's focus to what it does well. "We've decided to be as good as we can, and as focused as we can, on that market," Wolff says. "It is paying off in dividends. We're growing exceptionally fast." Though it was a little intimidating to remove the rest of the company's residential customers, its growth rate is at 14% this year.

Tightening the number of services and choosing a specific market allows the company to make the most efficient use of outreach efforts, he says. Rather than advertising to a wide set of potential customers or an overall region, his team can target and market in a way to build relationships that can drive company expansion.

It's also provided a new way to build the company's brand to set it apart from competitors. "We consider ourselves a premier commercial grounds maintenance company in our market," says Wolff. "We feel that our job is to arm our property managers with a whole toolbox full of ideas and things they can do to their properties to make them perform better to raise rents and increase occupancy levels."

Make sure you've got a sustainable amount of work coming in to support your growth through the process. Without a solid grasp of your profit and losses, any expansion will be a struggle. "Growth costs money, so make sure you've got enough held back to maintain the business too," says Wilson.

Kyle Brown is the editor-in-chief of Irrigation & Green Industry and can be reached at kylebrown@igin.com.



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