

Growing Business in a Down Market

Business growth and retention in the lawn care industry are both results of customer satisfaction. For Spring-Green Lawn Care of Hendersonville, Tenn., quality input and exceptional customer service has helped drive business in an overall struggling economy.

Del Reynolds, owner of Spring-Green and a 15-year industry veteran, owned and operated a mowing business for more than 10 years. Seeing an opportunity to expand on his service offerings, he started his Spring-Green franchise at the end of 2006 and has increased his customer base each year, eventually moving away from mowing.

"We grew more than 200 percent from 2007 to 2008, and the next year continued on that growth with a 70 percent increase in 2009," Reynolds says. He attributes much of their growth to word of mouth with existing customers and a very proactive approach to new prospects. "We go to the people and help

educate the customer, not wait for them to come to us."

The effort put forth by Reynolds and his staff of two salespersons and two applicators has attracted more than 500 residential customers.

Attention to detail

Reynolds finds it's the little things that go a long way with his clientele. Things like keeping service trucks clean, making sure to call customers back within 24 hours of an inquiry and being as personal as possible with homeowners has built trusting relationships with customers.

"I encourage my staff to get to know homeowners on a personal level. Even if it means spending an extra 20 minutes at a property to chat with someone, that isn't wasted time to us. We want them to remember our names when we come back," Reynolds explains.

Education of his customers also is a priority. A quarterly newsletter is sent

containing seasonal lawn care tips and updates on what services Spring-Green is planning during that timeframe. Reynolds believes that the more knowledge his customers have about pest prevention, the more likely they are to continue to rely on him and his crews to service their properties.

Eight-step program

The transition zone brings added challenges for Reynolds and his technicians because there is a split between fescue and bermudagrass lawns. "It's either relatively dry throughout the year or it rains like crazy, which makes it hard to manage for both varieties from year to year," he says. Customers with fescue lawns see bermudagrass as a weed, making it another thing to manage for lawns in addition to crabgrass, henbit and chickweed.

Beginning with split preemergence applications, both made between





February and March, technicians from Spring-Green apply Dimension® specialty herbicide on fertilizer at 0.15 percent. Next are two treatments of normal concentration fertilizer and spot postemergence herbicide applications. Steps 5 and 6 are low-concentration fertilizer applications, followed by a winterizer treatment. For the final step, lime treatments are used to reduce the acidity levels in the soil and add calcium and magnesium to the soil makeup.

There also is disease pressure due to the high humidity in the transition zone, especially coming from brown patch. When customers have a problem with brown patch, Eagle® 20EW specialty fungicide is used as a curative treatment. "In lawns where the pathogen has been persistent, we will use Eagle 20EW as a preventive treatment," Reynolds says.

Spring-Green also has conducted late-spring trials with Gallery® specialty herbicide for preemergence weed control.

"We've found that Gallery may have a nice fit in our clients' flowerbeds, and would be a good tank-mix partner with Dimension on our high-profile yards."

Price is only what you pay

Decisions on what chemistries will be used are evaluated after being tested by Reynolds. As with any business, price of materials has an impact on what is actually purchased. But Reynolds likes to refer to the value of the product — not price alone.

"A product that works well and provides good efficacy on target species goes a long way with our customers. In the long run, when you look at customer retention and satisfaction, a quality product provides more value than buying a product based solely on price," he explains.

In addition, support provided by product manufacturers also provides value for Reynolds. His Nashville, Tenn.-based Dow AgroSciences sales representative, Justin Stewart, has been a good resource for the Spring-Green technicians. In some cases, Stewart has joined Reynolds on a customer's lawn to help diagnose a problem, educate homeowners and come up with a viable solution.

"I certainly don't call him every day, but it's helpful to know that he's accessible and extremely knowledgeable if I run into any problems," Reynolds says.

It's the performance of reliable, proven products that helps keep his customers' lawns in tiptop shape. But it's the hard work and dedication of Reynolds and his entire team that pushes the business to expand. With reliable resources and a strong emphasis on keeping things personal with its customers, Reynolds' Spring-Green franchise is poised to score big through these tough economic times. 🌱

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