

PROS IN EXCELLENCE 2008 RUNNERS-UP

ADVANTAGE LAWN CARE & LANDSCAPING IN NELSONIA, VA

- **Founded:** 1994
- **Business Breakdown:** 50% lawn care, 25% installation, 10% maintenance, 10% irrigation, 5% snowplowing
- **Customer Breakdown:** 70% commercial, 30% residential

Rurally located Advantage Lawn Care & Landscaping has built up its customer base almost entirely by word of mouth. Free estimates and a wide array of services simplify the customer's life, which has ultimately aided in a 95% customer retention rate.

In an effort to obtain new sales leads, owner James Linton says he also stays in touch with general contractors in the area when he sees sites under construction. Whether it's sod installation, irrigation or landscaping, Advantage is able to deliver.

On the operations side, Linton recently purchased an Asus A626 Pocket PC by Dell for each of his lawn care trucks. "The device gives our lawn care supervisor access to GPS and the CLIP2Go program," Linton explains. "These programs also allow our lawn care technicians to work more efficiently." Notes from the field and client calls are immediately entered into the Asus A626. "Every night the devices are

synched with the office computer, ensuring that the posting is always up to date," Linton adds.

While on the road, Linton says he provides on-site quotes whenever possible, or at least within 24 hours.

"I'm having a printer installed in my truck so that, using my laptop, I'll be able to provide all quotes on-site," Linton points out.

"We will also have remote access to QuickBooks, giving us full access to client info on the road. We're hoping this will reduce office paperwork considerably while also saving the client three or four days of wait time." ■



LANDSCAPE SERVICES & TOTAL LAWN CARE IN TUPELO, MS

- **Founded:** 1982
- **Business Breakdown:** 50% installation, 40% maintenance and lawn care, 10% irrigation
- **Customer Breakdown:** 70% residential, 30% commercial

With an even mix of design/build and maintenance business, Landscape Services & Total Lawn Care's sales have more than doubled since 2004. Very little traditional advertising is done. Monthly newsletters are sent to existing customers. But most business is derived

from word of mouth. And if the stellar work this company provides isn't enough to get people talking, their fleet of 12 hot pink trucks is.

This type of "fleet advertising," coupled with targeted marketing in specific neighborhoods, has allowed Landscape Services &

Total Lawn Care to maintain route density and grow in specific areas.

To help channel that growth into profitability, several new standard operating procedures were devised and introduced in 2002. "These processes stem from sales leads to job time reporting,"

says co-owner Harry Collins. "All processes are implemented with both an approach of simplicity and a checks and balance."

Landscape Services & Total Lawn Care holds annual three-day strategic planning meetings,

along with four quarterly meetings to review goals. "Our goals are specific—with specific actions to be completed," Collins points out. For example, "buy two new trailers out of cash flow" accomplishes two goals: 1) remain debt-free, and 2) maintain crew efficiency with new

equipment and reduced downtime.

Setting and accomplishing goals aren't the only things Collins and his partners are serious about. Reducing employee turnover is another focal point.

"We developed an interview guide which is completed on each applicant in a multi-part process," Collins tells. Applicants first fill out an application providing job history, references and a driver's license. Second, the application is reviewed and the references are checked out. Third, an interview is scheduled and a complete three-page interview guide is completed.

"Once hired an employee is placed on a two-week review where we have a rapid elevated pay schedule," Collins explains. "Before implementing this system, our process was pretty much hire the first person who walked through the door after someone else quit." ■



Pete Poland (left), Harry Collins (right) and Chris Winders (not pictured) are the owners of Landscape Services & Total Lawn Care.

