

Exceeding Expectations



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Indiana landscape company enhances clients' properties with all the small details



Wesley Addington started in the industry in 1990 when he mowed lawns in the neighborhood with his brother. The business is now a million-dollar company with 16 employees.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WESLEY'S LANDSCAPING AND LAWN CARE.

Wesley Addington's love for landscaping dates back to 1990, when he and his older brother, Nathan, used push mowers to mow lawns in their neighborhood in Carmel, Ind. A few years later, the boys upgraded to riding mowers with trailers to transport their push mowers around the neighborhood.

Their service area expanded, and Nathan took another job while Addington continued to serve clients after school, continuing to grow the business.

In October 1999, Addington enrolled in the Indiana National Guard and served for six years. After fulfilling his military commitments, he went back to running his landscape company.

Business basics

Since then, Addington has turned his \$200,000 company with two employees into a million-dollar company with 16 employees. Wesley's Landscaping & Lawn care services Hamilton County, 20 miles north of Indianapolis. Services include lawn maintenance, landscape design/build, hardscaping, fertilization, commercial/HOA services, and snow and ice removal for the commercial sector and homeowners' associations. The design/build services include landscape sketch or design, new construction, landscape makeovers and low-maintenance designs.

Lawn care includes a six-step fertilization program, core aeration,

overseeding, monthly steel edging, irrigation maintenance, weekly weeding for properties mulched by the company, grub and insect control, pruning, and spring and fall cleanup.

Other maintenance services are bed preparation, including weeding, dead heading and cutting back ornamental grasses; trenching (elaborating bed definition between turf and mulch with a 2 to 4-inch trench around all beds); and preemergent weed barrier prior to mulch installation

For hardscaping services, the company installs natural stone or paver patios, walkways, retaining walls, seat walls, fire pits, fireplaces, steps, outdoor kitchens and bars, pergolas and water features.

The services offered to homeowners' associations include weekly mowing, fertilization, irrigation maintenance, tree and shrub planting, bed maintenance, mulching, landscape enhancements and seasonal flower installation.

When the company does a landscape plan or design for a newly-constructed home, Addington says, "We'll put a plan together for a client and follow up once we're in the process of doing a maintenance proposal for doing all of the maintenance work. It goes back to relationships and meeting or exceeding expectations," he says. "Once you do that and have a relationship where you're working through the process of a proposal, the designs and changing designs, you're more apt to upsell on the maintenance side of it."

When designing, Addington seeks to satisfy the desires of clients who want low maintenance. "We plant low-maintenance shrubs and put a little bit more mulch on the beds so they don't get the weeding as much," he says. "We try to make one large plant bed between the trees for ease of maintenance."



The landscaping at this residence was done by Wesley's. Spring mulching is the largest seller in the company's landscape division.

Going "green"

Addington's company has not adopted an organic approach, because in his area organic products are high-priced. "I'm all about going green, and we are the green leaders," he says. "We have to do things like recycle the pots and do things outside of the norm as far as fertilizer, but it's not cost-effective to do organics. We've had a few requests to go organic, and once we give a quote to them, they tell us they can live without going green."

Addington notes the nationwide move toward emissions controls and a reduction in chemical use. "We are the green industry," he says. "We should be the leaders in it and pushing for recycling. There's a strong need for leaders to take action and I'm one of them."

High-end clients

The company primarily services the high-end residential sector and homeowners' associations. Addington says most of his clients have not been

significantly affected by the recession.

"I've always had a strong belief that there's a lot of loyalty there," Addington says of the residential sector. "There are relationships there, and I feel like with commercial, in a sense, you put all of your eggs in one basket. I like to have multiple residential clients because they refer [us] to friends. Our mission statement is all about referring, so people refer good service to other people's friends and family and co-workers."

The company's philosophy is to enhance clients' properties while exceeding their expectations. "At the point of the referral, our management staff meets to take our mission statement apart and talk about how we can enhance that client's property and do the small details that will exceed their expectations, such as painting the light post out front," he says.

Giving back

Addington has established a good reputation in the community. "I've been doing this since I was 11 years old, and now I'm 31 and I have a real good standing in the community," he says. "Folks know us. We do good work. They see our trucks everywhere." The company participates in the Green Care for Troops program. As someone who was in the military, he wholeheartedly supports the program, although he hasn't had any local requests for help. "I wish there was more use of it here, because I'm all about giving back and doing the right thing," he says. "I would love to help someone out in need like that. If their spouse is overseas, I'd be more than happy to do whatever it took at no charge."



The 2009 company picture at Wesley's Landscaping and Lawncare's headquarters.

The right employees

In looking for a potential employee, Addington says, "It's important to focus on the position and not the person. We focus on what we need."

He looks for a good attitude and character in a potential employee, and what qualities they possess that reflect the company's mission statement. He also has a keen eye on how they present themselves. "There are a lot of times I'll have someone else interview a candidate and I'll sneak out to their car and make sure it's clean," he says. "I think it's important we present ourselves in a clean manner. We're pulling up to a million-dollar house. We have to create a good first impression."

Because his is a relatively small company, he also looks for someone comfortable with teamwork and the ability to be flexible. On the other hand, he likes each employee to have strength in at least one area the company covers. For instance, the employee who does fertilizing is apt not to be spending time mowing lawns.

Getting ahead

One of the company's biggest challenges is understanding the numbers.

"It's really important with the way the economy has been in the last two years. We've dove into our numbers to meet the challenge," he says. So, Addington hired Marty Grunder, Inc. to provide business consulting. "A lot of us smaller companies get lost in the day-to-day operations, and I'm trying to act a little more 'presidential' rather than operational in creating these core values and mission statements, continually having sales and business development meetings with our management staff, trying to get everyone's buy-in and cooperation so we're all on the same page," Addington says. "Communication is huge."

The company has put together a budget and will use it moving forward. "Doing a budget is great. We have done one in the past, but we're sticking to it this year and reviewing it," he says. "Five years from now, I'd like to say we're pushing over \$2 million."



Seasonal color at a residential property courtesy of Wesley's Landscaping and Lawncare.

Addington is predicting a million-dollar year due to shifting his business strategies. "There are inexpensive things you can do to improve as a businessperson and a leader," he says.

He puts an emphasis on marketing. Part of that is image, with employees wearing uniforms, and the trucks and trailers bearing the company's branding and colors. He does not want his employees parking the truck at gas stations in the morning, hanging out. "That's a waste of time," he says.

The company runs a fleet of Ford trucks and Exmark products, as well as Stihl weed eaters and blowers. Addington believes it's important to use the same vendor's equipment for consistency in parts. "You have to be able to repair it quick, get back out on the field and start making money," he says.

The equipment list also includes a PermaGreen Spreader Sprayer. He's planning on buying an L.T. Rich Z-Spray sprayer. He adds, "I'm excited about increasing productivity with that and increasing value to our client with that Z-spray with the quality of the job it does, the distance it goes and the quantity it holds."

Addington would like to grow the company within its current 25-mile service radius rather than beyond it.

"I've always lived in this community. I take a lot of pride in it. I want to stay in a very small area," he says. "There are plenty of potential clients in the area, and we are going to work on getting in front of more people."

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