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Nathan Scott fulfills childhood aspiration

Urban Eden, a multi-faceted landscaping business that serves the Portland, Ore., area, is one of the small players in the industry whose owner has large aspirations. The company of three employees, including owner Nathan Scott, has proven itself a worthy player in the landscaping field, having been in business for 11 years.



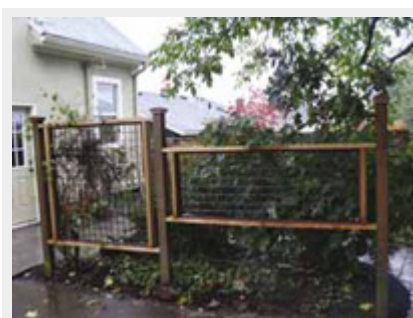
For Nathan Scott, owner of Urban Eden Landscaping, owning his own landscape maintenance business has been a dream come true.

Photos courtesy of Nathan Scott.

In fact, Scott was once an employee of the company he would come to own. He joined the company in 2008, just as the national economy was entering a downturn and new housing construction halted. He learned everything he could from the owner, and when she decided to sell the business to relocate to another state, she sold it to Scott.

For Scott, owning his own landscape maintenance business has been a long-time dream come true. "I've always had an interest in landscaping ever since I was little," he says. "At 8 years old, I'd be out there mowing the lawn, even though the lawn mower was taller than I was. I'd do it good. I've always enjoyed it. I just have a large interest in it."

After taking over ownership of Urban Eden, one of Scott's first strategies was to increase marketing efforts into the landscape maintenance end of the business, taking the company in a different direction than the previous owner did. "She had the business focused more on the construction, which I will continue to do," says Scott. "When the other type of work is slow, I think it would be ideal to be able to fall back on clients whose work you can rely on. It's easier to keep up the maintenance aspect of it." It's an area where he sees a greater opportunity for growth in the industry. "Maintenance is booming," Scott says. "I've noticed a lot of people being interested in it, so I think that's definitely a good thing for the industry. Working for Urban Eden as an employee, I saw that end of the business stayed fairly steady and we were able to stay afloat through the recession, so I think the industry is going to continue to go past this economy and hopefully go back up on the other end."



Screens add privacy as well as contrast to the landscape.

Urban Eden serves an area encompassing Gresham and Beaverton Valley. Services provided by the company include landscape maintenance (mowing, edging, blowing and clean-ups); landscape construction (fences, retaining walls, French drains, water features, concrete and pathways); and landscape design and implementation relating to proper placement of plants, trees, shrubs, groundcovers and sod.

Work is done year-round with the usual arsenal of equipment, which includes a truck, trailer, mowers, edgers, trimmers, blowers and hand tools.

"As plants are constantly growing, I'm happy to share my knowledge with my customers so their landscaping can look attractive and healthy year-round," he says. Scott personally meets with each of his customers to assess their landscaping needs, and then follows up with an e-mail outlining a proposal and budget.

He endeavors to create an outdoor environment for customers that is pleasing to all of the senses. "I am privileged to help turn people's yards and green

spaces into beautiful areas that satisfy the senses of sight, smell, touch, sound and taste," he says.

Being that his is such a small company and he is personally invested in its success, Scott is often found working side-by-side with his crew on landscaping projects. "I assure my clients' expectations are met by working directly on-site, as well as supervising a crew of landscaping professionals," he adds.

Maintenance is done on a month-by-month basis for each of his clients. Urban Eden's clients are a mix of residential and commercial, with Scott leaning toward growing the residential sector end of the business. "You have a more of a personal relationship with those clients," he says. "You get to know your client better and that in turn is going to help you meet other clients."

Being a small business with just two employees sets him apart in the field in a unique way, Scott points out. "A lot of people like that," he says, adding that his small crew can often accomplish the same work as that of larger companies. "It catches somebody's eye."



Nathan Scott endeavors to create an outdoor space for his clients that is pleasing to all of the senses. He says, "Water features are an easy way to not only compliment the landscape by sight, but to add the sense of sound to the landscape as well."

Essentially, however, Scott is cognizant that his company's bottom line depends on how he conducts his business. "If I'm referred to somebody by a previous client, they know that my work is good," he says. "It's quality work and efficient. That definitely is going to make a difference, whether it's a large or small company. But, if the work is the same, I think they will lean towards my way."

Yet, what he sees as an advantage in being a small company also yields challenges, such as keeping up with communications so he doesn't lose a potential customer. "I try to get back to everybody who contacts me, which is what I think is the key to keeping the business going and gaining more

clients," he says. "Making the time to get back to phone calls and e-mails will help in the long run."

Another direction Scott intends to go with his company is to introduce more environmentally-friendly practices. Getting support in his region should be no problem, as the Northwest region of the United States has been on the cutting edge of environmentally-friendly practices for years.

"I think that's going to be necessary in the next few years just to help the environment and save our natural fossil fuels," Scott says. "I'm definitely going to start leaning toward more electrical equipment and possibly diesel fuels instead of gasoline fuels. Going to the greener side is part of my philosophy."

Whenever there are ownership changes in a business, there is the potential that customers and employees may be resistant. Scott says that was not the case in his situation after he rose from among his peers to become their employer. "There has really been no conflict with it," he notes. "The transition has been very good."

He has retained the company's old customers and picked up new ones as well. He continues with most of the business practices of the previous management that served as a foundation of growth and success, but is keen on a stronger emphasis on the maintenance aspect of the business. Customers are responding positively to the change. "I've spent a little more time and gave a little more effort to that," he says. "The clients I did receive from the business already have made it clear that now that I've taken over, it's been a lot more detail-oriented."

While he likes having a small business, Scott has an eye to growth. "Five years from now, I would like to be able to get a full crew of guys to do my maintenance jobs and at the same time have a small crew work on the construction aspect," he says. "That's my biggest goal."

In order to get there, he's engaging in a great deal of marketing. He has set up a profile on LinkedIn and uses Craigslist as sources of marketing, and he is working on setting up a website. He also markets the old-fashioned way: going door-to-door distributing flyers and business cards.

"I'm definitely at the point where I could expand with equipment and employees if the customer base grows," he says.

Carol Brzozowski is a member of the Society of Environmental Journalists and has written extensively about environmental issues for numerous trade journals for more than a decade. She resides in Coral Springs, Fla.