

Selling Renovation Services



Source: www.TurfMagazine.com

Turf renovation and overseeding offer many benefits. Contractors report that clients, even customers that previously maintained a tight grip on their budgets, are now showing renewed interest in these value-add services.

For contractors who successfully sell these add-on services, turf renovation and overseeding can be a differentiator. It's not a service that "just anyone" can do, says Chris Becker, general manager of Schulhoff Tree and Lawn Care in Golden, Colorado. "This is something with which we can set ourselves apart."

Although the services do require some client education, that's what the client is paying for – the company's expertise, adds Mark Grunkemeyer, founder and president of Buckeye EcoCare in Centerville, Ohio. "Most companies can apply fertilizer, but what we are trying to do is build long-lasting lawns, as well as better relationships with our clients," he says. "The more we can educate them and the more we can build lower maintenance lawns, the better off we are in keeping those customers for life."



Priced for profit

While a lawn renovation sounds like an easy sell, it often isn't.

First of all, lawn renovations can be expensive. Grunkemeyer says Buckeye's renovation and seeding package is offered at different levels. The base level (aerating and overseeding each year) might be \$600, but jump to the customer who wants a brand-new lawn and wants sod because he or she doesn't want to wait for seeds to mature, and this could cost approximately \$3,000.

For Schulhoff Tree and Lawn Care, pricing is determined by looking at the time the job will take, estimating how much product will be put down (compost and grass seed), and then, of course, factoring in a reasonable profit

margin.

This is why client education is one of the keys to selling the service. “It can be a battle to educate clients,” Becker admits. “There are certainly some customers who do not want to hear about it. But the more information you can provide, the better chance they’ll be interested.”

Becker says a lot of clients have the misconception that as long as the lawn is being fertilized, it’s always going to look good. “We want them to know there’s so much more we can do,” he says. “Fertilizing is just one slice of the pie.” Ultimately, Becker says clients who take the time to understand and accept renovation services typically end up being some of his happiest customers.



Planting the seed

Marketing is vital to overcoming the challenge of educating clients. Putting the information out there makes clients aware of the service before you even talk to them. It plants the seeds.

Monthly e-blasts help Grunkemeyer educate customers. His company currently has half of its clients’ email addresses and uses the blasts to target customers with specific messages.

“We might say if you’re having disease problems it could be the grass variety, and you should consider a renovation,” Grunkemeyer says. “Or, we might point out that if you notice the neighbor’s grass looks a lot better than yours, it’s because he or she already transitioned their grass to a different variety. It’s definitely an educational process every step of the way.”

Blain Bertrand, president of Topeka Landscape in Topeka, Kansas, says Facebook is a non-pushy way to get that reminder out there and to secure extra jobs. He also sends out yearly seasonal flyers that explain add-on services.



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Becker agrees having the information listed on the website or in an ad isn’t enough. It has to hit the client in other ways, preferably in person. “It’s something that is better communicated and explained directly,” he says. “Everyone has heard about fertilizing, and most customers have even heard about aerating, but when you say ‘renovation’ the majority of clients are not going to understand what that means. It’s an open-ended term. In fact, the definition often varies from company to company or depending where you’re based.”

Schulhoff's renovation service includes aeration, overseeding and a topdressing with organic compost that helps jumpstart new grass. The compost also covers and protects the seed, which is important in an area that gets 300-plus days of sunshine. If seed isn't covered, it will be lost due to intense UV radiation or, perhaps, get eaten by the birds. The compost also helps improve soil and overall lawn health. Becker says in other parts of the country the compost portion of the renovation might be unheard of or perhaps unnecessary.

A service best performed by pros

Once this service is sold, the next step is following through. While renovations are, by nature, labor-intensive, contractors can count on modern, easy-to-use turf aerators and overseeders to perform the service and get great results – that is, if they do it at the right time of the year.

"Everyone thinks spring is for planting," Grunkemeyer says. "Obviously, that's when everyone plants their flowers, so they assume that's the time for overseeding, too. But for turf renovation, here in southern Ohio we have a six-week window between August and September. We usually plant grass seed on Labor Day, but we've had homeowners go ahead and put seed down after the last snowstorm to prepare for spring. That's a mistake because now we can't use any preemergent or broadleaf control."



Grunkemeyer says this is where client education comes into play. With some education, he hopes more homeowners leave those kinds of jobs to the experts. There is a science to lawn care.

"I would advise paying closer attention to what's going on in the yard," Bertrand advises. "Don't just put down seed and fertilizer. Take a deeper look into what the issues might be. Where are the problems? What are you overlooking that you might be able to solve? More often than not, lawn care operators just breeze over troubleshooting potential problems during a renovation."

Turf renovation has to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. "You can't treat all lawns the same if you're not giving clients the true benefit of the service," he adds.

"Some companies are set up to do the same thing at each job; they don't want to change their routine each time they go to a new job," Becker says. "Taking the time to specialize and to focus on individual lawns when we do these services is what sets us apart."