

GROWING

a Successful

Conklin

Lawn and Plant Care

Business

featuring

**HELPFUL
INFORMATION ON
GETTING
STARTED**



MAKE IT YOUR BUSINESS

Congratulations on joining the team of Conklin lawn applicators: a team that is setting a new standard of excellence in building strong, healthy, beautiful turf for lawn customers. The time-tested Conklin AgroVantage® products provide the foundation for building a successful, profitable business. You provide the hard work, a strong commitment and a common sense application program to complete the opportunity. Having a well thought-out, organized program allows you to charge a fair price that will help grow your independent business year after year.

In this guide you'll find ideas that show you step by step how to plan and execute various components of a lawn and plant care business. We realize that some IBOs are starting their business from scratch and others are adding our program to an existing lawn business. We will give you ideas that have been utilized by some of Conklin's top lawn applicators and suggest that you choose those that will work best for your situation. This guide is intended to provide you with a background of knowledge from which to draw upon. As you develop your business monitor, measure and reflect upon your results. Use that valuable information to improve your next year's activities.

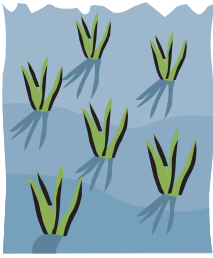
We wish you prosperity!



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Starting a lawn and plant care business

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

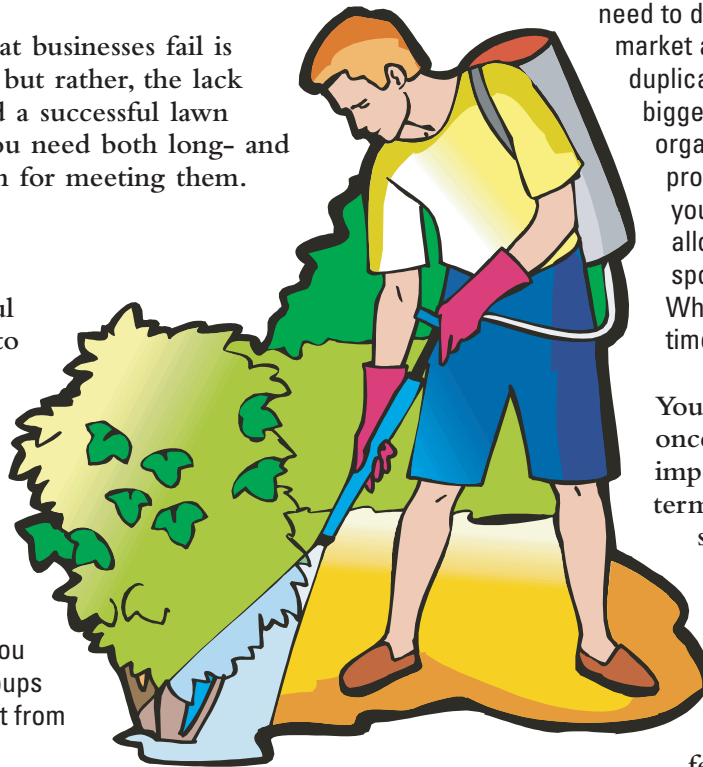
The number one reason that businesses fail is not the lack of hard work, but rather, the lack of a clear purpose. To build a successful lawn and plant care business, you need both long- and short-term goals and a plan for meeting them.

Setting the right goals

“I want to have a successful lawn business” or “I want to have the best lawn and plant care business in town” are worthy goals, but they need to be more specific. To be successful, a goal must be desirable, achievable, measurable and focused.

- What kind of business do you want? Identify potential groups of people who could benefit from your service. Ideas include residential work, commercial businesses, golf courses, sod farms, schools, and parks. Will you provide other services such as aeration, thatch removal, seeding, deep root feeding or mowing?
- What is your vision of success? Do you want to build a large business with employees or multiple locations, or do you want to keep it small enough to simply provide an excellent living for you and your family? What will be your role in the business during the first year, and what do you want your role to be after five or ten years? If you have control over a certain market segment in an area, in what direction do you want to expand or build your business?
- Will this be a family business or do you plan to have a partner? What is your desired income level? Is it important to earn a living right away or can you reinvest earnings back into your business?

- Will you have an office? Will you own your equipment or lease it? Is it important to earn a profit right away or can you put any earnings back into the business?
- As you develop your business, are you interested in increasing your customers' satisfaction? Would this mean providing additional services or improving your communication with your customers?
- What are your goals in relationship to growing and supporting an organization and advancing in management with Conklin? Satisfied customers lead to Independent Business Owners (IBOs). Will you be duplicating yourself and building residual income by teaching others to market Conklin products and services and sponsor new IBOs?



If you plan on growing an organization, you need to devote time to teaching others to market and sponsor. Training with a duplicable system is key to building a bigger, faster and stronger Conklin organization. As you build a strong, profitable and secure organization your time will be spent in different allotments between marketing, sponsoring, training and leading. What are your plans to adjust your time and goals accordingly?

You can always adjust your goals once you start, but it is important to have both a long-term, comprehensive vision and smaller milestone goals along the way. You need the big goal to know where you want to be and the intermediate goals to know if you're still on track to there. For the first few years especially, your goals

should be very concrete: “By the end of the first year, I want to have X number of customers. By the end of the second year, I want to have X + X customers.” Or “By the end of the first year, I need to earn X dollars of profit.”

A short-term goal you might set is developing a reward system for referrals which results in an increase of your customer base by five percent. Or, perhaps developing a marketing campaign, with a short-term goal of increasing the number of new customers by 15 percent.

Once you've set optimistic but realistic goals, you'll find you have an outline for planning your business.

GATHERING MARKET INFORMATION

Do some preliminary research to determine the potential of your business. Or if you are in business already, keep abreast of the changing business climate in your area on a yearly basis. Determine who your competition is and how they are positioned. Take good notes on what they don't do. Review your competitors' literature for their focus. Who are the other lawn and landscape people buying product from?

Ask yourself, how can I position myself in this market? How will customers differentiate my business from my competition? Can I repackage my service or customize my selling so people feel they have made the right purchase decision? Can I improve on quality? Price? Responsiveness? Reputation? Technical assistance? Dependability? Scheduling flexibility? What will make it easier to do business with me? Will there be a higher perceived value for my service? Is there a gap I can fill? Look up trade material on the Internet for



information on trends and case studies in the lawn and landscape industry. Shop around. Are there some partnerships that can be established? Are there some strategic alliances that can help you grow a stronger business? Can you arrange to work with local business owners who specialize in putting in new lawns or plant trees and shrubs? Can you build a quality relationship with them and gain referrals? These people can be valuable allies in your relationship marketing and prospecting efforts.

By pulling together this information, you will have the facts before you, to help see the entire picture. Your business decisions will be based on information from a variety of sources.

PROFIT POTENTIAL

If your business is going to survive for the long term you have to make a profit. To assess how you will derive your profit you will need to determine:

- Will this be a full- or part-time business? A full time applicator could build a business servicing 300+ average homeowner lawns.
- How many applications will be needed in my area? Some areas may do two applications per year. Other areas may do three for a premier program and only two for customers who simply want weed control and some fertilization. While warmer climates may apply almost year round. You can determine this by calculating how long the growing season is for your area and then schedule your applications every eight to 12 weeks, per Conklin guidelines.
- Who will be your potential clients? Will they be homeowners with 8,000- to 10,000-square-foot lawns or commercial accounts? Keeping within a 30- to 40-mile radius of your business location will probably result in the best profits. A population base of around 20,000 should provide enough customers to support a full-time applicator in most areas.
- How many applications can you make per day, per week, and per treatment time period? From 12 to 20 lawns per day is feasible for the average applicator. The time frame for each application period should be done within 4 to 6 weeks (i.e., the spring treatment should be done from mid-March until the end of April when the grass greens up. Keep in mind that there will be rainy days and windy days that will prevent you from making applications.
- Determine how much profit you can make per application. The Conklin Company will provide you with suggested pricing of various applications as well as formulations and costs for products used. Here is an example of how this can be calculated:

I want to have a full-time business. I live in the Midwest and my growing season goes from mid-March through October. I can do three applications per year to create a full program: April, June, and September. My clients will be predominately homeowners with an average lawn size of 10,000 square-feet. I can average \$50 profit per application throughout the year. I will service 300 customers.

$3 \text{ applications} \times \$50 \text{ profit} = \$150 \text{ profit per customer per year}$
 $\$150 \text{ profit} \times 300 \text{ customers} = \$45,000 \text{ per year}^*$

OR

I plan to work part time and earn an extra \$15,000 per year.
 $3 \text{ applications} \times \$50 \text{ profit} \times 100 \text{ customers} = \$15,000 \text{ per year}^*$

*This estimate does not take into account your business expenses. Profits will vary.

STARTING UP

A checklist when you first begin in business.

- Contact the Agricultural Department in your state and request the fertilizer and pesticide licensure packet.
- Locate a insurance carrier.
- Begin building business contacts. Set up appointments with people you know.
- Take licensure test.
- Establish your office, create your files and record keeping procedures.
- Focus on the benefits of using our Conklin products.

One of the most exciting things about starting an independent Conklin lawn and plant care business is that it has a very low start-up cost compared to many other business opportunities. In this section we will discuss important steps to take when beginning your business.

- Become familiar with our AgroVantage® products. By becoming a Conklin IBO, you will be able to purchase these and other high quality products direct from the manufacturer.
- Become familiar with our AgroVantage® soil testing program. It will build credibility when your customers can choose to have a personalized prescription for their lawn.
- Attend both the Corporate Training program and Lawn Pro I. By doing so, you will better understand the quality of products and people you will be working with. The confidence you gain through these trainings will be vital to helping you sell your program to prospective customers. Your reward will be a higher closing rate with those customers.
- Check with the Department of Agriculture in your state to determine what is needed for licensing, insurance, and required records of fertilizer and pesticide applications. License fees vary from state to state. A listing state-by-state is available by searching in an

Internet directory under the category of State Department of Agriculture.

- Obtain required local and state sales tax permits. Find out if you need a city business license by calling the local city hall or city government offices.
- Develop a delivery ticket and record-keeping system that works. Check with your Department of Agriculture for information required to be kept on each application you do. Incorporating this information with your bill and leaving it at the customer's door at the time of application saves time and postage when sending statements later.
- Some states require posting of the property with a small lawn stake and sign after spraying. Even if it is not required, it is a great way to advertise your business. Design yours to look different from any competitors in your area if possible. One source is R.N.D. Signs out of Minneapolis, Minn. They can be reached at (800) 328-4009.

INSURANCE

Your business needs insurance coverage to be prepared for life's unpredictable twists and turns. It is a necessity. It is best to shop around to get the best (and enough) coverage at a price you can afford. Check with several of your local insurance companies to get the best price and coverage available. The Web site www.plcaa.org may provide some insurance references.

EQUIPMENT NEEDS

Evaluate and make a decision on equipment needs. The equipment needed to do lawn applications is very simple. Keep in mind that if you are starting your business with no customer base to draw from, your first goal is to make money. Start simple. When your business grows, you can afford to upgrade your equipment.



A basic lawn rig includes a single 150 to 200 gallon tank, engine and pump, hose reel with 300 feet of hose, and a Teejet lawn gun. A rig can be purchased from several suppliers for around \$2,000. A list of suppliers is available through Conklin.

Options you might want to consider:

- An **electric rewind hose reel** is highly recommended as rolling up 200 to 300 feet of hose 20 times per day manually becomes very tiring.
- **Multiple tanks** for products can be beneficial for carrying different formulations, which is helpful as your business grows. Often a few minutes spent planning your schedule can allow you to utilize a single tank unit when you first begin your business.
- If you will be spraying areas of more than one acre in size, you may want to consider mounting a sprayer on a **golf cart, lawn mower, ATV, or commercially available units**. These units can reduce your application time and fatigue but will increase your start-up cost. Keep in mind that in most cases you will still need a rig to do hand applications around buildings or landscaping.
- **Small hand or backpack sprayers** are a personal preference among Conklin lawn and landscape applicators and may be useful if you need to do spot applications. Sometimes having the ability to spot spray a few individual weeds can save a lot of headache involved with mixing in a large tank. Cost: \$80–\$125 each for backpacks
- **Personal protective equipment** is highly recommended. You will need chemical proof gloves and boots. The product label of the pesticides you use will sometimes have requirements for additional eye protection or clothing. The Gempler's Company has a good selection of these items. They can be reached at (800) 382-8472 or www.gemplers.com Cost: \$100-\$200
- A good quality, **measuring wheel** is much faster than a tape for measuring customer lots. Most of our application prices are based per 1,000 square foot, so you will need to measure the area to be treated and then subtract the area of the house, garage, driveway, landscaping, etc. Cost: \$60-\$200
- A **pickup truck or a vehicle and trailer** will be needed to transport your equipment. Again try to keep your start-up costs within reason if you need to make a major purchase along these lines.

Product inventory

Conklin has formulation recommendations available on a variety of products you will be utilizing. How fast you expect to grow your business will determine how much product you want to have on hand. As a Conklin IBO, you can usually have product delivered to your door in less than one week. Cost: \$1,000–\$2,000

The Agronomics marketing division at the Conklin Company can help you find a pesticide supplier in your region to obtain needed product. Cost of pesticide inventory: \$300–\$1,000

Storage facilities

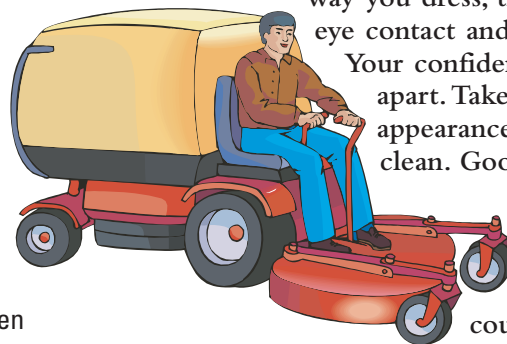
Determine where you will base your business. Do you have adequate facilities presently or will you need to rent/purchase an operating site? Some states have requirements for storage and handling of some of the products you may choose to use.

Many IBOs, who already had a suitable truck and/or trailer, have begun a lawn business with equipment, product, supplies, and initial advertising for less than \$10,000.

LOOKING AND ACTING PROFESSIONAL

You never have a second chance to make a first impression. If you present yourself well, and establish your competence, you will earn the trust of your customers. If you treat your clients well once you land the job, you will build a solid reputation in the business.

In a service business like this, everything communicates your expertise to the customer. The way you dress, the way you talk, eye contact and posture all add up. Your confident style will set you apart. Take pride in your appearance. Look neat and clean. Good manners are important.



Set the example for treating customers with courtesy, respect and professionalism, and insist that your employees do the same. Let them know in no uncertain terms that crude language, sloppy dress or rudeness will not be tolerated when the employee is on the job.

Your reputation depends on your professionalism, and so does the success of your business. Remember that each current customer has a friend, relative or acquaintance who is a possible referral.

Your client may have had a bad experience in the past. The best way to respond to a suspicious or skeptical client is to be courteous, professional and attentive to their needs or concerns.

Living up to promises

The foundation of your operation should be honesty, quality work and great service. Quality work includes living up to your promises. Keep your word. When your word is reliable, you are counted as reliable. Sometimes promises made in good faith can't be kept. It is inevitable that problems will occur even with the best of intentions. Many problems can be prevented or minimized through solid planning and a policy of pleasing the customer. Keep a written schedule of all jobs and stick to the deadlines you set.

If you encounter a problem, which will delay an appointment, contact the client. Apologize. Find out what the customer expected. Let them know you will be late or arrange a new time. Assure them that their satisfaction is important. In most cases, the customer will appreciate being informed and will reschedule.

DETERMINE YOUR SERVICE STRATEGY

What does good service mean to you? Be proactive. Customers want to feel that they have made the right choice by purchasing your service. Show them the value of your service by:

- Providing assistance and answering questions. It reduces the risk customers feel they take when buying your service.
- Gathering information to identify the highest need of the customer.
- Demonstrating how the product and service meets their needs and represents the highest quality of value in the industry.
- Assisting them along through the buying decision.
- Helping them feel confident about their purchase.

“Customer expectations are loud and clear; look good, be responsive, be reassuring through courtesy and competence, be empathetic, but most of all, be reliable. Do what you said you would do.”

Dr. Leonard Berry – Researcher, Texas A&M University

Returning phone calls promptly and scheduling an appointment quickly is critical to your success. How quickly you respond forms an opinion in the customer's mind of how seriously you take your business and how valuable they are as a customer.

If you use an answering machine or voice messaging service to take calls, make certain the greeting is done by an adult in a businesslike and professional manner. Change your message frequently, providing

up-to-date information about when you will pick up and return messages. Tell callers what information to leave and how to use your system. And, listen to your message periodically to ensure it is clear and the system is working well.

WRITTEN AGREEMENTS

You can protect yourself (and your customers) by insisting on written agreements. If you are utilizing Conklin's commercial lawn bid form for your estimates, ask the customer to sign at the bottom and leave them a copy. If you receive their approval over the phone, document it, along with the date on the form, and mail a copy to your customer as soon as possible. Putting the job in writing also clarifies what the customer wants done, meaning they will be more satisfied when the job is completed. Make certain that any maps or drawings of applications to be done are in enough detail that you will not be confused when you go back at a later date. Do not rely on just your memory to remember which trees to deep root feed or exactly where the property lines are.

PROMOTING YOUR BUSINESS

If you don't have a name for your business yet, put some thought into creating a name that is professional sounding, yet easy for potential customers to remember. Your business name should be simple and indicate something about what you do. Avoid names that are vague about what you do (e.g. Marsh Enterprises). Brainstorm as many names

GROWING GREEN LAWN SERVICE

as you can, and then ask people you know to help narrow down the list. Don't make it too long or too abbreviated or too "cute." Also check around your potential trade area to make sure the name, or a name very similar, isn't already being used by another business. Once you have it, you may want to contact your Secretary of State office to register and protect the business name.

What's your sign?

Imagine your future vehicles moving quickly from job to job. Picture a distinctive logo or a catchy slogan on the side panel, your business cards and in the Yellow Pages. A logo or slogan tells the world that you are a legitimate, professional business.

Your logo could be something simple. Perhaps the name of your company in special graphics will be your logo. Maybe you like a combination of two or a different symbol altogether. You may find a graphic artist (in the phone book, through a local art school, or through a commercial printer) who understands your ideas and can turn them into a sharp looking logo. Make sure it's attractive when enlarged but readable in small type.

Business cards

In some cases, your business card will be a customer's first introduction to you. Be sure that it represents you well. Business cards are one of the most effective and cost-efficient ways of promoting your business. Design your own card with your logo and the services you provide on it.

Conklin's Trade Tools stationery catalog has an easy, inexpensive way to create a first-class look in all everyday business supplies including letterhead and envelopes. www.emarking.com/conklin



MARKETING

An old saying is "Advertising doesn't cost, it pays." A more truthful statement would be "Effective advertising doesn't cost, it pays!" Realize that a lawn spraying business is part of the service industry and that name recognition and market presence is very important. Your goal should be to achieve high visibility. Advertising of one type or another is vital to getting your business off the ground and growing. It is vital to your business' success by choosing key marketing strategies and putting them to work.

Two crucial factors you have to analyze:

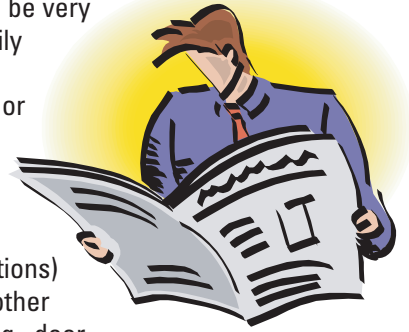
1. What types of marketing will be the most effective for your targeted trade area? Are you in a community that has one very prominent newspaper or radio station that almost everyone receives, or are you in a large metropolitan area with a more diverse selection of these media outlets? If in a large city, will you target certain sections or subdivisions (obviously the more affluent areas would be the first target).
2. How many dollars can you afford to spend in the beginning and as your business grows?

There are a variety of ways to promote your business, with prices ranging from practically-free to some costing hundreds of dollars. You need to decide which you can afford depending on how quickly you

want or need to build your business. Also it may be good to experiment a little to see which avenue works best for you. Realize that a good marketing plan will often include several types of media.

- **Contact your newspapers.** If you are a new business in the area, many papers will do a story about you in a business section for free. Some will even use photos if you have them. Always ask to see any story or ad in the newspaper before publishing. If you're placing an advertisement, you have every right to approve it. If you are seeking free publicity and the paper has agreed to write a story about you, the paper may or may not agree to let you read it before print. That is their right. It doesn't hurt to ask however.

Newspaper advertising can become very expensive, very quickly depending on what type of ads you run. Display ads can be designed to be very appealing and can be an asset to your advertising campaign. They can also be very expensive to run on a daily basis. We recommend utilizing them on the one or two biggest days of circulation and special editions (e.g., Home Improvement editions or Think Spring special sections) and in conjunction with other methods of promotion (e.g., door hanger blitz, Home Show booth, etc.) Often a small classified ad or service directory ad can be more cost effective.



If possible, work with the area editor and produce an article or two on lawn care that the newspaper could use. The article should be positioned as a benefit to the reader. Conclude the article with a tagline that states how to contact you, or offer something extra for qualified buyers. Again, as this is considered a public relations-type of effort, there are no guarantees. The editor may decide to feature other services in your area as well.

- **Create flyers on your computer.** An excellent, inexpensive way to advertise is on community bulletin boards – usually located at grocery stores, restaurants, and other businesses.
- **Talk to friends and family.** Tell everyone you know that you are starting a new business and ask them to refer you or, better yet, utilize your service themselves. Let people know why you need referrals. Becoming well known helps differentiate yourself from the pricing, product, and service issues. Establish yourself as credible.
- **Pass out business cards.** Look for places and opportunities to get them to other people. They will do you no good sitting in a box.

- **Talk with people in the area who mow lawns as their business.** Ask them if they would refer you to their customers, providing you are not mowing lawns also. Many times they will welcome the chance to work with you to provide more services for their customers, especially if you will refer them to some of your customers who are looking for someone to mow. This is a proven method to grow your business very large, very fast – working an existing customer base that respects the professional who referred them. Sometimes just exchanging referrals will be payment enough for the lawn mowing businessperson. But sometimes, you may be asked to share a percentage of your business done with those clients. Be careful not to give away all of your profits.

- **Utilize Conklin's lawn and plant care door hangers.** Target particular neighborhoods or houses. You can purchase an inexpensive stamp or stickers to put your name and phone number on each piece. Go to www.emarking.com/conklin to find out more.

- **Advertise in the Yellow Pages.** It is very important to get in the Yellow Pages of the phone book. A small, cost-effective one-inch ad is often enough to let people know what services you provide. Many people check the Yellow Pages when they need a service but they also use it as an indicator of a legitimate business.

- **Join your Chamber of Commerce.** The Chamber of Commerce can be a big key for you. Most chamber members are business owners or managers and they are perfect prospects for your lawn spraying business. Most of these people check the list of other chamber members when choosing whom to do business with. Often you can insert one of your flyers into their regular newsletters. Also you will typically be listed and recommended by the chamber to new people moving into the community.

- **Attend home shows at your area convention center.** Home shows are a fast, efficient method to get your business in front of the most potential clients at the right time. We realize that some home show participation can be fairly expensive, so you'll need to assess if is the show visitors are really your best prospects. Most good show promoters can give you the demographics of past attendees.



Successful shows require strategy, tactical steps and training of personnel to generate leads effectively. Make the booth details count: Select the right booth location, decide on a display that meets your needs, develop key messages, produce a lead card and set the level of expectation for follow-up. To convert your leads, you need to quickly pursue any interest. (i.e., mail out material first, then follow up by making a phone call to see if they received the information and if they have any questions). The results may be well worth the effort.

Conklin has recommendations for helping you set up and operate an effective trade show booth. Check out the *Vision* magazine – May/June 2001 via our IBO Web site at www.conklin.com

- **Advertise on the radio.** Most people believe that radio advertising is too expensive but in the right situation it can be the least expensive way to keep your name in front of people during the early spring contracting season. If you are in an area with a strong regional radio program that is tuned into by your best prospective customers, radio ads may be effective for you. Large metropolitan areas with multiple stations may require more research into their listener demographics to get the best return.

- **Send direct mail pieces.** Conklin has made available both postcards and color brochures you can personalize to send to potential or existing customers. Postcard mailings can be prepared quickly thanks to some software programs available such as those found on www.mysoftware.com/proventure. Who do you want to target? Do you want to target people who have never used your service or introduce existing customers to a new service? The most important element of a successful direct mail campaign is to obtain a solid target market customer list. A few avenues might be your church directory, school handbook, neighborhood associations, Chamber of Commerce, or look in the Yellow page listing under mailing houses to find a mailing list broker.

- **Make referrals part of your compensation.** Begin your discussion by setting up a referral: "I receive two types of compensation. First in the form of payment, and secondly, if you feel I've completed the job to your satisfaction, through referrals. If you feel that I've been helpful and professional, I would appreciate it if you would tell people that you are my client." And then be sure you send a thank you each time you receive a referral.

Track your results

Unless you have previous advertising experience in your area, we recommend that you begin cautiously. Utilize the different methods as you can but make sure you track how many responses you are receiving. Be sure that your leads are comparable to the amount of time and money you are spending. Also realize that the time of year may have an effect on the number of responses you receive.

Timing is important

In most areas, the best time of year for acquiring new customers is late winter into early spring. Advertising just before and through this time is the most beneficial. A major consideration though is when and how your competition is renewing client contracts and pursuing new clients. If they are sending out contract renewals in December, which is common, then people need to be aware that you are also in the lawn spraying business. You will want to discuss your program and prices at an earlier date.

FIND OUT WHAT YOUR COMPETITION IS DOING

Be aware of your competition, not only when they are renewing contracts or advertising but also how their fertilizer and pesticide program works. Find out what type of products they are using. If the competitors are using a urea program and are coming back every month, then point out that you will be making less trips across the customers lawn and using a product that is more environmentally friendly. Understand the AgroVantage® program well enough to be able to sell your benefits to the customer.

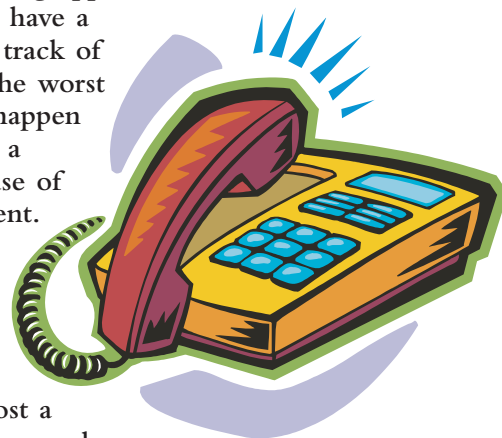
Research your competitors pricing structure. This is not to say that you should be the low cost service. Price your service profitably, but fairly. If you have discounts for larger applications or church/civic groups, state that. But whatever you do, BE CONSISTENT. Neighbors will talk across the fence and sometimes discuss things such as price!

As you begin doing estimates, talk with your prospect about who has been doing their lawn spraying. Ask them what things about that program they have been happy or unhappy with. Most times they will very eagerly share with you. Use this information for two things. If it is something that you believe that you can do better, explain to them while making your proposal how you will be

different from your competitor. Make a mental or even physical list of the most often heard complaints and review it often. *Realize that this is why they left your competitor, and they will leave you if you repeat the same mistakes.* Despite what some of the largest companies out there seem to believe, most homeowners do not want to be called every few weeks by someone trying to sell them more services.

WHEN THE PHONE CALLS COME IN

As potential customers call inquiring about your services and setting appointment dates, you must have a system to keep track of all your calls. The worst thing that can happen is that you lose a customer because of poor management. You will gain a reputation for not returning phone calls simply because you forgot or lost a name and phone number.



- Keep notepaper by each phone. Everyone in your business or in your family should be trained to carefully write down information from each caller including the day and time they called or left the message.
- Set the appointment when people call, so you don't waste time returning a phone call and confirming a time.
- Fill out the Conklin Lawn Bid Form with their name, address and phone number and clip it to your clip board so it is ready for your appointment, or place it in a file marked for the day of the week of the appointment.

Response time is important. Determine what your customer expects of you in terms of response time. Then meet or beat it. Pride yourself on the ability to meet your customers' deadlines.

Explain to them while making your proposal how you will be different from your competitor.

THE LAWN ESTIMATE

It is very important to actually measure each lawn. Do not rely on your “eyeball” techniques or simply throw out a number that sounds reasonable. *Always measure and never give a verbal guesstimate.* Remember that every lawn is a different size and that homeowners will have their own desires for their lawn.

If you are not confident about figuring the square footage of the lawn, work with someone who has experience in measuring. You may want to ask that person to assist you on the first few lawns. Not only will you learn how to measure and figure much faster and accurately, but you'll avoid shortchanging your business.

Confidence in your products and your lawn program are very important in how you present yourself and your service/business. Your confidence and knowledge will increase your closing rate and customer base.

- **When you arrive at your appointment remember to look professional.** If you have a logo shirt, wear it. Make sure that it is wrinkle-free and clean. Whatever you wear, look neat and professional.
- **Arrive at your appointment time.** Be punctual. Call if you will be late. We find that it works best if the homeowners are available. This allows you a chance to get to know them and allows a face-to-face meeting. They can also define the property lines and give you additional information about the lawn. Also find out if they have children or pets that are on the lawn daily.
- **Measure the lawn using your measuring wheel.** Don't rush yourself. Use the Conklin Lawn Bid Form to diagram the property. Figure the square footage of the lawn. Fill in the cost of the service options at the bottom of the form.
- **After the Bid Form is complete,** visit with the customer and discuss the options available and how the service will help their lawn. Put a check mark in the box beside the services that they selected for the year.
- **Have the new customer sign the Bid Form** at the bottom and give them the yellow copy of the form.
- **It's a good idea to keep a master file of Bid Forms on all of your customers,** even the ones that didn't choose your service this year. If they call you back, you already have the measurements of their lawn.

KEEPING TRACK OF YOUR CUSTOMERS

Having a good bookkeeping system is vital to your business and your efficiency as a manager and business owner. You may already have a system in place that works well for you, but if you don't, file folders, file boxes and index card are inexpensive and effective as a file system. You may choose a program for your computer as well.

- **Computer programs are listed in trade magazines.** With a laptop computer you could track your appointments and enter information during the day.
- **A file card system is easy-to-use and organize.** We suggest buying two 5x7 inch file boxes with alphabet dividers, 5x7 inch index cards and round colored stickers.

Here's how this system works:

1. In File Box 1 the index cards will have the customers name, address, phone number(s), town, lawn square footage, and application dates with invoice numbers and/or comments. File Box 1 and cards stay in the office.
2. In File Box 2 the index cards will have the customers name, address, phone number(s), town square footage, and price of each application. Place a colored tab on top indicating pets, grub control, prepaid and/or two applications. File Box 2 cards are the cards that you use to arrange your day. Each day of the week select which lawns you will be doing applications on and take their cards with you. This will make it easier to know which lawns you are doing and how much to charge for the application.
3. After each application, paper clip your copy of the delivery ticket and index card together with the customers check (if paid).
4. At the end of each day record the application date and invoice number on your File Box 1 cards, enter payments in your Income Ledger or computer program, make deposit and place your copy of the delivery ticket in either the "Paid" or "Unpaid" file folder in the filing cabinet. File your File Box 2 card you had with you for the day back in your file box under "applications completed."
5. As payments arrive in the mail, enter them in the Income Ledger or computer program and move the delivery ticket from the "Unpaid" to the "Paid" file folder. This allows you to always know who has yet to pay for the application.

Following are examples of letters utilized by Conklin IBOs in their lawn and plant care businesses.

START OF A NEW SEASON

Dear:

We would like to thank you again for the privilege of servicing your lawn and landscape needs. We are now planning for the upcoming season and would like to extend this opportunity for you to continue our services with the enclosed form. We are holding to the same pricing structure as last year despite the usual increases from some of our suppliers.

This year we have added a deep root-feeding program. For people with small trees and shrubs, we can supply the extra nutrition to keep your investments healthy. We inject fertilizer and micronutrients into the root zone to insure that the plant gets its optimum growth while it is getting started. Mature trees usually have extensive enough root systems to supply themselves so we normally do not have a need to feed them. Mark the box on the return form and we will provide you with a quote for them.

A word of CAUTION. If you are thinking about putting seed on all or part of your lawn this spring it will affect the way we need to approach our application. Almost all pre-emerge crabgrass herbicides will harm newly seeded grass if applied too difficult to use the herbicide at the optimum time to control crabgrass. Our alternative becomes waiting until later when we use herbicides to control crabgrass and also applying a pre-emerge for control for the rest of the season. Know your plans. Most grasses with good growing conditions will spread in thin areas with a fertilization program. Fall is usually the best time to over-seed.

Please mark the appropriate boxes, sign and return the form by January 1st. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. On behalf of (company name and employee names) we look forward to another year of servicing you.

Respectfully,

SECOND PAGE

Please mark appropriate boxes, sign and return to:

This past year we made the following applications to your lawn _____

At a total cost for the year of \$ _____

Services we offer include:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| Spring fertilizing with crabgrass pre-emerge and broadleaf control | Broadleaf and fertilizer |
| Fall broadleaf control and fertilizer | Crabgrass pre-emerge only |
| Fertilizer only | Broadleaf control only |
| Crabgrass pre-emerge and fertilizer | Grub preventative |
| | Insect rescue treatments |

- I would like to continue my program unchanged for 2003
- I would like to discuss adding other services.
- I would like to discuss changes to my lawn size or my program.
- I have pets on the lawn – we need to have a definite appointment for treatments.
- I would like an estimate for deep root feeding of trees and/or shrubs.
- Other _____

Signature _____ Date _____

THANK YOU LETTER

Dear:

Thank you for giving us an opportunity to inspect your lawn and landscape and recommend services to meet your needs. Our company can offer you:

- High quality materials. We utilize Conklin's phosphorus-free Agrovantage® system that includes a fertilizer formulation that is fast acting for quick green up and also has excellent slow release to stay in the plant root zone longer.
- Licensed technicians who have been trained and insured to perform these services.
- Less return visits.
- An affordable, customized program.
- A discount if you pay for your entire year's visits in advance.
- Guaranteed results.

We recommend _____

If you have any questions or concerns you can call our toll-free number at (800) XXX XXXX, otherwise I will call you next week to set up schedule for your treatments.

Cordially,

Name
Business

Handling collections

Decide ahead of time how you will handle collections of accounts. Remember that if you are leaving the ticket at the door in a plastic door hanger bag, that the wind can blow them away or children who come home first can misplace them.

Experience has proven that the best results for collections work by sending a copy of the delivery ticket along with a note stating “We still have this ticket in our unpaid file. Could you please check your records and let us know if we have made a mistake?” This is a very non-threatening approach. Many people will respond very quickly to this note.

TIP: Never send the original of a delivery ticket – only a copy. You will need the original for your records.

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS

Business letters

Letters are not just ways to communicate, they can be effective substitutes for face-to-face visits, attracting and holding customers, and building a favorable image for your company. When writing a letter, strive hard to generate goodwill, make or keep contacts and enhance sales opportunities. Keys to remember include:

- Don't waste words
- Keep the language lively and simple
- Personalize your letters
- Emphasize the positive
- Use the correct letter form
- Proofread

Examples of letters that can be sent to prospective customers that announce a new service, start a new season, thank the customer for their business, request for a referral, as well as specialized letters for your VIP customers, can be found in bookstores, or on the Internet at www.lawncaresuccess.com

When communicating with your clients, look for articles of interest in various magazines and newspapers. Clip these articles out, obtain permission to reproduce them and send them to your customers on an ongoing basis. Send along a simple note card that says, “I thought this would be of interest to you.” It conveys the message that you are interested in them.

Newsletters

Create a communication piece that might be sent to select customers whose loyalty you desire. Tell them about your service and the value you provide. From time to time offer a special invitation that's not available to everyone. Newsletters can spur word-of-mouth referrals. Keep it simple, but effective. Provide readers with who you are, where they can find you and in general what services you provide. Entice them, projecting a professional image. Show them that you are an expert. Give them information on why they should support you and create a call to action (i.e., call this toll-free number now).

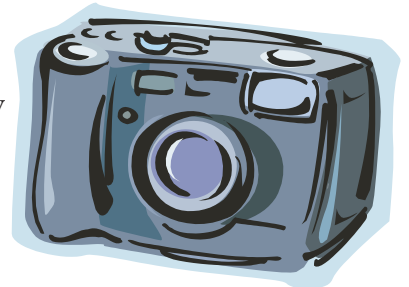
Newsletters are no longer limited to just print form. Consider sending information via email, or the fax machine.

HAPPY CUSTOMERS? GET IT IN WRITING

As your customers compliment you on a job well done on their lawn, ask them for a simple handwritten note to use as a testimonial. A hand-written note that says “Thanks Ed. We love the way our lawn looks!” is a powerful testimonial. A quick personal note written on the spot is more valuable than a promise to send on neatly typed paper. If they have some trouble putting together a statement, ask them to describe how they feel your service has helped them.

Consent

When a customer gives you a letter of recommendation, they are giving you their consent to use it for promoting your business. However, if you wish to quote a customer's letter in a newspaper ad or other printed promotion, it is professional courtesy to ask that person for their approval. This is also necessary if you wish to use a picture of their lawn “before” and “after” in your promotions or any display of your work.



**A hand-written note that says
“Thanks Ed. We love the way our
lawn looks!”**

Referrals

“I am expanding my business and I need your help. Who do you know who needs some help with their lawn care?” It may feel awkward to press your customers for referrals, but it is a very effective way to gain new business. Asking for a referral lets your customer know that your motive is to serve and sell your service to others in the same professional way you have serviced them. Remember, many people in your community get the majority of their business or their best business through referrals. Meet with other professionals who are benefited by the sharing of leads. Perhaps provide incentives for good leads. If someone has given you insight that you appreciate, send him or her a note that is sincere and gracious. (i.e., Thank you for the confidence you have placed in me. In appreciation of your referral...) Remember, you have to be assertive if you want to be successful in this business.

Have a plan for following up on referrals. Call on these potential customers by phone or in person and let them know that they were referred to you by one of your customers. Tell them who the customer was. Ask them if they would like a free estimate. ALWAYS send a thank you note to the referring customer. This extra work you put into generating new business will be rewarding as you gain new customers.

APPLICATION TIPS

Being professional in the way that you conduct yourself and your business is key to gaining and retaining customers. Your customers want you to respect them and you want your customers to respect you.

- **Call the customer a day or two ahead of the scheduled application.** This is especially necessary if they have pets that they need to make arrangements for. This also allows you to reschedule, if necessary, around a family gathering they are planning outdoors that evening, etc. So even before you arrive to do the application, you are making a good impression on your customer, and they are grateful for your call.
- **Keep the hose away from the corners of the house,** tree trunks and out of the flowerbeds. It may be helpful to have someone with you to help guide the hose.
- **Do not spray anything within a landscaped area or inside of flowerbeds.** Not even one dandelion.



- Look the area over for children’s toys and/or pet chew toys. Pick them up and move them out of area to be sprayed or treated.
- At each application leave a newsletter with the delivery ticket. The newsletter could include information about your company (awards, new employees, new services community activities you support, your products, watering, mowing tips, testimonials etc.)

WEATHER CONDITIONS

Be mindful of the weather conditions before spraying. Don’t lose a customer and hurt your reputation by spraying in unfavorable conditions.

- **Is it too hot?**
If it’s not green and growing, fertilizer will not help. Most customers realize that brown grass doesn’t need fertilizer and you should realize that too.
- **Is it raining or is rain forecasted?**
While some products require rain to move them into the soil profile to be effective, most customers realize that spraying in the rain is not a very good idea. If the soil will absorb the initial rainfall, it is okay to finish a job once the rain starts. Remember that some herbicides may lose effectiveness. Conklin’s Rain-fast® surfactant can help shorten the time required between the application and rainfall. With most products, one to two hours should be a sufficient rain-free period.
- **Is the ground saturated with water?**
Check herbicide labels carefully. Some products will have restrictions for applying them in areas with standing water. If there is standing water or visible run-off, the products you are applying could be carried off with the water and cause environmental problems. Also, if the soil is fully saturated and more rain is in the forecast, the product won’t be absorbed into the soil. And even though you really need to – or want to do the application at that time, you need to wait. Correcting your mistakes through reapplications are the most non-productive, but necessary, things you will do. Be a good manager, and you will avoid reapplications.
- **Is it too windy to spray?**
Conklin’s Bulls-eye® drift management aid works great to keep you working on days when the wind is blowing. However, there will still be times when you may have to wait. Smaller lots with many homes, trees, and fences will be less affected by wind than open estates. Be careful of drift and overspray on trees, shrubs, bushes, gardens and landscaping. If you do happen to overspray a couple of leaves on a plant, pluck off those leaves to minimize exposure of the product to the plant.

REALITIES

As in all businesses, there are many realities of being in business. There will be times when:

1. **You have made a mistake in figuring the total square footage of the lawn.** Decide how to be fair to your customer and yourself. If you are overcharging ... correct it. If you are losing money ... you may need to meet with the customer and explain the situation with the homeowner and ask to correct your fee.
2. **You will have a "call back" because of customer dissatisfaction.** When a customer calls, be kind and understanding. The product may take longer to be effective or you may have mis-measured or forgotten product in their application. Always try to improve the situation. The customer's satisfaction is most important.
3. **You are called on for regulatory inspections.** Don't be surprised if your area Department of Agriculture Inspector calls you to look over your records, your facilities, ride with you, and take pictures while you do an application. If you are a good manager, you will be doing everything correctly. They may just give you suggestions for improvement.

SELECTED RESOURCES

- Professional Lawn Care Association of America
www.plcaa.org
- Weisburger Green Insurance
www.weisburger.com
- *Lawn and Landscape Magazine*
www.lawnandlandscape.com
- Lawn Care Success
www.lawncaresuccess.com
- A Garden Place
www.agardenplace.homestead.com
- *Inc. Magazine* (starting up a business)
www.inc.com

IN CONCLUSION

This guide was written by lawn and plant care applicators in the Conklin business. We don't make the claim that this guide covers everything you need to know. Some of it will come with application and experience. But we hope that we have addressed all of the major aspects of starting and maintaining a successful lawn business. We thank those who have provided us with direction, vision and guidance in our continuing efforts to improve this business. If you plan accordingly, treat your customers with respect and keep your eyes open for marketing opportunities, you should be on your way to creating a successful enterprise.

Good Luck!

Conklin Company Inc.

Notes



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