

# What's Best for Our Clients ... and Planet

Bill Horn of Terracare Associates talks about serving commercial clients, and how sustainability is coming into play more and more.

**Q**: As a specialist in commercial landscape maintenance, what are you doing to provide that “value” clients are looking for? In today’s market, like it or not, low price often wins. We need to be able to bid a price that’s not as high as it was four or five years ago, but still deliver a quality product. Thus, we need to be state of the art with our equipment, processes, business management software and training regimen. We’re constantly searching for ways to do things faster and better.

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It also helps that we have many tenured employees. When you don’t have to go back to square one every season, it’s easier to switch gears and say, “We’re going to do this job *this way* now in order to keep clients happy but still make a buck at the end of the day.” Furthermore, we have several employees who are certified in different areas. We have always placed a very high value on

certification. In fact, I’ve been involved with it since the early 1980s. Having so many certified people on staff has really helped with our internal training program.

Finally, we’ve created the position of “director of business development and marketing” within our company. As your company grows, you really need to think about marketing materials and technology—maintaining a good website, writing a blog, and being available on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. That’s where clients and young people are going these days, and that’s where a lot of business is being done now. Having somebody who’s driving these things has been a huge plus. We’d always had a strong sales force, but that was done at a branch level. We needed something extra with continuity at a corporate level. The continuity of your message is critical today.

**Q**: What role is sustainability playing in your maintenance operations? My passion for sustainable landscaping started at my own house; I’d converted almost my entire front lawn into an edible garden. What

we’re preaching to clients now is the concept of meaningful vs. non-meaningful turfgrass. Turfgrass on a soccer field is great, but turfgrass just for the sake of having turfgrass probably isn’t.

We’re having some success in selling conversions to some property managers, substituting things like native plant beds for patches of turfgrass. We educate the client on how this will help them save money over time, but will still be aesthetically pleasing. And you don’t have to do it all at once; budget for small sections at a time and phase it in.

**Q**: Aren’t you concerned that this could ultimately lead to a reduced need for the maintenance services you provide? I’m interested in what’s best for our planet as a whole. Besides, we’re still going to have our work—it’s just going to be a different kind of work. ◀



Bill Horn, a Landscape Industry Certified Manager and 30-plus-year veteran of the industry, is the vice president of Terracare Associates based in Littleton, CO.