

Keeping Facility Grounds In Top Shape

The logo for Turf, featuring the word "Turf" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. A green grass blade graphic is integrated into the letter 'T'.The logo for Tree Services, featuring the words "Tree Services" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. A small green leaf graphic is above the 'e' in "Services". Below the main text is the tagline "Taking Tree Care to New Heights" in a smaller, italicized font.The logo for DesignBuild, featuring the word "Design" in a black, sans-serif font and "Build" in a bold, orange, sans-serif font. A small orange square graphic is above the 'i' in "Design".The logo for PLOW, featuring the word "PLOW" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The letters are slightly slanted to the right.

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By Christine Menapace

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Imagine a workplace that attracts top hires, increases employee productivity, reduces healthcare costs, and even saves money. Sound too good to be true? Perhaps not. But it may require looking beyond the building envelope to capitalize on the beneficial effects of the outdoors. "It has even been called the new 'workplace frontier,'" says Megan Horn, principal with BrightView Design Group & Pre Development.

Benefits Of Outdoor Workspaces

In an initiative launched this past June, outdoor retailer L.L. Bean partnered with coworking provider, Industrious, and workplace strategy expert Leigh Stringer, author of *The Healthy Workplace: How to Improve the Well-Being of Your Employee—and Boost Your Company's Bottom Line*, to better understand the benefits and barriers of the outdoor environment as it relates to work. The L.L.Bean 2018 Work and the Outdoors Survey revealed:



This past summer, L.L.Bean debuted its first outdoor co-working space in partnership with Industrious, complete with individual workspaces, collaborative conference areas, cycling desks, and outdoor team building activities, to encourage people to spend more time outdoors. (Photo: Elena Saido)

- 82% of indoor workers liked or loved the concept of an outdoor workspace.
- Workers believe there are tangible benefits to working outside. The top five perceived benefits are: improved mood (74%); lowered stress level (71%); relaxation (69%); promotion of health and wellness (66%); and

increased happiness (64%)

- Respondents say they are most likely to do creative work (77%), brainstorm (73%), or one-on-one discussions (73%) outside. They are least likely to do computer-based work (41%) or conference calls (32%).

Steve Smith, President and CEO of L.L.Bean, said he hopes the initiative “will inspire employees to be creative in finding new ways to incorporate outdoor time in their day. We also hope that by demonstrating the benefits, employers will be supportive of this idea.”

Take the case of Pasadena, CA based Alexandria Real Estate Equities, Inc., which has won multiple awards for its “cluster model” of sustainable buildings and campuses. It cites its mission as “to create ecosystems that ignite and accelerate the world’s most innovative companies.” This means, among other things, providing amenities such as multi-use open green spaces and organic gardens (with accompanying cafes) for its life science tenant companies. At the Torrey Pines Science Park in San Diego, CA, employees can reportedly enjoy lunchtime bocce games, a barbeque patio, or sit in an Adirondack chair beside a garden. “It’s not just the building—it’s also a lifestyle,” Daniel Ryan, Alexandria’s San Diego regional marketing director and executive vice president told the La Jolla Light. “What’s unique about this is the ability to really accelerate discovery.”

Horn concurs. “Having outdoor amenities within and part of the workplace landscape provides opportunity for employees to be more active, and to engage with nature and their peers. This more casual and natural environment provides varied social opportunities that contribute to team building and finding opportunities for casual conversations and engagement—and potential innovations.”

Commercial Landscape Trends

For facility executives, the message is clear: inviting outdoor spaces can not only enhance corporate perception, but can facilitate meaningful work. And measures need not be extreme. Walking paths, shade canopies, comfortable seating, and attractive landscaping can all go a long way. In fact, the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) reports 7% higher rental rates for commercial offices having high-quality landscapes. According to NALP, some of the current trends in commercial landscapes include:



After an initial conversion project delivered significant water and cost savings, Oracle plans to install smart irrigation products at all its California locations. (Photo: Oracle)

Experiential landscape design. Walking and biking paths, outdoor eating areas, garden views, and even the aforementioned bocce or BBQ areas all allow interaction with nature and peers. “Having beautiful grounds makes a facility more inviting to work for, and some companies have developed walking paths and garden areas for employees to have lunch,” says Brian Schoenthaler, marketing coordinator for Grasshopper. “Grounds are typically not high on the

order of facilities. However, besides the buildings, they reflect on the company's image... Landscaping design of new facilities is becoming a higher priority than previous years."

Climate-cognizant landscaping. Design elements like hardier hardscape materials, retractable awnings, and outdoor heaters allow for extreme or unpredictable weather patterns. Horn comments, "Our best recommendation is to understand the natural processes that impact sites, to work with nature instead of against it, and leveraging the landscape's inherent ability to respond and repair."

Water management and conservation. Native plant use (accustomed to the climate and less water dependent); xeriscaping (designing with low-water use plants); and smarter irrigation technology can aid in more sustainable landscapes—and great cost savings. At Oracle's Redwood City and Santa Clara, CA facilities, a savings of \$573,000 was realized by converting 50 conventional controllers to smart controllers over a three-month period. The project saved 91 million gallons of potable water in one year, reducing consumption by 29%.

"We take the plant type, sprinkler type, slope, and soil type and combine them into a formula to determine the water needs for each zone," says Brandon DeYoung, vice president general manager at BrightView, which conducted the conversion at Oracle and maintains the grounds. "The controllers also alert us of any issues from the last water cycle." In addition to using HydroPoint WeatherTRAK controllers, BrightView planted native plants and changed to drip irrigation with high-efficient matched precipitation rate nozzles. With awards from the Silicon Valley Water Conservation Awards Coalition, Oracle has decided to install smart irrigation products at all its California locations.

Enhanced Equipment

The many forms of new technology are indeed making their mark on landscaping equipment, perhaps most notably in the area of ergonomics. According to NALP, the latest tools on the market "consider ease of use and storage while incorporating more eco-friendly innovations. Many lawn mowers, leaf blowers and similar equipment feature low or no emissions, are battery-powered, and are quieter."

Ergonomics. Landscape equipment manufacturers agree. "Consider the cost of finding, training and replacing [service] employees," says Schoenthaler. "Grasshopper spends a tremendous amount of time in testing and designing products that are durable and ergonomic for the operator." He continues, "Grasshopper mowers are built with the operator in mind. Seats and footrests are iso-mounted to eliminate vibration to the operator. Hydra-smooth, swing-away steering levers are dampened to provide that comfortable Grasshopper feel and they return to neutral when let go. The result is a smoother ride that leaves the employee less fatigued at the end of the day and helps retain employees."

Pierre Pereira, director of sales, N.A. for Billy Goat Industries Inc. also

sees more ergonomics built into their products. "It used to be a chore product, but the last few years, it's all about making the job easier." He mentions how heavy, boxy and noisy backpack blowers with steel housings are now being replaced by lighter, rounder, quieter ones of composite materials.

Productivity. Evolving product design is also making tasks less time consuming. "Mechanical transmissions couldn't match the actual ground speed to the work," says Pereira. "Now hydro drive transmissions make that easier." Mentioning Billy Goat's new self-propelled PLUGR 25" Hydro-Drive Aerator, he says moving from drum style to reciprocating technology also offers advances in production speed. It's also easier to maneuver with smoother turning without lifting.

Grasshopper uses the time savings of its zero turn maneuverability and applies it to snow removal, leaf collection, clearing sidewalks, edging, and more. With the company's FrontMount™ Power Units, operators remove the front-mounted cutting deck and replace it with commercial-grade implements that cost less than walk-behind or backpack implements. Tasks can also be finished in less time, with less labor.

Connectivity. "Professionals are also integrating more technology—mobile apps, 3D modeling, and drones—into landscape planning," asserts NALP.

At Billy Goat, a major enhancement has been its "text to video" informational program, available across its entire rental product line. Visual guidance from basic use to changing a belt can be accessed with a text. "It's a game changer for facilities executives and their personnel," comments Pereira. He expects telemetrics and "connectivity to your machine" will be an even greater focus moving forward. "Imagine thinking, 'Did he cut the back quad?' then checking your computer or mobile device and seeing it was cut at 2pm on Wednesday," he says.

Pereira recalls a presentation from Adam Lawver, director of campus services at Michigan State University, on developing an evidence-based Landscape Management Plan model that is revolutionizing how the university's Landscape Services group manages and funds the maintenance of the 2,100-acre developed campus. It involved intelligently mapping the entire campus down to the last sprinkler and equipping personnel with over 1,100 mobile devices, says Pereira. "All the jobs and details are there on your device. From a facility point of view, think of how valuable that is."

Lawver writes, "A landscape management plan with focused metrics is critical to maintain a safe and aesthetically pleasing physical environment. We decided to go one step further and align the campus master plan and the landscape management plan—the long-term theoretical vision and the day-to-day operational reality—with realistic metrics that allow us to strategically manage with limited resources." Pereira says the project started with one section to justify the numbers. "It's amazing. The huge efficiency gains make it pay for itself."

"Anything that can help you understand, track, manage and analyze your site certainly is valuable," says Horn. "Long-term data collection will deepen

your understanding of the site, and be highly informative for maintenance planning and evaluation. I suspect it would also assist in management and overall facility planning.”

As a final thought, Horn says, “If we look to our university and college campuses you’ll see a very high value placed on the outdoor environment. There’s a direct correlation to successful student recruitment and enrollment. Applying this same sort of attitude—that the exterior environment is the new ‘workforce frontier’ is different than the neat, clean, and somewhat non-descript landscapes of corporate America. While change is slow, we are seeing significant new design and retrofit projects that represent rethinking outdoor environments and making them more social, more dynamic, and more sustainable.”

Menapace served as a former managing editor of [Facility Executive](#) for six years. Currently a professional freelance writer and editor, she has over 25 years of experience in publishing, journalism, copywriting, and marketing.

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