



PROGRESS REPORT

You don't have to be a tech geek to use technology that will show you the numbers and help you monitor projects and other aspects of your business.

By Kristen Hampshire

INFORMATION IS POWER. (You've heard that before.) But when you can access real-time details regarding sales leads, labor hours and production status, you can make the type of just-in-time decisions that improve profitability. This month, *Lawn & Landscape* spoke with three companies that shared what technology they use so they can be smarter about running their businesses.

Getting on track

Robert Groff was proud of the high-end residential landscapes that his company was completing. Groff Landscape Design was doing some interesting work. "We were doing cool projects and building a profit," he says. "But we were losing money some years or breaking even."

The numbers just weren't adding up like Groff expected. "I was a typical contractor that tried to do everything in the beginning," he says. Job costing and labor hour projections were sometimes off base.

So when Groff heard about a seminar led by Canada-based Landscape Management Network (LMN) for its budgeting and estimating software, he decided to check it out. The \$100 fee was well worth the investment because it has changed the way Groff looks at numbers and tracks details.

"We can now estimate based off of a budget, which sounds elementary, but the software simplifies (the process) for you," Groff says. Plus, it's easy to use, he says. "It honestly reminds me of an Apple interface."

Groff creates the annual budget, and all costs (direct, indirect) are logged into the system. He also enters into a database the cost for various materials, and there is a "portfolio" part of the program that allows him to create projects.

For example, the company has a "patio package" set up.

**GROFF
LANDSCAPE
DESIGN**

Robert Groff, president

LOCATION:
Fairfax, Virginia

ESTABLISHED:
2007

EMPLOYEES:
8

2015 REVENUE:
\$1.4 million

CUSTOMERS:
100% residential

SERVICES:
Design/build



Technology changed the way Robert Groff looked at numbers and tracked details.

“Once you enter the square footage, man-hours, pavers, gravel and other materials, you click and create an estimate,” Groff says.

Because the company’s budget is in the system, the software automatically adds the appropriate percentage of overhead recovery for labor, materials, equipment, etc. “That way, you are recovering all of your costs in a very strategic way,” Groff says.

The key is to input accurate information. Groff refers to previous profit-and-loss statements to help identify average costs.

As for labor hours, Groff uses a complementary tool called LMN Time. It basically allows his team to use their mobile phones to clock in and out of entire jobs, and components of every job. Because the team starts their days in the field versus office, this tool is especially helpful, Groff adds.

“When they get to the job site, they can log into LMN Time and note, ‘It’s 7 a.m. and we started installing the patio.’ And they can record, ‘It’s 11 a.m. and we are planting.’”

Not only does tracking hours motivate the crew – they can see their progress on jobs – but it also allows Groff to make real-time decisions and prevent leaching profit due to inaccurate labor hour estimates.

“If we see that we are over our hours, we’ll know right away and can find out how it happened and decide what to fix in the field so we hit our goals,” Groff says.

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

FIX THE PROBLEMS.

Groff knew labor hours and estimating were causing his company to experience some flat years. Identifying the problem first allowed him to look for a software solution that would help.

**LEARN THE
INS AND OUTS.**

Groff attended a set-up seminar so he could get started with the system. For a nominal fee, he was guided through the step-by-step process.

KEEP IT SIMPLE.

The easy-to-use interface attracted Groff to LMN and has made adoption fairly seamless. “All the guys in the field have to do (to track labor hours) is push ‘log in,’ enter their password – and it’s as easy as clocking in and out,” he says. As for the budgeting side, Groff has to do that work anyway and now he enters the information into the software so he can track progress in real-time.

Go with the flow

How many leads does the sales team turn into opportunities? What’s the status of projects in the production process? How many (and which) jobs are closed out?

Many managers are so consumed by daily tasks that they bypass the big picture of the sales and production cycle. And, for lengthy jobs that require months to complete, there’s greater chance of losing track of time – and money.

At Southern Scape in Alabama, using Salesforce and its customer relationship management (CRM) tool has changed the way managers understand and react to information. “It helps us make on-the-fly adjustments,” says Denny Langston, general manager and partner.

For example, while installing a major landscape package at a commercial site, he reviewed tracked data and noticed labor overages, specifically with tree installation.

“There were hundreds of 2.5-inch caliper trees we were putting in and it was taking us, for whatever reason, too long compared to the estimate,” Langston says.

So, Langston reviewed the numbers with the production manager. “We made the decision to invest in an auger and start auguring instead of hand-digging holes to get our labor hours back in line,” he says.

Mid-project adjustments like this can make the difference between profit and loss.

Langston says Southern Scape opted for this technology when its consulting group introduced the platform. What’s attractive is how the program follows the company’s sales and production from beginning to end.

“Our process flows through this one integrated system,” Langston says.

Leads are inputted, along with all of their contact

“Our process flows through this one integrated system. ... We figure out what the prospects’ needs are and how we can meet those and eventually (the lead) goes to a proposal stage.”

**Denny Langston,
general manager
and partner,
Southern Scape**

SOUTHERN SCAPE

Denny Langston, partner

LOCATION:
Huntsville and Nashville

ESTABLISHED:
1996

EMPLOYEES:
36

2015 REVENUE:
\$3.1 million

CUSTOMERS:
80% residential,
20% commercial

SERVICES:
Design/build, maintenance,
water conservation
and management

information. Once that lead progresses to an opportunity, the sales team tracks this and notes once that opportunity is qualified. "We figure out what the prospects' needs are and how we can meet those and eventually (the lead) goes to a proposal stage," he says.

A pricing tool helps with estimating, which is performed by an estimator who enters the "flow" at this point and inputs the scope of work and every step that must occur for the project to reach completion.

Projects move from account managers to project

managers, who continue to use the system for tracking progress until the final walkthrough. "I can see what's going on at any time and it's real-time information," Langston says.

Langston doesn't want to micromanage his people. But he can stay involved by having the information and redirecting teams if and when necessary.

"Salesforce and the CRM allow us to hire people to do their jobs, and then step back and truly manage what is going on rather than being consumed by daily tasks," he says.

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

GAIN BUY-IN.

Langston says it took about 18 months to get everyone on board with using Salesforce and the CRM. The best way to get the team hooked on the system was to simply have them start using it.

TRAIN IT.

Training webinars, videos and hands-on sessions with a consultant helped Southern Scape implement Salesforce.

SET THE EXAMPLE.

"When the top buys in, everyone else starts buying in," Langston says. "We let everyone know, 'This is what we are doing moving forward.'"

Growing your business
is our passion



That's why we focus on developing the nation's leading mobile software solutions to manage your business, as well as automated digital marketing and print solutions to promote and grow your business, and enhance customer experience.

Need to energize your business?
Join us at Disney World!

solutions 2017 JAN 10-13 2017

Disney's Coronado Springs Resort
Lake Buena Vista, Florida

I have attended GIE-Expo and they have good classes, but they are nothing like Real Green's.

- Dutch Cottle (Owner of Real Green Professional Services)



This annual conference presents the opportunity to network with fellow lawn care business owners, vendor suppliers, and industry professionals.

Attend marketing, business management, leadership and industry-specific sessions led by national leaders in their fields, to gain the competitive knowledge you need to grow and sustain your business.

We enjoy seeing all the vendors' new equipment and product releases, networking and learning about other businesses' operations. With the marketing and business speakers they bring in - it's impossible to miss! Our company really benefits.

- Merv Kotlitz (Owner of Spring Tech Lawn & Pest Control)

For more information & to register, visit:
RealGreen.com/Solutions2017

●●●●● (800) 422-7478

©2016 RealGreenSystems. All rights reserved.

Stepping up retention

"Did we talk about this last year?" an account manager might wonder when suggesting enhancements or potential projects on a property for the coming year. No one can remember every detail of every conversation, especially if a client has been on board for years.

That is, unless the team has information at their fingertips, says Jonathan Thrift, president of Carolina Creations Landscapes in Shallotte, North Carolina. Nine years ago, the company implemented Salesforce, but didn't fully tap into the system's potential. In the last five years, the company has ramped up its use and now it's simply a part of how the team does business.

Thrift says the client retention rate is a sign

"You might as well embrace (technology). That's the motto we have lived by. Use technology to the best of your ability and make it work for you."

Jonathan Thrift,
Carolina Creations Landscape

that the system is working. "We have always had good retention rates, but now we are seeing 95 to 98 percent retention, which is fantastic," he says.

What's more, client relationships are stronger,

CAROLINA CREATIONS LANDSCAPE

Jonathan Thrift, president

LOCATION:
Shallotte, North Carolina

ESTABLISHED:
2001

EMPLOYEES:
92

2015 REVENUE:
\$7.2 million

CUSTOMERS:
65% residential, 35% commercial

SERVICES:
Landscape design/build,
maintenance, pools



call: 816.855.8383
email: info@bradleymowers.com
click: www.bradleymowers.com

**SALES REPS WANTED - ALL REGIONS
INTERESTED? CONTACT US TODAY!**



DON'T BE ANTISOCIAL.

If you're not following Lawn & Landscape, you're missing valuable insights, opinions and some fun from peers and experts throughout the landscaping world.

Join us today!



Search "Lawn & Landscape" on Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram, or find us on Twitter @lawnlandscape.

Lawn & Landscape

“We have always had good retention rates, but now we are seeing 95 to 98 percent retention, which is fantastic.”

Jonathan Thrift,
Carolina Creations
Landscape

he adds. “We have two customer appreciation days a year, and I have seen more and more clients coming to those,” he says. “And, they know their account managers better.”

From a revenue perspective, the company has grown every year since it implemented the system. “I attribute that to Salesforce and being able to hold people accountable by using it,” Thrift says.

“If a client calls in, our office manager enters the information into the Salesforce client page and an email is sent to our sales rep,” Thrift says. “Account managers can look back and see a history of all phone calls, from meetings and proposals to offering work.”

That’s the “did I mention new plantings” conversation Thrift referred to earlier. “We’re not standing there wondering if we had the conversation before.”

Technology is here to stay, Thrift says. “You might as well embrace it,” he says. “That’s the motto we have lived by. Use technology to the best of your ability and make it work for you.” **L&L**

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

TALK TO PEERS.

Thrift tapped into a network of peers to find out what systems they were using, and he has turned to his industry colleagues with questions about the software. “Reach out and ask, ‘How do you handle this?’” he says.

KEEP TRAINING.

A CRM training session is held bi-monthly to keep the team up to date and to review basics. Sometimes, the company will use YouTube how-to videos.

CHOOSE FOR YOURSELF.

“Compare notes and see what might work for your company,” Thrift says, adding that the key is to find a system that suits your needs. Then, he says, “don’t fight it.” No system is effective unless everyone is on board and uses it.

REVOLUTIONARY PLANT HEALTH SOLUTIONS

Garden Center • Greenhouse • Indoor Growing
Landscape • Nursery • Trunk Injection



**NO MATTER YOUR CHALLENGE,
ARBORJET IS HERE FOR YOU.**

Trunk injected insect & disease controls
Botanical insect & disease controls
Soil amendments & water management

www.arborjet.com
781.935.9070

ARBORJET
PROFESSIONAL PLANT HEALTH SOLUTIONS

Non-Traditional 3-way Herbicide? You Bet.

Triad Select™ Herbicide

- University Tested
- New Formulation
- Lower Odor
- Signal word = Warning
Threat = Danger
- Made in the USA



For your local distributor,
please contact:



877-235-0043 • www.selectsourceinc.net