

NORTHWEST LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONAL



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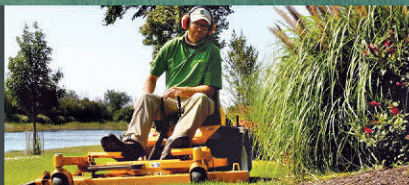
5 Ways the Walker Mower Makes Lawn Care

EASY



MOWING

- Highly responsive **precision steering and handling**
- Designed to enhance ergonomics and **operator comfort**
- Well-balanced weight distribution for greater **hillside stability**
- Out-front deck allowing for better **trimming capability**



"Everything is pretty much at your fingertips. I just have one hand resting on my knee most of the time and I can control forward, backward, side to side."

Ryan Boyd, Metcalfe Grasshopper, Metcalfe, Ontario Canada



WATCH THE VIDEO ▶



YEAR-ROUND PRODUCTIVITY

- Mulching and collection **deck options** make quick work of **leaf cleanup**
- Decks can be swapped out for a **snowblower** for powerful snow removal
- **Dozer blades** allow for quick sidewalk or driveway snow removal
- The **Dethatcher** attachment is an easy solution for removing thatch from lawns



"We live in a climate that, when it gets a little cooler, we're doing fall cleanup. We can suck leaves up, cut long, [cut] short for winter, and we can switch to snowblowers and blades."

Chase Coates, Outback Landscape, Idaho Falls, Idaho



◀ WATCH THE VIDEO



BEAUTIFUL CUT

- The **front-mount deck** of the Walker reduces impact on the turf prior to cutting
- **Lower overall mower weight** improves agility and reduces rutting
- **Internal Grass Handling System®** vacuums grass clippings, leaves, or debris
- Grass is lifted, cut, and processed evenly to produce natural **striping**



"I want to give people Disney World. You know when you go there and the landscape is just beautiful. I want to do that for my clients."

Stevie Delabar, Lawn Relief, Elizabethtown, Kentucky



WATCH THE VIDEO ▶



ALL THE LITTLE THINGS

- **Seat options** and **adjustable footrests** improve operator comfort
- The **Power Dump** allows you to dump the grass catcher without leaving your seat
- The **Hi-Dump®** raises up 67 inches to dump grass and debris into a truck or trailer
- **Tilt-up decks** allow cleaning, blade sharpening, or blade changing in seconds



"It fits all the gaps in all the services we provide. I mean, you want talk the ergonomics, the ease of maintenance, the ease to dump the grass, the cut, everything about it just works for our industry."

Jeff Craddock, JC LawnCare, Strongsville, Ohio



◀ WATCH THE VIDEO



MAINTENANCE

- **Tilt-up decks** allow cleaning, blade sharpening, or blade changing in seconds
- **Tilt-open bodies** give you full access to the engine, belts, battery without tools
- Maintainable **grease fittings** greatly extend the life of your mower
- Each Walker Mower is **reliable**, engineered to perform and proven to last



"With other mowers, you have to either find a jack or find a way to see it at an angle. But with a Walker, you just flip up your deck, pop it out, and in the new blades, and keep on cutting grass."

Elias Baltazar, Baltazar Lawn Care, Russellville, Alabama



WATCH THE VIDEO ▶

See the videos at

walker.com/advantage/easy

Or experience the Walker for yourself on a **FREE** on-site demonstration.



Northwest Landscape Professional

The NWLP – Northwest Landscape Professional – is the official publication of the Washington Association of Landscape Professionals and is published and distributed quarterly to WALP members and extended gratis to select courtesy subscribers.

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Washington Association of Landscape Professionals

The Washington Association of Landscape Professionals (WALP) offers your company first-tier access to decision-makers in the Landscaping Industry. WALP reaches more than 3,000 landscape professionals and supporters with our print magazine, the Northwest Landscape Professional (NWLP) and online newsletter, WALP Wednesday. WALP also reaches out to Industry professionals and the general public with our innovative website. Gain access to this customer base for your business to business marketing needs and start promoting your company's products and services with WALP today.

For information regarding advertising opportunities, please call us at 800-833-2186 or email at info@walp.org.

Cover image: Malone's Landscapes entry in the 2024 Design/Build category for 'Double Decker Delight'



Happy New Year!

Tim Buiten

*Tim's Complete Landscape Management & Mist'er Rain
2024 WALP State President*

I'm Tim Buiten, proudly representing Tim's Complete Landscape Management & Mist'er Rain. It's a true honor to serve as your WALP State Board President for 2024. My journey with WALP has been incredibly meaningful, and I am thrilled to collaborate with each one of you to further enhance our association's legacy. I especially look forward to welcoming new members and ensuring your experience is as enriching as mine has been.

A heartfelt thanks goes out to Will Bailey and the previous State Board members for their exemplary leadership over the past two years. The COVID era presented significant challenges for many associations, including ours. While some unfortunately did not survive, our collective determination, expertise, and leadership steered WALP through these turbulent times, emerging even stronger.

As we build on our past successes, I'm excited to share our key initiatives for the year:

1. **Enhanced In-Person Engagements:** We're committed to providing more opportunities for training and networking. Our calendar is packed with events like the annual conference in January, a Bootcamp in March, a summer BBQ in collaboration with other state associations, our much-anticipated golf tournament, a fall strategic planning session, and regular monthly networking meetings across the state.
2. **Strengthening Contractor Membership:** Our focus will be on expanding our contractor base. This includes simplifying the joining process, offering flexible payment options, guidance on maximizing association benefits, and reinvigorating our mentorship program.

Your thoughts and ideas are invaluable to us. Please feel free to reach out to me directly to share any suggestions or feedback that could help WALP continue to thrive and uphold our impressive legacy.

I'm eagerly looking forward to connecting with you at various WALP events throughout the year! 🌱

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Mission Statement For The Washington Association Of Landscape Professionals

To promote professionalism, integrity, and education to a thriving membership within the Green Industry and the communities served.

Vision Statement For The Washington Association Of Landscape Professionals

- The Washington Association of Landscape Professionals is a publicly recognized and unified industry of landscape professionals who embody business and technical excellence.
- The Washington Association of Landscape Professionals provides and promotes the opportunity to mentor and support its members.
- The Washington Association of Landscape Professionals' members receive value and benefit by sharing knowledge, resources, and experience.
- The Washington Association of Landscape Professionals is the networking place and referral resource for "Green Industry" professionals.

"Defining Professionalism In The Green Industry"

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AWARDS PROGRAM



Northwest Premier Landscape Awards Program

*By Lloyd Glasscock
Awards Committee Chair
Northwest Flower & Garden Festival*

Winter has now arrived, this year with a bit of a whimper. Rain is back and the talk of drought is quiet again, at least for now. Seasons in the Pacific Northwest...

For the unfamiliar, the purpose of the program is to recognize outstanding performance by member firms; foster pride in superior workmanship; publicize the Association and Industry and encourage future business for WALP members. Benefits can include

pride in team accomplishment when earning an award and a ready-made method for updating websites and other social media thru images taken for entry forms. 'Bragging up' awards received is a good way to market a company to the public thru a website, blog post or press release.

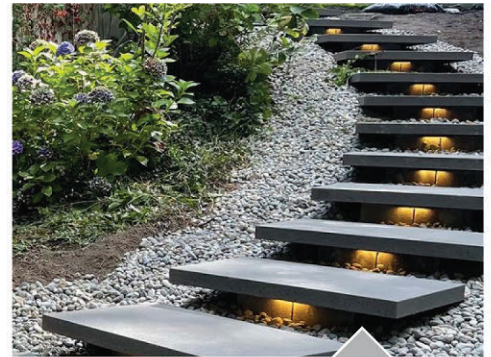
This year's Awards Program wrapped for entries in early November. We received 22 entries, which is well beyond what we have gotten for quite some

time. The entries were in a total of 10 different categories.

Thank you to the firms that entered projects;

- Malone's Landscape
- Devonshire Landscapes
- Northwest Outdoor Lighting
- Pacific Earth Works WBE
- Seattle Sustainable Landscapes

continued on page 4



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- Kirkland Land Care
- Plantscapes, Inc.
- New Leaf Creations
- Place Landscape Architecture

These fine firms and their work will be recognized at the Awards evening held as part of the Annual Conference at the Hotel Indigo, Everett on January 12th. Join us we celebrate the accomplishment of these members through their work. Awards levels are Merit (meets industry standards), Distinction (exceeds industry standards) and Grand Award (exceeds standards with little room for improvement). Register now so you can see first hand who received which level of award.

We hope to see you there. As a preview, here is a shot of Malone's Landscapes entry in the Design/Build category, 'Double Decker Delight' and one of New Leaf Creations' entries in the Residential Construction category 'Farmer Residence'.



New Leaf Creations, Residential Construction, Farmer Residence



Malone's Landscapes, Design/Build, Double Decker Delight. Also featured on the front cover.



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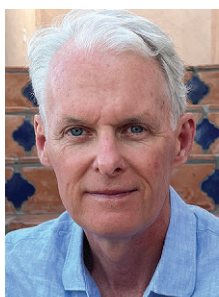
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WALP

WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONALS



Are You Keeping Up with Change?

by John Marshall, Results Driven

I was sitting in the waiting area for one of our new clients. The walls were covered with pictures of my client and his team winning awards. There were articles featuring him and his business. There were plaques and trophies on the table sharing many accomplishments. I was impressed.

I then began to look more closely at the awards and trophies. Something stood out. Something seemed odd. It was the dates on each award. They were at least 5 years old. Many much older. I made a mental note.

Soon, I was meeting with him in his office. As we began to talk, what stood out to me was his frame of reference. He kept talking about his previous successes. He wasn't old, but his outlook on business made him sound old. He shared how difficult it was today.

I then realized something significant. His business hadn't adapted to change. He was stuck in the past. And we all know how fast

time flies and often don't realize our habits and ideas are years old.

As you're reading this, let me ask you these questions. They might be a little uncomfortable if you answer them genuinely. Have you unintentionally allowed your landscape business to get into a rut? Are you resting, even a little bit, on your previous successes? Are you, as well as, your team keeping up with change?

Do you occasionally think about the good old days when things were less complex?

Here's a few ideas you and your team can immediately implement in the next 30 days to embrace change.

- New Service/Product: change your business for the better, by adding one new service or product your landscape clients have been asking for
- Stop: change your tolerance level and stop working with difficult clients

- Review: change your habit of not reviewing your accounts receivable (A/R) frequently

You know how valuable, and dare I say, exciting change can be to you and your business.

If you realize, however, that you want to make changes, but you're stuck where to start, let's talk. I'd welcome your text or call. 🌱

John Marshall, Founder of Results Driven, is an expert in helping small business owners Build Their Business IQ. He developed a proprietary business tool called 'What's Your Number?', used by clients in over 30 industries, that will assess the performance of your landscape business. It'll benchmark your present situation and highlight areas that need to be addressed. If you're frustrated because your business is underperforming, and you don't know why, email John to request your free copy of our business assessment. (john@results-driven.com).



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Training For Change

By Will Anstey
Devonshire Landscapes
WALP Conference Chair

Winter is the perfect time for Pacific Northwest Landscape Professionals to focus on education, training, and planning for the upcoming season. The Washington Association of Landscape Professionals Annual Conference is designed specifically to help our membership succeed in that endeavor. After the holidays we have a few months to relax...OR, get to work making sure that 2024 will be even better! This year our focus is on educating and motivating owners and their management teams.

The market is changing. Interest rates for mortgages and home loans have increased considerably putting financial pressure on many of our clients. I anticipate that it will be more important than ever to have competitive pricing as well as a high-quality service. Understanding YOUR business's numbers and knowing how much you need to charge to make a profit is number one. Making sure your team is able to complete the work on time and on budget is number two. You also need to have the right clients.

We've got you covered! We are bringing a nationally recognized landscape industry speaker and co-Author of The E-Myth "Landscape Contractor Edition" to present three separate sessions to address each of these areas: finance, operations, and marketing. He will give owners and managers the information and the tools they need for success.

Our technical track this year will be Spanish only. All 3 of these sessions will qualify for WSDA pesticide applicator credits. Sign up your pesticide applicators and we will submit their CEU's for them. Many of the owners

that I talk to share my frustration in struggling to implement change in the way our crews work in the field; using hedgers on plants that shouldn't be hedged, raking up too much mulch, and everyone's favorite – excessive use of the blower! With the looming regulations on gas blowers and transition to battery powered equipment we all need to change the way we meet our clients expectations. Gonzalo Yepes, owner of Columbian Gardens, will be back this year to speak to these and other issues with powerpoint presentations followed by a Q&A and open discussion to address concerns, pros, and cons

among peers. We will also have a session on landscape products and fertilizers with a focus on new and alternative/organic products, as well as a session on irrigation Spring start up and adjustments.

Investing in your team and their growth and success is how you help your company grow and succeed. Networking with your green industry peers and collaborating on solutions for day to day issues we all face helps keep you motivated and supported. That is what WALP is here to offer you. We appreciate your support and participation. 🌱

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Getting your Landscape Business Back on Track

2024 Northwest Landscape Industry Conference & Trade Show
January 11-13, 2024 | Hotel Indigo in Everett, Washington



Conference Schedule

Thursday, January 11th

WALP Board Meeting	2:00 PM–5:00 PM
Non-Host gathering	5:30 P –9:00 PM at Scuttlebutt
Trade Show Vendor setup	12:00 PM–5:00 PM

Friday, January 12th

Registration	opens at 6:00 AM <i>Sponsored by Simplot Turf & Horticulture</i>
Trade Show Vendor setup	7:00 AM–9:00 AM

Break Out #1 *Sponsored by Professional Stone Products & Vermeer Mountain West*

PROFESSIONAL: (7:30-9:30 AM) Tony Bass, *Are You charging enough? Price Right (Finance)*

Pricing right is Step 1 of your business success plan and the foundation of the future of your company. You MUST Price Right for your company, your employees, AND your clients. We'll give you a quick exercise you can use to compare your company's financial productivity to the industry and we'll take you through the 6 critical success keys in the Price Right System: budget, overhead recovery, estimating, bidding, sales, and job costing.

Knowing your numbers to ensure profitability! Set up your sales team for success. Common mistakes to avoid and metrics to help your sales team meet their goals.

SPANISH: (8:00-9:30 AM) James Kalteich (Ewing), *Irrigation Spring Start-Up and Repair*

This class will cover common irrigation issues that arise during Spring Start-Ups and how to spot irrigation issues during maintenance visits. We will also discuss and do some in class hands-on repairs/adjustments, etc. for common irrigation issues.

WSDA Pesticide credits

Break with Vendors	(Spanish) 9:30–10:30 AM; English (9:30–10:30 AM) <i>Sponsored by Walker Mowers & Coates Landscape Supply</i>
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Break Out #2

*Sponsored by Professional Stone Products and
Wetlands & Woodlands Wholesale Nursery, Inc.*

SPANISH: (10:30 AM-12:00 PM) Martin Munoz / Scott Mutchler (Horizon Distributors), Organic Fertilizers and New Products

This class will cover new and organic/alternative fertilizers, pesticides, and other products on the market, and how and when to apply them properly. This training session will teach technicians how to create an annual weed control and lawn/plant fertilizer plan, focusing on new and organic products. It will focus on practical application techniques and procedures, and potential issues to avoid. Guest speakers from Marion Ag Services and Brandt/Monterey. ***WSDA Pesticide credits***.

PROFESSIONAL: (10:30 AM-12:30 PM) Tony Bass, Operations Keeping Promises (Operations)

After you sell work, it's your job to Keep Promises. And you MUST Keep Promises to your employees, your clients, your vendors, and the taxing authorities! You need operational systems in your company to help you keep these promises in 6 key areas: company, contracts, team, training, feedback and management.

Systems for efficient operations and KPI's to keep your team on track! Give your management team the tools to eliminate downtime, increase productivity, and promote accountability.

Break with Vendors/Lunch

12:00–3:00 PM Sponsored by STIHL NW

Break Out #3

Sponsored by Professional Stone Products & HD Fowler Company

SPANISH: (1:30-3:30 PM) Gonzalo Yepes, Colombian Gardens LLC / Plant Amnesty, Landscape Maintenance – techniques and training

This class will address many aspects of everyday landscape maintenance work and provide a better understanding of what actions to take in certain situations and why. It will be instructional in nature with open discussion. Topics will include: proper pruning, weed identification and weeding techniques, mulch mowing, battery equipment use, reducing blower use, etc.

WSDA Pesticide credits

Afternoon Break in Session

Sponsored by NC Machinery

PROFESSIONAL: (3:00-5:00 PM) Tony Bass, Marketing Creating Clients (Marketing)

If we have a tightening economy in the coming months, you will have to attract new customers, reactivate past customers, improve sales skills and win jobs without being the low bidder. We want to help prepare you to add new clients to your list. We'll help you create clients with confidence in 6 key areas: marketing, lead generation, needs analysis, lead conversion, billing and client retention.

How to get the right clients for the best profits in today's tight markets! Gone are the days of low interest refinancing and home loans. Roll up your sleeves to keep your crews busy.

Have you gotten lazy with your marketing? How to get the right clients for the best profits in today's tight markets!

Vendor load out – venue change

3:00–5:00 PM

WALP Awards Reception

5:30–6:30 PM *Sponsored by Kress Commercial Equipment*

WEF Silent Auction

6:30–8:00 PM

Northwest Premiere**Landscape Awards Banquet**

7:30–10:00 PM

Saturday, January 13th

WALP General Meeting

8:00–10:00 AM *Sponsored by Bartlett Tree Experts*

Conference Speakers



Conference Speaker

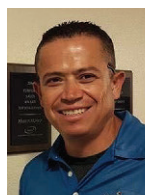
Tony Bass

Tony Bass is a successful entrepreneur whose passion is helping green-industry small businesses achieve their fullest potential. Tony is a 1987 University of Georgia graduate and specialized in Agricultural Mechanization. He founded Bass Custom Landscapes, which he sold in 2006 to retire at 41 years old. Tony has earned two U.S. Patents for equipment and created the Super Lawn Truck™ system, an enclosed truck design now used in more than 40 states and Canada. Currently, Tony operates trucking and ramp businesses as well as a consulting firm under the parent company of Super Lawn Technologies.



James Kalteich

James Kalteich is a branch manager for Ewing Outdoor Supply with over a decade of experience in wholesale distribution within the green industry. James is a passionate educator with a strong desire to help contractors develop their skills and potential in this industry. James is known as someone who wants those around them to have as much education and knowledge as possible. Over the last five years James has sought to create strong relationships with vendors to help provide contractors with invaluable resources. In 2012 James graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from Portland State University in History.



Martin Munoz

Martin Munoz has been in the irrigation industry for over 30 years. He has been with Horizon since 1999 serving the Puget Sound market. His specialties include irrigation, lighting, drainage, central controllers, and design. He has been recognized as Horizon Employee of the Year in 2017 & 2021.

Scott Mutchler

Scott has been in the green industry for 30 years. He is currently a Business Development Representative for Horizon Distributors. He supports the channels of contractors, municipalities, golf courses and public agencies. He is a recipient of the "Puget Sound Champions Award" on behalf of the Chico Creek Restoration Project. This project improved fish-passage and created new spawning grounds for one of the Puget Sound's most productive salmon streams. It was one of the first projects on private land that was funded by state, local and tribal funding.

- Class A GCSAA Golf Course Superintendent
- AA in Ornamental Horticulture (Edmonds CC)
- Certificate in Landscape Maintenance (Edmonds CC)
- Two-year Certificate in Golf Course Turf Management (Rutgers University)
- Certificate in Stormwater Run-off Management (Washington State University)
- WSDA Pesticide Dealer Manager license holder
- Recipient of "Puget Sound Champions Award" 2012



Gonzalo Yepes

Gonzalo owns Colombian Gardens, LLC, Landscape Design, Construction, and Maintenance. It is an Envirostar Company. Gonzalo is Certified nationally through the National Association of Landscape Professionals.

He is a certified irrigation and hardscape technician. He has completed numerous irrigation trainings for water wise gardening and environmentally sound landscape practices. He has AA degree in Horticulture (1 year). He has an AA degree in Landscape Design and Construction (2 years). South Seattle Community College. He has a BA in Agricultural Business Management Universidad Catolica de Oriente Rionegro Anitioquia, Colombia. He teaches for and has taught for the following organizations; Plant Amnesty, Seattle Public Utilities, Cascade Water Alliance, King County Noxious Weeds, Snohomish Conservation District, Casa Latina.

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The Green Meridian Brief

"20 Ways to use Ai in your Landscape business"

by Alan Burke, asla, Landscape architect, Classic Nursery

Back in the 80s I remember getting my first computer, it was the original box Macintosh, what is now affectionately called the "Mac Classic". It was an unbelievably amazing machine for its time – which now, looking back – appears as a quaint and simple relic of some bygone era. I remember playing games from numbered discs that we would have to pop out and place back in. I feel fortunate to be a person that can look back and feel a part of what was a real fundamental shift and change in society, although we couldn't really imagine it at the time. Over the subsequent 20 years, computers would completely reshape and redefine the world, much as the railroads did in the 19th century – or electricity at the beginning of the 20th. It's rare to be part of the beginning of this kind of change. Inevitably, we don't see the full effects of it in advance – both good and bad.

Few would have guessed how ubiquitous cell phones would become, when Steve Jobs took the stage and introduced the first iPhone. I remember seeing a picture of Jeff Bezos driving on the old Seattle viaduct in his Honda Civic with a magnet sticker on the door that said Amazon. It seemed like a farfetched idea at the time, to be purchasing products through your computer. Now our lives have completely changed – and these tools and methods have become part of our everyday existence. With that change comes the extinction of critical media and methods that we once relied upon. I used to think that books were forever, but now I really do think the time of paper books is passing. Just as newspapers have been relegated to the recycle bin.

My history with computers goes back to the late 1980s when I left

my job as a landscape architect to work for a software company in Los Angeles. The company was founded on the innovative idea of taking digital pictures, typically from a video camcorder freeze frame and transferring these still images into a computer system to put various hairstyles typically on women. Printing out to a Polaroid picture, it was a moderately successful package of hardware and software. I was experimenting with early imaging at the time, basically tracing on a TV screen to generate hand drawn perspectives, when I heard about the company. Enthusiastic about the possibility of substituting botanicals for hairstyles, I did an interview piece for a magazine in which I spoke to an employee there, a man from San Francisco who had quit his job as a landscaper – and started to create his own database of trees and shrubs.

After the article was published, I was hired by the company and I worked there for about two years, creating the image databases and marketing the equipment. When I left, we had built the foundation for digital imaging in the landscape trade, having sponsored the national convention for the American Society of Landscape Architects in Los Angeles speaking at universities across the country. Our work was featured on ABC World News Tonight and CNN on the same evening. I had traveled internationally for the firm – and I could see the beginnings of what would become the digital revolution in landscape design.

Working with my new "imaging service" I was hired by a company in Seattle that saw potential in the visual work I was doing for landscape design. Moving up from Los Angeles, the system I brought with me was a

286 computer with a flatbed scanner – that cost me almost \$18,000. It was a deal at the time but seems ludicrous now. The evolution of the technology has taken the power of that large unit, improved it 10 times over – and put it into my back pocket. Yes – things have really changed – and yet our work demands the same of us in many ways. Let's talk about how AI can be used to increase the depth of our understanding of our businesses, expand the possibilities of what we can present to clients and work smarter, faster and in a way that is more relaxed, but focused. We can only barely imagine the possibilities that are

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being presented now with the advent of artificial intelligence. Standing as we are at the beginning of this new era – we have no idea how far reaching it is going to become. But importantly for me – this time – this time, I am aware of it. Right now, Ai is being seen as an entertaining plaything that is not well integrated into our daily business activities.

What we aren't really aware of is that Ai is quickly becoming an all pervasive information gathering and dissemination system. It's fast adapting to all the important facets of the economy, from manufacturing to marketing and from journalism to justice – in ways that are going to fundamentally change the way that we work and interact – professionally and socially, just as computers did over the last thirty years. Considering all of this, I am dumbstruck by the fact that these

powerful tools have the ability to focus and positively automate the way that we operate our businesses – and so I wanted to take a few minutes today to talk about that – and distill the myriad complexities of artificial intelligence down to 20 basic ways that Ai can be incorporated into your landscape business.

Lets talk very briefly about the history of Ai. Artificial intelligence is the term first noted by John McCarthy in 1956 at an academic conference that was put together on the subject that machines could think. The idea of Ai has been with us for quite a long time, and while no one can dispute the fact that computers can process logic, it's been a leap of faith to think that machines can actually think for us. Advances in search algorithms have led to exponential increases in the ability for computing power to

generate information – and I think it's not a stretch now to say that Ai can pass what is called the "Turing test", a central tenet of research into artificial intelligence. The "Turing test" questions *whether a computer can ever sufficiently imitate a human, up to a level where a judge would not be able to tell between a human and a machine*. In my view, *that moment is here* – and we see it in the daily influx of information and images that force us to actually question reality – and the nature of truth.

With this conundrum of differing realities and the corresponding confusion that it generates, it's important to keep your wits about you. It's one thing to be confused about an image of a celebrity and whether it is real, it is a whole separate issue to be generating false information and issuing that out as fact

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– to your clients or your employees, whether purposefully or by an error in verification. With this in mind, you need to understand the general limitations of artificial intelligence and how best to manipulate the questions and data that you are inputting, so that you can receive the most accurate information you can find. For the most popular source, you might be using Microsoft's Bing platform using ChatGBT – and in so doing, you will need to come up with a strategy of using the appropriate text or oral prompts. The “prompt”- or your initial question format – is going to guide the message that will be received and processed by the Ai source. You will want to keep records of your image submittals, text prompts and your questions and answers – so that you can finely tune your inquiries, in order to receive the best and most accurate information. These strategies will help you enhance productivity, improve customer service, and streamline various aspects of your business.

So let's think about the top 20 ways that you can incorporate artificial intelligence into your landscape business.

Ways to utilize Ai

Ai can streamline daily office tasks

The daily grind of taking care of a range of mundane office tasks takes up most of my day. Just as you may find yourself spending a disproportionate amount of time generating emails and responding to inquiries and questions, the use of an AI chatbot or another form of AI channel can help you to make this process more efficient and comprehensive. Thinking about this topic and trying to bring it into focus for the GM podcast, I am going to list these various ideas by number as we go along....

1. The place to begin is your standard e-mail. You can easily make e-mail introductions to clients and business associates. Plugging in text prompts such as “Act as a

professional landscape company and respond to this email”, will yield surprising results. You can create thorough and comprehensive business correspondences and set up dialogues related to payment requests or invoices and company promotions. A topic we will talk about in a few minutes is to create a structure for culture building or staff messaging that can be done more thoroughly and easily using a tool such as ChatGBT. OK, so that's maybe 4 things, but because we have a lot to cover here, I am calling this #1.

2. You might try to integrate ChatGPT into your scheduling system to enable clients to schedule appointments, request quotes or make inquiries about availability, saving you time for both clients and the other work. AI-powered chatbots or virtual assistants can handle customer inquiries and provide basic information about services. This helps free up human resources and streamline office operations.

This barely touches on how we can use artificial intelligence to streamline and improve our communications. If you haven't yet tried it, plug a recent complex email from a business contact into ChatGBT and ask it to respond. You might be pleasantly surprised.

Let's talk about how to use Ai chat to improve customer and client interaction.

I had a problematic client recently that owed us about 30K. I was responding to a bit of an acrimonious e-mail from him related to the fact that, because he had not made his payments and was unresponsive, we had placed a lien on his property to ensure payment. Always an unpleasant task to do, I tried to set a professional and pragmatic tone to my email response. On a whim, I copied his e-mail into ChatGBT,

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Industry Feature *continued from page 17*

issuing the prompt “act as if you were a professional landscape businessperson responding to this letter”. The Ai spit out a very comprehensive and professional letter – in about 5 seconds – that pretty much blew my letter out of the water. I actually followed up with a second response to the client after reading it. This was an eye opener for me – and has informed my thinking about how we can open up to the possibility of artificial intelligence in our normal business day-to-day operations. Since that time, I have used this tool to write correspondence related to warranty responses and other daily communications.

3. One area to consider is to integrate artificial intelligence chat into your Customer Service Support. Implement Chat GPT as a virtual assistant on your website or social media platforms to handle customer inquiries, provide information about services and offer basic support.
4. You can also use Ai to measure Customer sentiment and perform client research. AI-powered sentiment analysis can analyze customer feedback from various online sources and social media channels to identify trends, gauge customer satisfaction and help you to address concerns promptly. This helps businesses improve their services and enhances customer experiences.
5. Consider using Ai to perform Troubleshooting and to generate FAQs. You can train Chat GPT with frequently asked questions and common troubleshooting scenarios to help clients troubleshoot minor issues or find answers to common horticultural, construction or company process queries without needing direct staff assistance. You can also use Ai chat easily for Client Communication and Support. Chat

GBT can handle client inquiries, provide quick responses, and offer basic guidance throughout the design and implementation process. You can also use Ai to generate Maintenance Tips, going so far as to direct answers to use specific products or to respond with natural – process solutions. Use this to develop a knowledge base for Chat GPT to provide clients with monthly maintenance information, seasonal watering schedules, and site specific care instructions. This can help clients maintain their landscapes effectively and can be an impressive and immersive experience between your company and client.

A helpful use of Ai is to organize a framework that allows it to provide Feedback and Review. You can integrate Chat GPT into your feedback and review system to gather valuable insights from clients, collect testimonials, and address any concerns or issues they may have.

6. Chat GBT can educate clients about sustainable landscape practices and suggest eco-friendly design options, providing insights on water conservation and eco-friendly materials. A structured outline made using Ai can provide real-time advice on plant care, troubleshooting, pest management and information on making the necessary improvements to regenerate habitat.

The daily back and forth can be improved in simple but effective ways by using a range of low cost or free productivity applications. (*Check out the GM episode about Office Systems for more insight into this.*) Now, with the integration of Ai tools, we can take this even further.

We have only just begun to explore the many ways Ai can redefine how we design and estimate.

I was experimenting with the Discord Ai image processing application “Mid-Journey” recently, and became fascinated with the idea of taking a background image and – by submitting a careful series of text prompts, developing loosely directed photo realistic design details to the image, in order to present a concept idea to a client. (*You can see some examples of this on the Green Meridian FaceBook page. Simply search Ai or MidJourney.*) This is an amazing new tool for us with fantastic possibilities. You can experiment in a limited way with Mid Journey at no charge through the Discord app. I would suggest that you play around with it a bit. You will be amazed.

One limitation right now is the inability to lock in the background image sufficiently in order to manipulate the foreground. In this regard, these image generators will usually *alter the background image* so that it becomes a more stylistic view of the general architecture, rather than the actual building you might be working with. Regardless, this is evolving and may already be fixed. I think that the new “Firefly Generative Ai” upgrade for Photoshop. The software actually has an AI generated function that will do this. I have not experimented with that yet.

7. You can use artificial intelligence chat to generate a wide array of Design Suggestions. Using image processed Ai concepts or Chat GPT text prompts, you can generate design suggestions for clients by providing relevant information such as preferences, dimensions, and desired features. This can help you offer personalized recommendations and streamline the design process. One of the most powerful tools available to us is the ability to use image generating applications to

present a variety of Image concepts. In addition, AI can assist you in generating landscape designs by analyzing various factors such as site conditions, client preferences, and design principles. Chat GBT can act as a virtual assistant, providing design suggestions and recommendations based on input criteria.

When you perform site research and study the environmental issues affecting a property, you can use artificial intelligence to perform an Energy Efficiency Analysis. Ai algorithms can evaluate energy consumption patterns and recommend landscape design modifications to improve energy efficiency.

8. We know that we are on the cusp of a very real and fundamental change in the way that we can present our finished work as an immersive experience using Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR). Very soon we will be able to fully utilize AI-powered VR and AR tools to create immersive experiences for clients, walking through their actual outdoor environment with an interpolation of the existing architecture and plant materials this information can be overlaid in real time with proposed new elements and solutions.... Imagine the possibilities with this! Clients will be able to visualize proposed designs and make informed decisions before implementation, improving collaboration and improving your overall design work.
9. We can use Image recognition for landscape design, as AI can analyze images of landscapes and generate design recommendations or suggest suitable plant species based on factors like soil conditions, climate, and client preferences. This can speed up the design process and improve accuracy. AI image recognition technology can identify elements within images, helping you gather design inspiration from photographs, artworks, and existing

landscapes. Chat GBT can assist in sourcing relevant images and offer design suggestions based on the identified elements.

10. You can also use Ai for ongoing Design Collaboration. AI-powered platforms enable real-time collaboration with clients and team members, allowing you to share design ideas, gather feedback, and make revisions efficiently. Chat GBT can facilitate the exchange of design concepts and gather preferences from multiple stakeholders.
11. An immediate and game changing use of Ai that you can use right now is in generating Plant lists and Material Recommendations. You can quickly train Chat GPT to provide a comprehensive database of plants, materials, and their characteristics based upon The USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map or other criteria. Clients can then receive personalized recommendations based on their preferences, location, and specific project requirements. AI algorithms can analyze environmental data, including soil type, sunlight exposure, and climate conditions, to suggest suitable plant species and materials for specific landscapes. Chat GBT can provide detailed information about plants, their care requirements, and design implications.
12. Another key ability that we needs developing is effectively using Ai for Cost Estimation and Budgeting. Ai tools can analyze project specifications, material costs, and labor requirements to generate accurate cost estimates and assist with budgeting. Chat GBT can answer cost-related queries, provide pricing information, and suggest cost-effective alternatives. I can envision a time in the not too distant future in which you are estimating to provide materials

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based upon real time inventories from local suppliers and placing orders for those materials right from your computer directly from the estimate as work is approved. This capability exists now – and has just not been integrated fully. *Are you listening Aspire and LMN?*

I am hopeful that the big Cad players, Autodesk, LandFX, Vectorworks and others, will incorporate Ai functionality into their platforms very soon. I suspect that the estimating packages will be slow adapters, but we will see. There is a lot of upside to this, so they need to get on it.

Ai can help to restructure your project management process.

Project management takes up a lot of my time. Some of it can be mind numbingly redundant, as I am answering questions that are typical in the process of construction or planting, layout or supply overall. You want to be able to bring a reliable professionalism and god – forbid, passion into your dialogue, but finding the time and mental focus is just sometimes not there. There are a number of things that – especially in a repeated sense, could be made more streamlined and comprehensive through an integration with artificial intelligence.

13. Weather impacts our daily production – and can be made more predictable than we it has been in the past. When we consider using artificial intelligence for Weather monitoring and a corresponding production scheduling adjustment, AI can integrate with weather APIs and sensors in real time to monitor weather conditions. It can then make automatic adjustments to irrigation systems, maintenance schedules, or recommend appropriate services based on the weather forecast.

14. Another helpful tool will be the capacity to be using AI for sprinkler maintenance and Irrigation Management. AI-powered systems can monitor weather forecasts, moisture levels, and other relevant factors to optimize irrigation schedules and plant maintenance.

Much of project management for most of us is coordinated on site and by cellphone, away from our desks. This can limit our ability to professionally respond. Ai is a powerful tool that can bring a new level of responsiveness and detail to these important aspects of what we do.

One easy fix using Ai right now is to use these tools to improve company culture and team building

After a lot of dialogue back and forth and the best of intentions, we have – like you probably – struggled with hiring and developing an effective and skilled working team. Formalizing our training offerings at the office weekly and monthly, I have been using ChatGBT to assist with this process. If you haven't noticed already, you'll know that I like to use a compartmentalized version of thinking to distill and simplify complex topics. This helps when I am training a new designer, for example – a person that may have moved from out of state and needs to learn plant materials or something of that nature. I was that guy once. I felt lost and intimidated by the broad range of botanicals that I would need to know, not to mention the myriad suppliers and tradespeople to network. My feeling is that – if you can learn the fundamental top 10 items in a certain category, you will go a long way toward learning it overall. *(A good example of this is the GM podcast episodes "The Dozen Things We Do", presented in two parts. Check that out when you can.)*

We can – of course, never learn everything that we need to know – and therein lies the beauty of our work. The green- industry trades keep us curious, as new materials are introduced daily. We are always developing and evolving. In my recent efforts to put together comprehensive training programs, I presented a workshop for our design staff recently – on *"The Top Ten Garden Pests in the Pacific Northwest -and their Natural Process Controls"*. I had put together a painstaking list and was about ready to publish it – when, *again on a whim* – I pasted a prompt into ChatGPT asking that it basically “act as a professional trainer, and list out the top 10 garden pests in the Pacific Northwest and their natural process remedies”. As you might expect, ChatGBT immediately spit out a very comprehensive list – that made my list look like a novice. Again, I was blown away by this simplicity and surprisingly comprehensive ability to generate detailed information. With a bit of editing, this became the bulk of the training session.

15. So with this in mind, I am suggesting that you utilize ChatGBT as a powerful tool for training. If you make an outline of the main items that you want to train as topics – and you set up let's say- a weekly meeting or a periodic session for discussion, you can simply fill out most of the information fairly accurately using artificial intelligence in the form of ChatGPT to provide an outline for you. This can go so far as to be used in a way that you can generate a live image training avatar as well, *but keeping things down to earth right now*, I think it's best to just use it for an easy handout outline.

Personalized messaging, detailed and individualized information – and the ability to create professional documents, images and presentations can be a useful tool,

if you integrate Ai into your staff correspondences.

Consider using Ai to reinforce Office infrastructure and to direct your Fleet and equipment care

One of the most difficult aspects of a business to keep up with are all of the decisions related to running an office, caring for a fleet of vehicles, and maintaining and ordering hand tools and power equipment. You can use artificial intelligence to help to collate this information and present it to you in a way that makes the work predictable and manageable .

16. One simple way to use AI in the office – is to set up systems around Energy efficiency and sustainability. We have all seen how you can control lights with a Google nest

or an Alexa. AI can optimize energy consumption by controlling lighting, heating, and cooling systems based on occupancy and usage patterns.

17. Another powerful aspect of artificial intelligence is to use it to organize around Equipment maintenance and optimization. AI can monitor equipment sensors to detect maintenance needs or potential breakdowns, allowing for timely repairs and reducing downtime. Additionally, AI can optimize equipment usage, suggesting efficient routes or schedules for tasks.

With a bit of work, you can use Ai as a tool to monitor and report when inventory levels need replenishing, when orders need to happen based upon seasonality

and when the oil needs to be changed (in Truck #3, you know – the cranky one with the cracked window and rusted toolbox).

You can plan use Ai to better understand your business by forecasting and business modeling

Business planning can be a luxury for many of us, with the combination of tax deadlines, payroll , marketing and all of the vagaries around weather and production that can throw a spanner in your gears – as you try to simply manage your business. Remember the recession and the pandemic and how you were back on your heels? Forecasting is a useful tool for business plan-

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ning. That noted, it is one of the more difficult aspects of business analysis – and as such can be a vexing and complex mix of topics, a heady brew that can put you into an analysis paralysis around managing your business for the long term. Artificial intelligence can help with this.

18. I think that probably the most powerful tool in this portion of the toolbox – is the ability to take a lot of arcane information that you probably have already, that is sitting on your computer in Quickbooks or your CRM and that you do not really use fully. Looking at historical data within your company, you can plug this information into Predictive analytics for demand forecasting. Using income statements, balance sheets and other financial records as well as historical weather data, SEO input and a myriad of other information, Ai algorithms can analyze this and other relevant factors to forecast demand for landscaping services. This allows the business to allocate resources effectively and optimize scheduling. Another management tool is Ai for Data Analysis and Trend Identification. An Ai algorithm can analyze large datasets, including historical landscape designs, demographic changes in your region and market trends, to identify patterns and predict future design preferences.

19. Given the proper information from your company records, you can use artificial intelligence for Resource allocation and scheduling. Ai algorithms can optimize the allocation of resources such as labor, vehicles, and equipment based on factors like project requirements, location, and staff availability. This ensures efficient resource utilization and improves productivity.

20. Chat GBT can provide insights into emerging landscape design

trends and help you stay ahead of the curve. With Data-driven decision-making, Ai can analyze vast amounts of data from various sources, such as customer feedback, market trends, and operational metrics. This enables landscape businesses to make informed decisions on service offerings, marketing strategies and resource allocation.

For many of us, business planning is something that we might do in an idealized world, where we didn't have to deal with the broken truck and the guy that didn't show up for work today. But you should just get into it. Start measuring your business metrics in a realistic way that allows you to check on this data on a routine basis. Check out the blog and YouTube feeds from The Harvest Group, Grunder Landscape and Yes Express on this – just to know where to start your tune-up.

Conclusion

It's a brave new world out there. The information is coming to us fast and furious. Clients and business associates have ever shorter attention spans and demand a high degree of complexity and realism in presentations, an immediacy in responses and the ability for you to adjust pricing to fit production. Clients will require ever more imaginative and innovative solutions now, as environmental improvements that we suggest months before a project breaks ground may be slow to adapt to rapid climate change and the needs of a population on the move. It's important to note that implementing Ai solutions should be done in a thoughtful and responsible manner, considering factors like data privacy, ethical considerations, and the need for human oversight in critical decision-making processes. Remember, that while Ai and chat GBT can

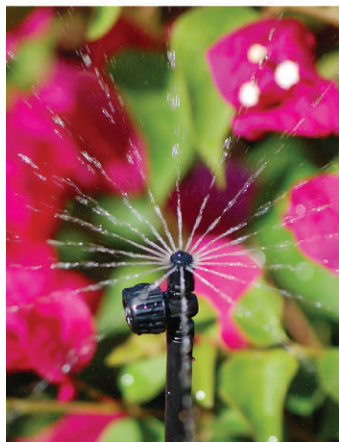
provide valuable assistance, *they should augment your expertise as a landscape designer rather than replace it.* That human touch and individual creative vision remain essential for successful landscape design. *For now anyway, until our robot overlords take over. (Oh, and just for the record – I have to say with a bit of trepidation – that a lot of the text in this podcast was generated by Chat GBT. Hey, Thanks Bing! Who would have thought I would ever say that!)* 🌿

Alan Burke is a graduate of the University of South Florida and the University of Florida. He has a background as a practicing landscape architect in Los Angeles and Seattle. Pacific Magazine, The Los Angeles Times Magazine, Northwest Home+Garden and American Home Magazine have featured his design work and a residential garden design that he prepared at the request of the editors of Sunset Magazine is displayed on the back cover of the first edition of The Sunset Western Landscaping Book. His company, Classic Nursery & Landscape Company (classicznursery.com) of almost 40 years, has over 3000 followers on social media and has earned numerous awards. In the Spring of 2021, Alan and Julie sold their company to Alki Partners, LLC, where Alan works now as Design director. In 2021, he formed a consulting firm, 'The Outdoor Project Company' (theoutdoorprojectcompany.com/). He also curates a landscape industry group, 'Green Meridian' on Facebook – and produces the 'Green Meridian Podcast', a design/build oriented series of talks available on Spotify and other platforms.

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- **Erwin Newell**, vice president of business development and irrigation, TriEst Ag Group (Tampa, Florida)
- **Todd Polderman**, vice president of marketing for landscape irrigation and outdoor lighting, Hunter Industries (San Marcos, California)
- **Mark Stuhlsatz, CIT, CLIA**, regional vice president, Ryan Lawn and Tree (Mission, Kansas)


These directors started their terms at the conclusion of the 2023 Irrigation Show and Education Week and joined the 11 other members who are continuing their terms from previous years. The IA Board is made up of 15 elected leaders in the irrigation industry.

The IA welcomes these new leaders to the board and the association. Their contributions are essential to the IA's work to elevate the impact and value of the industry and create an environment where irrigation businesses can thrive and grow.

"Our four new directors bring highly respected experience and expertise to the IA Board," said IA CEO Natasha Rankin, MBA, CAE. "I look forward to the insights and contributions each of them brings to the IA Board as we carry

out our mission to be the recognized authority in efficient irrigation. We appreciate the commitment these industry leaders provide to the IA and its members and their efforts to further the industry and association's long-term sustainability and growth."

The IA Board of Directors is tasked with establishing the association's strategic direction, policies and programs. Directors are nominated and elected each year by members of the association and represent the diversity of member types and market segments.

To learn more about the IA Board of Directors and view the complete roster, visit www.irrigation.org/boardofdirectors. 

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