

# YARD & GARDEN

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

\$87 Million in Online Power Equipment Sales

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Market Insights for Equipment Dealers

## DEALER BEST PRACTICES

Tennessee Dealer Recovers Profits Lost in Processes

Page 10

### SALES TIP:

Tap Into Your Existing Customer Base for More Dollars

Bob Clements Tells You How

Page 18

### EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Excel Plans for Banner Year

Page 12

### PRODUCT COVERAGE

Commercial Riding Mowers Page 20

Trimmers Page 22

Sprayers and Spreaders Page 24

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**FEATURES**

**04 Front Yard**  
 Make a New Year's resolution to try something new in your dealership.

**06 Best of the Web**  
 The most-read Green Industry news and online features.

**12 Supplier Spotlight**  
 Excel Industries plans for a banner year as they ramp up production and expand manufacturing footprint.



**14 SPECIAL REPORT: Financial Trends**  
 Customers turn to their dealers for low-interest financing options in 2013.

**16 Market Watch**  
 Commercial Mowers Set to Sell in 2013.

**18 Bob's Business Tips**  
 Keep in touch with your existing customers to remain relevant and get the most out of the relationship.

**DEALER BEST PRACTICES**



**Find Profits in Processes**  
 Dee and Jerald Hampton implemented changes in dealership processes that would help them recover increasing operating costs without raising prices.

**PRODUCT COVERAGE**

**20 Commercial Riding Mowers**

**22 Trimmers**

**24 Sprayers & Spreaders**



**20**



**23**

**ONLINE EXCLUSIVES**

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**\$87 Million in Online Power Equipment Sales**

Power Equipment Direct has gone from basement startup to monster internet seller in 10 years. Tapping into the landscaper market is next on the Illinois-based company's agenda. [greenindustrypros.com/10855711](http://greenindustrypros.com/10855711)

**Dealers Share Greatest Challenges in 2012**

A 2012 survey of *Yard & Garden* readers revealed power equipment dealers' biggest challenges in business. Do your personal challenges line up to those listed in this article? [greenindustrypros.com/10853401](http://greenindustrypros.com/10853401)

# A New Year's Resolution to Try Something New

Step outside your comfort zone and see what kind of results you get.

**A**ccording to a study by the [examiner.com](http://www.examiner.com), 8% of people are successful in achieving their New Year's resolutions. The study also revealed that 47% of resolutions are related to self improvement or education. While you may have made resolutions about making improvements in your personal life, I urge you to also think of your business.

I encourage you to make a New Year's resolution to try something new in your business this year. Big or small, any change brings the possibility of great results. Whether it is a new form of marketing (radio, Internet, TV, etc.) or trusting your business management system (BMS) to a task it's never been used for, it's important to take chances and embrace the possibility that comes with change. Step outside your comfort zone and see what kind of results you get.

As the outdoor power equipment industry continues to evolve, there is a need for dealers to do the same. While change may not come easy to you or your staff, starting small by making a promise to try something new is a great start.

In our Dealer Best Practice article this issue, Dee Hampton of Boones Creek Outdoor Power Equipment Center in Gray, TN, enlists the help of her staff to evaluate their processes in the parts and service departments and institute change that would improve their profitability. She knows that while

change can be difficult, it is also necessary in order to succeed in business.

"Look around at your competitors to see how they operate," says Hampton. "Open your eyes and ears and learn from everybody everywhere. Without change, you are going to end up right where you are now. Change is cheap. Not changing will cost you more in the long run."

Take some time and discuss with your staff what one area they think would benefit most from a change in the coming year. Address your ability to make those changes, and once you find a project or initiative that is suitable, make a plan for implementation.

We hope that in the pages of *Yard & Garden*, the many volumes of the *Dealer Success Guide*, and on our website [greenindustrypros.com](http://greenindustrypros.com), you will find articles that both inspire you and help you to implement changes that lead to a more prosperous future for your dealership.

When you implement a change in your business, please share your successes with us and other dealers. ◀



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# YARD & GARDEN

Market Insights for Equipment Dealers

Published By

**CYGNUS**  
BUSINESS MEDIA

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#### Cygnus Reprint Services

For reprints and licensing please contact Nick Iademarco at Wright's Media 877-652-5295 ext. 102 or [niademarco@wrightsmedia.com](mailto:niademarco@wrightsmedia.com).

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One year subscription for non-qualified individuals: U.S. \$35; Canada and Mexico \$55, \$80, all other countries (payable in U.S. funds, drawn on U.S. bank.) Single issues available (pre-paid only) \$10 each. Canadian GST #131910168.

YARD & GARDEN (ISSN 0896-6834) is published six times a year: January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October and November/December. Periodicals postage paid at Fort Atkinson, WI and additional entry offices. POSTMASTER: Please send change of address to Yard & Garden, PO Box 3257, Northbrook, IL 60065-9770. Printed in the U.S.A.

Canada Post: PM40612608. Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to: Yard & Garden, PO BOX 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2

Volume 36 Number 2





## An Open Letter to STIHL Dealers

Ladies and gentlemen,

History is a great business teacher. After working for more than 40 years in this industry, I can confirm that substance wins out over style every time. Fancy gimmicks, flashy packaging, and cute slogans may create short term interest, but it is the strategic discipline that ultimately dictates real and lasting success. For STIHL that has meant designing, engineering and building the best outdoor power equipment possible for our independent servicing dealers and STIHL customers here in America and around the world.

There is no doubt that 2012 brought its fair share of challenges. Despite these, STIHL continued to be the number one selling brand of gasoline-powered handheld outdoor power equipment in America\*, and we achieved market share gains in several product categories and record sales. I want to thank all of our STIHL dealers for making that success possible.

But we do not rest on past accomplishments. Next year we will bring you new products, technologies, and marketing strategies designed to not only retain our loyal fans, but also introduce a new generation of customers to the STIHL brand and your dealerships. We will continue our support of professional associations, such as the Professional Landcare Network, and consumer movements, including Independent We Stand, that reinforce our business principles and ultimately support you.

I believe that fortune favors the bold, and success comes to those who have the resolve, skills, tools and team to achieve it. At STIHL Inc., we build in America\* because we believe in America, and we look forward to working with all of you in achieving even greater success in the future.

On behalf of all employees at STIHL Inc., I thank you for your support, and wish you good selling in 2013!

Sincerely,

Fred J. Whyte  
President  
STIHL Inc.

\*A majority of STIHL products are built in the United States from domestic and foreign parts and components. "Number one selling brand" is based on syndicated Irwin Broh Research as well as independent consumer research of 2009-2011 U.S. sales and market share data for the gasoline-powered handheld outdoor power equipment category combined sales to consumers and commercial landscapers.

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**What's This?**

Visit [greenindustrypros.com](http://greenindustrypros.com) to search for the eight-digit code at the end of the news item and read the complete story.

## Michael Jones Leaving Husqvarna

Husqvarna Group has made two changes in group management as of January 23. Michael Jones, executive vice president and head of business unit Americas since 2009, has decided to leave the group. Jones is heading to Lowe's.

Earl Bennett, vice president and general counsel for Americas, has been appointed acting head of Americas. He will be a member of group management until a replacement has been recruited.

Nicolas Lanus has been appointed executive vice president and head of business unit sales and service for Asia/Pacific and will become a new member of group management.

What's This?

**10857682**

## Case Sells 11 West Coast Dealerships

Case Construction Equipment has announced an agreement with Los Angeles-based Sonsray Machinery LLC, under which Sonsray Machinery will acquire and operate 11 Case dealership branch office locations in California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington. The dealerships were previously owned and operated by Case Power and Equipment, a subsidiary of CNH Construction Equipment. **10854610**

## GE Capital Retail Bank and Briggs & Stratton Introduce Retail Financing Program

GE Capital Retail Bank and Briggs & Stratton Corporation announced a multi-year agreement to provide a private-label retail credit card program for power equipment and standby generators. The private-label retail

financing program is accepted at more than 6,000 Briggs & Stratton dealers nationwide. It offers a fast application process and special financing promotions (subject to credit approval and availability) on a complete line of lawn and garden and turf care products through the Simplicity, Snapper, Snapper Pro, Ferris and Massey Ferguson lawn and garden brands, as well as GE Generator Systems and Briggs & Stratton Standby Generators. The Briggs & Stratton Retail Credit Card can also be used toward parts, service and accessories. **10853084**

## John Deere Pulls Out of Dealer Partnership After 84 Years

According to their website, R.N. Johnson in Walpole, NH, was the oldest John Deere dealer in the world. After 84 years and three generations, their partnership with John Deere has ended. Owner Alan Johnson says John Deere was talking of pulling out of the dealership for the last 10 years.

Half of the company's revenue was made through the sales of the machines. Due to the loss of the John Deere line, six of the company's 20 employees were laid off. **10852016**

## Snapper Mowers Available at Walmart

Three of Briggs & Stratton's Snapper brand walk-behind lawn mower models are now sold at Walmart. Briggs & Stratton had said previously that they would not manufacture products to be sold through the mass merchants, and stress that these models are being made by an existing lawnmower supplier.

"Our brand is available, but we are not manufacturing them," explains Rick Zeckmeister, vice president of engine marketing and planning for Briggs & Stratton. "We are not going to manufacture lawn mowers for the mass merchants. It is very consistent with what other OEMs do. There are quite a few more dealer options, and only the walk mowers are available to Walmart." **10855759**

## Challenge to EPA Ethanol Ruling Denied

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia denied a rehearing on the EPA decision that put fuels with a 15% ethanol concentration, known as E15, on the market. Concerns have been expressed by the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) regarding E15 use possibly harming outdoor power equipment and voiding warranties.

"Now we will reconsider moving forward on a mis-fueling rule challenge concerning EPA's wholly inadequate solution to avoid mis-fueling, which consists of a small 3x3 gas pump label," says Kris Kiser, OPEI president and CEO. "EPA denied our petition to have an E10 legacy fuel for the marketplace. We remain adamant that an E10 fuel stay in the marketplace for all products not approved for E15 use." **10853942**



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## TAKE IT FROM THE PRO.

Changing equipment lines is not a decision to take lightly. Bringing on a new brand can be a real culture shift and a strain on operations, from stocking different parts to training employees on how to properly run the machines. Sometimes, there's a learning curve. That's why Kurt Kluznik, president of Yardmaster, stayed with his equipment brand for more than 15 years, until recently. Kluznik now owns a dozen Snapper Pro mowers. Most of his locations are switching over to Snapper Pro, and Kluznik says aside from being cost competitive, the exceptional service has made him a Snapper Pro advocate. Kluznik compared Snapper Pro to other mower lines and discovered he didn't have to sacrifice quality to get value.



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## Steven Willand Inc. Expands Distribution Territory

Steven Willand Inc., a wholesale commercial power equipment distributor based in Augusta, NJ, has recently been awarded the New York and New England territories for Husqvarna's RedMax, Dixon and BlueBird brands of power equipment. In all, Steven Willand Inc. distributes over 20 brands of power equipment to dealerships from D.C. to Maine. **10847656**

## EETC Appoints New Executive Director

The Equipment & Engine Training Council (EETC) has a new executive director, Erik Sides. Sides comes from Jacobsen/Textron where he was the training manager. He succeeds former executive director Jim Roche. **10855333**

## Billy Goat Names Shindaiwa Alum as New Sales Manager

Billy Goat has named Carmelo Grenier as western regional sales manager. In this key role, Carmelo will be responsible for leading Billy Goat's sales efforts across the Western United States for all sales channels. Grenier brings more than 30 years of experience with five major manufacturers including Hitachi Koki USA, Ltd. (Tanaka), Shindaiwa, Garden Way, Cub Cadet and Waxman Industries. **10847824**

### BLOG

#### What's Cheap in 2013?

Coming into the new year, a lot of predictions are being made about the year ahead. Many of those predictions are about consumer spending and the cost of goods and services. This list allows us to make some assumptions about how your customers will be shopping and spending in 2013.

**10849519**

## Most-Requested Products of 2012

Well over 140,000 people have visited greenindustrypros.com in 2012, viewing the nearly 4,000 pieces of content that include product reviews, industry news, podcasts and videos, company profiles, business tips, and more. Product reviews continue to be a popular feature at the site. Of the more than 1,500 currently listed, several really stood out last year. Here's a look at the 12 most-requested products of 2012 at greenindustrypros.com.

Jari USA's walk-behind sickle mower - **10157880**

Toro's 30-inch walk mower (pictured) - **10446753**

Exmark's 30-inch walk mower - **10821199**

Stens aftermarket replacement parts catalog - **10185807**

Worx unmanned mower - **10185517**

Toro stand-on aerator - **10448877**

Stihl sharpening tool - **10156523**

Canycom brush cutter - **10175852**

Bayer Specticle herbicide - **10184685**

Stihl MS 271 chainsaw - **10242905**

Kioti CS 2410 tractor - **10683213**

Wright ZTO riding mower - **10634203**



## Takeuchi Adds to North American Dealer Network

Takeuchi-US has announced AgCon Equipment as the latest addition to the expanding Takeuchi dealer network in North America. As a full-service heavy-construction, landscaping and agricultural equipment distributor, AgCon Equipment will represent the

full line of Takeuchi compact earth-moving equipment from their offices in Springfield, MB, Canada. **10847716**

## Morbark Acquires Boxer Equipment

Morbark Inc., a leading manufacturer of tree care, sawmill, recycling, forestry, and biomass chipping and grinding equipment, has completed the acquisition of Boxer Equipment, a product line of Mertz Manufacturing, which manufactures and globally markets a full line of compact utility loaders (also known as mini-skid steers) and attachments. The Boxer line will continue to expand as production is moved to Winn, MI. **10847768**






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# Find Profits in Processes

A look at how one Tennessee dealer has preserved profits without raising prices. The secret's in the work processes.



The next step for the Hamptons is to find areas for improvement in the showroom.

**M**any dealers are doers. They know what needs to be done to provide equipment and service to customers, and they do it. An important step they often miss out on is evaluating how well they provide those things to customers. Doing so can lead to higher profits and better customer service.

The staff at Boones Creek Outdoor Power Equipment Center in Gray, TN, decided they needed to put forth the time and energy to evaluate their processes and implement changes that would bring them out on top. They needed to recover increasing operating costs and knew that raising prices wouldn't fly with their customer base.

"We needed to increase our profits in a weak economy," explains Dee Hampton. "We had to find a way to decrease our cost of doing business to achieve a higher profit margin. In this sluggish economy, we knew our customers couldn't stand a price increase so we had to find a way to lower our cost of doing business."

## Implementation and research

To decrease costs and increase profits, owners Dee and her husband Jerald decided to implement time and motion studies. They continue to evaluate operations throughout the business, looking for ways to save on time and effort while increasing output.

"We do time and motion studies on all our operations," says Hampton. "We constantly review our processes to ensure maximum efficiency."

At the start of it all, they spent a lot of time evaluating similar businesses to see how they operated. From there they evaluated what they could and should apply to their own dealership.

"We learned by watching other dealers, our competitors, our distributors and the big box stores," shares Hampton. "We watched to see how these other companies operated and what worked well for them. We learned something from each of them. Some things we knew wouldn't work well for our industry, but other things did."

From the big box stores, they took the cue to monitor inventory with computers, lessen transaction time with a signature capture system, buy in bulk and keep shelves stocked with

### DEALERSHIP DATA

#### BOONES CREEK OUTDOOR POWER EQUIPMENT CENTER

Gray, TN  
boonescreek.com  
**Founded:** 1995  
**Owner:** Dee and Jerald Hampton  
**Employees:** 5 full-time  
**Sales Mix:** 65% wholesales, 20% parts, 15% service  
**Customer Mix:** 50% consumer, 50% commercial  
**Major Lines:** Little Wonder, RedMax, Scag, Steiner, Toro

**▶ HOW WE DID IT**

- ☛ Enlist the help of staff
- ☛ Evaluate and improve processes to save time and money
- ☛ Set goals for future improvement initiatives

merchandise. But they were careful to maintain the way they treat customers and provide service.

“We knew we wanted to continue to offer service after the sale and we didn’t want to treat the customer as a number,” says Hampton.

## Service and parts

Obviously, the service department is a great place for a dealer to start when looking for improvement. A lot of time can get wasted in this area of the dealership, which is often the busiest. The Hamptons have gotten their turnaround time on repairs down to 24 hours.

“We did the study in the shop and service area as well as in the parts room,” says Hampton. “We needed to improve our time in both areas.”

In their parts department they added a Vidmar cabinet system with all parts assigned a specific parts drawer and bin number. The location of each part is tracked on the computer. The Hamptons are currently in the process of adding on to the dealership with additional warehouse space and a larger parts room. They have four Vidmar cabinets in the parts room now, but will have nine after the expansion is completion.

“This will allow us to inventory additional parts so the customer doesn’t have to wait for us to special order something,” says Hampton, who follows the big box’s lead on stocking a heavy inventory. “We also stock an additional Vidmar cabinet behind the parts counter in the showroom with fast-moving items. By keeping these items close to the counter, the salesclerk only has to turn around and get them instead of making the customer wait as they go into the parts room,” she adds.

They also designated an employee for delivering parts to the technician in the shop. It keeps the technician working and increases the shop’s output.

“Now, instead of a tech having to look up a part, track it down and go back to the shop, we have one specific parts person who takes the work order, looks up the parts, pulls them and takes everything back to the tech,” explains Hampton.

New handheld scanners limit the transaction time between the clerk and technician and the clerk and customer. A signature capture unit at the checkout saves them not only time, but also on the cost of paper.

It’s their increased net profit from these small changes that make a big difference and show them they are moving in the right direction. Improved efficiency has allowed them to be more profitable, and in the end, remain a servicing dealer.

“It has made us a more profitable dealer so we can continue to service our customers,” says Hampton. “We offered great service before, but this has allowed us to be able to continue to offer that great service.”

## Employee input

When doing the time and motion studies, they also include staff in the process. Their participation is not

only valuable to get a good read on what systems are and aren’t working, but also encourages staff to embrace the change.

“We asked ourselves, ‘How do you get people committed to change?’” Hampton relates. “Staff has to be involved, so we have involved them from day one. We always ask for their suggestions.”

For example, one of their technicians suggested a designated work area for two-cycle equipment with a work bench and tool box just for those products. Now, the technician doesn’t have to hunt for tools or make room to work around the mowers when he has to service a piece of equipment.

In the year ahead, the Hamptons plan to look for more ways to improve efficiency throughout the dealership and specifically in the showroom. Sometimes change can be hard, but they strongly suggest dealers consider it. Making small changes to your business can lead to big improvements in profit later on.

“Look around at your competitors to see how they operate,” says Hampton. “Open your eyes and ears and learn from everybody everywhere. Without change, you are going to end up right where you are now. Change is cheap. Not changing will cost you more in the long run.” ◀



Parts are stored in a Vidmar cabinet system and are each tracked on the computer. More cabinets will be added after the dealership expansion is completed.



Employees have been included in the process improvement exercises and helped to greatly increase shop efficiency.

# Excel Plans for Banner Year

Excel Industries is ramping up production of new Hustler and BigDog mowers, all while expanding manufacturing footprint and employee base.



The Hustler Raptor is marketed toward large-property homeowners and will help Excel to compete in a new market.

**E**xcel Industries, maker of Hustler and BigDog lawn-mowers, is preparing for what they think will be a banner

year. The company is ramping up production of new products under both brands in 2013. Continuous facility and employee investment will help them to meet customer demand and reach their goals as a company in the coming year.

## Facility and staff investment

Embracing growth in the zero-turn mower market, Excel will be increasing the manufacturing and distribution of their zero-turn mowers. The company says they are committed to providing what they think are some of the best zero-turn mowers on the market.

“The zero-turn market is a growing market with limitless opportunities for residential, commercial and industrial owners,” says Corey Seidl, product manager at Excel. “We have added additional distribution of our product across the globe and introduced five new product families this fall. We expect the new families to increase market share and don’t forecast much cannibalism from the legacy products.”

To meet the increasing production demands, Excel has brought on roughly 39 full-time employees, bringing the

company’s employee total to 450. They also completed a 40,000-square-foot addition to their production facility in 2012. Facility and employee investments are helping to drive a positive corporate culture.

“Employees at Excel Industries invest every day in our facilities, products and production,” says Seidl. “We are committed to our core values and beliefs. These values were drawn from our experience as a company and upon reflection of the many employees that have demonstrated these attributes throughout our history.”

## New products

The company’s growth has led to many product family additions, including a new and more affordable zero-turn mower. The Hustler Raptor is marketed toward large-property homeowners and will help Excel to compete in a new market.

“We have never competed in the sub-\$3,000 market with a mower that stacked up head to head with other brands,” explains Seidl. “The Raptor is our first product to do so. The Raptor has many advantages over the competition in the sub-\$3,000 zero-turn mower market such as a welded steel deck, not a stamped deck.”

Orders from dealers starting in the fall of 2012 have shown promise.

Dealers are embracing the product line and hoping customers will do the same.

“Orders are meeting our expectations for the first quarter and units are starting to retail at a good pace even though we are in the winter season,” says Seidl.

The commercial segment of products from Excel has reportedly shown strength as well. As current products maintained popularity, the company also introduced new commercial mowers to their lineup. The company hopes to build off of their commercial mower reputation.

“The market is expected to be up, so if we didn’t change anything to the line that would be good news,” explain Seidl. “However, we introduced three new commercial-grade families: X-ONEi, New Super Z and Super Z HyperDrive.”

As order numbers for the Raptor hold strong, Excel is also seeing the same strength with other product lines. Numbers are expected to be up through the spring.

“With the product and programs we have in place, we see no reason for them to slow down as spring approaches,” says Seidl. “Our other products are just as anticipated, and as they come into production we should see the same success.” ◀

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# Credit Approved



Customers will turn to their dealers for low-interest financing options in 2013 as they plan their purchases.

**G**oing into 2013, offering financing options to customers can greatly help dealers to close the sale.

While consumer debt is down overall, spending on credit is up. Dealers can benefit greatly from a customer's desire to make a purchase if they have credit options available.

"In today's environment where many budgets are stretched, there are numerous benefits of using consumer credit programs," says Gary Slagle, general manager, Outdoor Power Equipment Industry, for GE Capital's Retail Finance business. "For consumers, a credit card that is used for outdoor yard and garden equipment or services increases buying power by providing access to special financing."

## Purchasing trends

While consumer debt has continued to decline over the past four years, falling by \$74 billion in this year's third quarter, non-mortgage household debt is up. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's Quarterly Report on Household Debt and Credit, non-mortgage household debt balances jumped by 2.3% in the third quarter to \$2.7 trillion, boosted by increases of

\$18 billion in auto loans, \$42 billion in student loans, and \$2 billion in credit card balances.

This data suggests that while consumers are paying down their mortgages, they are still turning to credit for many expenses and purchases. To help grow consumer spending, many creditors are offering some of the best financing options in years with low interest rates.

"Our most popular program in 2012 was a 0% for 48 months," shares J.C. Hendrix, chief sales and marketing officer for Sheffield Financial. "We have agreed with most of our major OEMs that we will continue to offer this program in 2013 along with our other low-rate programs."

While consumer confidence plays the biggest role in spending, new and innovative products encourage customers to buy and take out credit for purchases. This is where the desire to have the next greatest thing on the market paired with financing options helps secure the sale.

"With the industry ever changing by adding higher-priced and more-productive units like the zero turning-radius mowers and others, we continue to see our customer base increase significantly," says Hendrix. "In fact, in 2012 we saw our finance volume in the outdoor power equipment industry more than double over 2011."

Dealers should touch on their financing options in marketing efforts during peak purchasing times. Hendrix says most contractors buy in April, May and June depending on where they are located in the U.S.

"Southern customers buy in April and May with the Northern tier coming

in early June," explains Hendrix. "That means 53% of purchases come in months March-June and 34% in months August-December."

## More dealers take on credit

"Our dealer base continues to increase," says Hendrix. "Low-interest and low-payment programs continue to be a valuable tool for dealers as well as customers."

Commercial customers especially should be taking an interest in financing options that can help them to grow their business. Revenue made from the use of equipment allows them to quickly pay down low-interest financing.


"Our dealers can offer attractive finance programs which enable the commercial cutter to generate revenue during the term of the loan," explains Hendrix. "For the commercial cutter that uses these programs to assist in the purchase of their equipment, along with all of the tax benefits, it makes it an easy decision for them to purchase now instead of paying cash. In other words, let the equipment pay for itself during the normal course of business."

Be sure employees are knowledgeable on all programs and benefits. Financing programs can often be a deciding factor for customers.

"Research confirms that consumers are prudent about making outdoor power equipment purchases, and are poised to spend on larger-ticket items, with financing being an important consideration in the research and purchase process," says Slagle. "In fact, the availability of financing drives the final choice of an outdoor power equipment dealer for about 40% of all shoppers." ◀

### Did you know?

"The availability of financing drives the final choice of an outdoor power equipment dealer for about 40% of all shoppers."



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# Commercial Mowers Set to Sell in 2013



After the ups and downs of 2012, dealers and manufacturers are optimistic for the coming year.

**B**oth dealers and manufacturers are hopeful for commercial mower sales in 2013. Orders are on par with 2012, and 62% of landscape contractors surveyed by our sister publication *Green Industry PRO Magazine* plan to buy a mower in 2013. The market for commercial walk mowers is also showing strength as some manufacturers introduce new models in the category.

## 2013 Sales expectations

As the 2012 selling season came to a close, dealers had many successes and failures to reflect on when planning for 2013. Each year, dealers are at the mercy of the weather and economy.

“Dealer preparation for the upcoming season is directly related to the successes and challenges their dealerships faced in 2012,” explains Glenn Beyerl, president and managing member of distributor KPM Exceptional with locations in New York and New Jersey. “Dealers are still in a strong preparation mode; the economic pause brought on by the election is past and we can get down to the business of 2013.”

Some dealers from drought-stricken areas may still have small amounts of 2012 inventory that had to be carried over to 2013. In spite of that, many manufacturers are still reporting

commercial mower orders being in-line with that of 2012.

“Dealer orders to date are equivalent to last season’s levels,” says Bill Shea, vice president of sales for commercial products at Briggs & Stratton Products Group. “Like OPEI, we expect the market to grow in 2013.”

Beyerl urges dealers to work with early predictions and “stack the odds” in their favor to better ensure their success in 2013. Reaching out to customers through hosting events and having one-on-one conversations can help you to better assess and plan for their needs in the coming year.

“Early plans to reach out to customers will help build a successful 2013,” says Beyerl. “Dealership events that address your customer’s business (what your customers need to be profitable) will also work to help create demand.”

## Landscape buying intentions

Weather events in the last year have caused many ups and downs for landscape contractors. Their cash flow and the wear and tear—or lack thereof—on machines decides whether a purchase in 2013 is likely.

“The current weather cycle has not been ideal for some contractors in some areas of the country,” says Chris Hannan, marketing manager at Toro.

“Last year, the light snow accumulations hurt landscape contractors that plow snow during the winter months, but the early spring put many crews back to work earlier in the year. Some contractors also had a slower summer because of drought conditions, but started to see business pick up this fall as those markets saw increased moisture.”

Coming into 2013, contractor equipment needs will be driven by the demands of their business. This reiter-

## EFI A NOVELTY NO LONGER

With a watchful eye on fuel prices, landscape contractors are looking for solutions to help recover these costs. Many are turning to the fuel savings and environmental benefits of mower models that feature electronic fuel-injection engines.

### Mower manufacturers currently offering Kohler EFI-powered models

- Hustler (Excel Industries)
- Exmark
- Gravely
- John Deere
- Scag
- Toro
- Walker



Kohler anticipates that approximately 12 more mower brands will soon be offering Kohler EFI-powered models. [Read the full article at greenindustrypros.com/10843556](http://greenindustrypros.com/10843556)



ates the importance of connecting with your commercial customers to learn what they require of you.

“They will need to either purchase new equipment or maintain their existing fleets,” says Shea. “Either way, the dealer can count on business from the contractor.”

### Commercial walk mowers

At industry tradeshow GIE+EXPO in October 2012, several manufacturers showcased new walk-behind mowers directed toward the commercial user. While Toro says they are still seeing increasing numbers of contractors purchasing stand-on mowers over walk-behinds, they see strength in the walk-behind category for the coming year.

“There is still a very strong market for 21-inch professional mowers although we’re starting to see a shift in that market as well,” shares Hannan. “In 2012, Toro introduced the TimeMaster 30-inch walk-behind mower that was designed for the homeowner market. While a huge homeowner success, many landscape contractors also purchased the TimeMaster to enjoy the high productivity of the 30-inch mower. In January 2013 we began shipping the professional TurfMaster 30-inch walk-behind mower. The TurfMaster is built specifically to withstand the demands of a contractor while significantly reducing mowing time, enabling contractors to get more done and enhance their profitability.”

Beyerl has seen renewed interest for commercial hydro walk-behind mowers in areas with large unsupervised crews where turf damage is a concern. Stand-on mowers are also gaining popularity, but he stresses it is all about the individual contractor and their needs.

“They (contractors) are all figuring out where this technology fits in their business,” says Beyerl. “The need for productivity will drive so much of the

buying decisions in the near future.”

Prosumers are also assessing how these technologies can help them to maintain their own properties. Beyerl says the prosumer market is growing and should remain a dealer focus. Contractors and prosumers alike will

be turning to their dealers in 2013 for a wide offering of commercial-grade mowers that provide a high-quality cut in less time. ◀

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Bob Clements

# Take Advantage of Your Biggest Asset

Keep in touch with your existing customers to remain relevant and get the most out of the relationship.



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**W**hen it comes to business, we tend to think of assets as items we have invested in, like our buildings, land and equipment. Yet one of the most important assets you have paid for and own is your past and current customers. Your customer base is the biggest and most important asset that you have. Like with your other assets, to make sure you are getting a good return on your investment you have to make sure that you are working constantly to keep it active.

## Put it in perspective

Every customer that you've ever had has a lifetime value you can attach to them. Think about your commer-

cial cutters. Over a period of say 20 years, how much equipment, parts and service would one small commercial cutter purchase? Let's say that every five years they purchase one zero-turn mower, a backpack blower and a string trimmer. On the low side you are looking at them spending \$6,000. Now throw in some parts and service over a period of five years and you are looking at around \$7,500. So conservatively in 20 years, assuming that the commercial cutter doesn't grow his or her business at all, they represent a minimum of \$30,000 in sales to your dealership.

As you think about the value of a customer, whether it be a commer-

cial or consumer customer, they all have a lifetime value, and your goal in business is to make sure that you are capturing as much of that as you can.

If you want to take advantage of the maximum dollars you can receive from a customer, it's important that you have an active relationship with them. It's critical that your customers know that you value their business and that you offer products and services that they can continue to benefit from.

## Market to existing customers

People only notice what is relevant to them. You have seen this happen in your own life when you have

purchased a vehicle. Prior to making the purchase, you drove by vehicles like you purchased on a regular basis without noticing. Once you made the purchase of your car or truck, you suddenly noticed that there were lots of other people who had the same model as you. The same holds true for your dealership. If you assume that all of your old customers know what you have to offer and will buy when they are interested, then you are more than likely missing out on some easy sales.

Everyone in your customer base needs to be reminded on a regular basis about the equipment you sell and the parts and services you offer. The easiest way to make them aware of what you have is through a direct-mail piece. Keep in mind that with direct mail some people will act upon


it immediately while others may take some time. So if you send one letter out to customers and get only a limited response, don't give up, send the message again. It can even be the exact same message.

Advertising is about consistency. Most people need to hear a message multiple times before they act on it. If you are proactive and consistent in keeping in touch with your customers, you will remain relevant to them. When they need your product or services, it will be a natural decision to purchase from you.

There is an old saying that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and the same holds true with your existing customers. While it is exciting to focus energy, effort and dollars on attracting new customers, your dealership's most

valuable asset is your existing customer base—and it will pay big dividends in 2013 if you will focus more of your resources and energy in reigniting their passion toward your business. ◀

Bob Clements is the president of Bob Clements International, a consulting firm that specializes in the development of high-performance dealerships. His organization works hands on with dealerships throughout North America, helping them attain the personal freedom and financial wealth all entrepreneurs strive to achieve. For more information, visit [www.bobclements.com](http://www.bobclements.com).



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## Contact Management Tools Help You Leverage Customer Data to Increase Sales and Service

**Customer Segmentation** - With business system contact management tools, you can segment your customers to market to them by type, warranty expiration, last service date, type of equipment owned, etc., or create your own scenarios to pinpoint customers by their sales history by department. For example, you can find out which customers have purchased units but not parts or service from you, and reach out to them with a targeted promotion.

**Easy Marketing** - After targeting your desired customers, with just a few mouse clicks, market to them via e-mail or create internal follow-up tasks, or use the generated lists to send direct mail. Filter your completed work orders or sort equipment pickups by zone, and create a call list or an e-mail to notify these customers of scheduled deliveries or pickups.

**Better Records** - However you reach out to your customers, all your communications are logged onto the selected customers' records to build a history of all contact with them. This information at your employees' fingertips allows them to be more responsive to customers' needs and greatly improves customer service.

Supplied by Charter Software, provider of the ASPEN Windows-based business management solution that helps dealers manage customer relations in the ways listed above. For more information, visit [greenindustrypros.com/10708600](http://greenindustrypros.com/10708600).

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### Grasshopper 226V-48 Zero-Turn Mower

Grasshopper says its compact Model 226V-48 delivers the superior cut, performance and handling that landscape professionals expect from a Grasshopper at a low entry price. A 48-inch cutting deck is now offered along with the available 52- and 61-inch deck options for Model 226V.

- Built with professional-grade components
- Individual pump-and-wheel motor drive that's design-matched for precision control
- Extra-deep, 48-inch cutting deck with side discharge, mulching and vacuum capabilities
- True zero-turn maneuverability
- 12-gallon fuel tank

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### Wright ZTO Mid-Mount Zero-Turn

Wright's ZTO (Zero Technology Optimized) mid-mount zero-turn mowers feature an exclusive transmission interlock that is built into the controls, eliminating the need for a separate parking brake.

- Deck widths of 48, 52 and 61 inches
- 31-hp Kawasaki FX or Briggs & Stratton Commercial Turf (Cyclonic) engine
- 15-gallon fuel tank
- 10.5-mph cutting speed
- Rear tires are low-profile 23" x 10.5" and the front tires are 13" x 5" run flats
- Z3400 series Hydro-Gear transmissions
- Undercarriage cage protects the transmissions and their filters

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### Rotary Corp. Blades

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- 100% of all Rotary blades are made in the USA

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### Land Pride ZTi Series Zero-Turn Mowers

The Land Pride ZTi Series of zero-turn mowers is designed for lawn maintenance contractors, ranchers, farmers, large-estate owners, cemeteries, municipalities and campuses.

- 60- or 72-inch deck
- 27-hp Kawasaki engine
- Tele-caster front suspension for smoother ride
- New deck design with reinforced box front edge
- Front suspension and pivoting front axle

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### Snapper Pro S50x Compact Riding Mower

Snapper Pro says its compact, easy-to-use S50x is designed specifically for the daily rigors of commercial mowing.

- 24- or 27-gross-hp Briggs & Stratton Professional Series or 19-gross-hp Kawasaki FX600V engine
- 36- or 48-inch cutting width
- iCD Cutting System with strip kit
- Heavy-duty 1.5" x 2" 11-gauge frame rails
- Flip-up seat and seat pan

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### Dixie Chopper Xcaliber

- 66- or 74-inch deck
- Can reportedly mow 5.9 to 6.6 acres per hour
- 33-hp Generac or 40-hp Kohler engine
- Hydro-Gear 21 Series pump, White 24-cubic-inch wheel motors
- 14-gallon fuel capacity
- Springer Forks designed to produce a more enjoyable ride by absorbing imperfections in the turf
- XCaliber X2 Cutting System features the Wind Tunnel design to produce an enhanced quality cut

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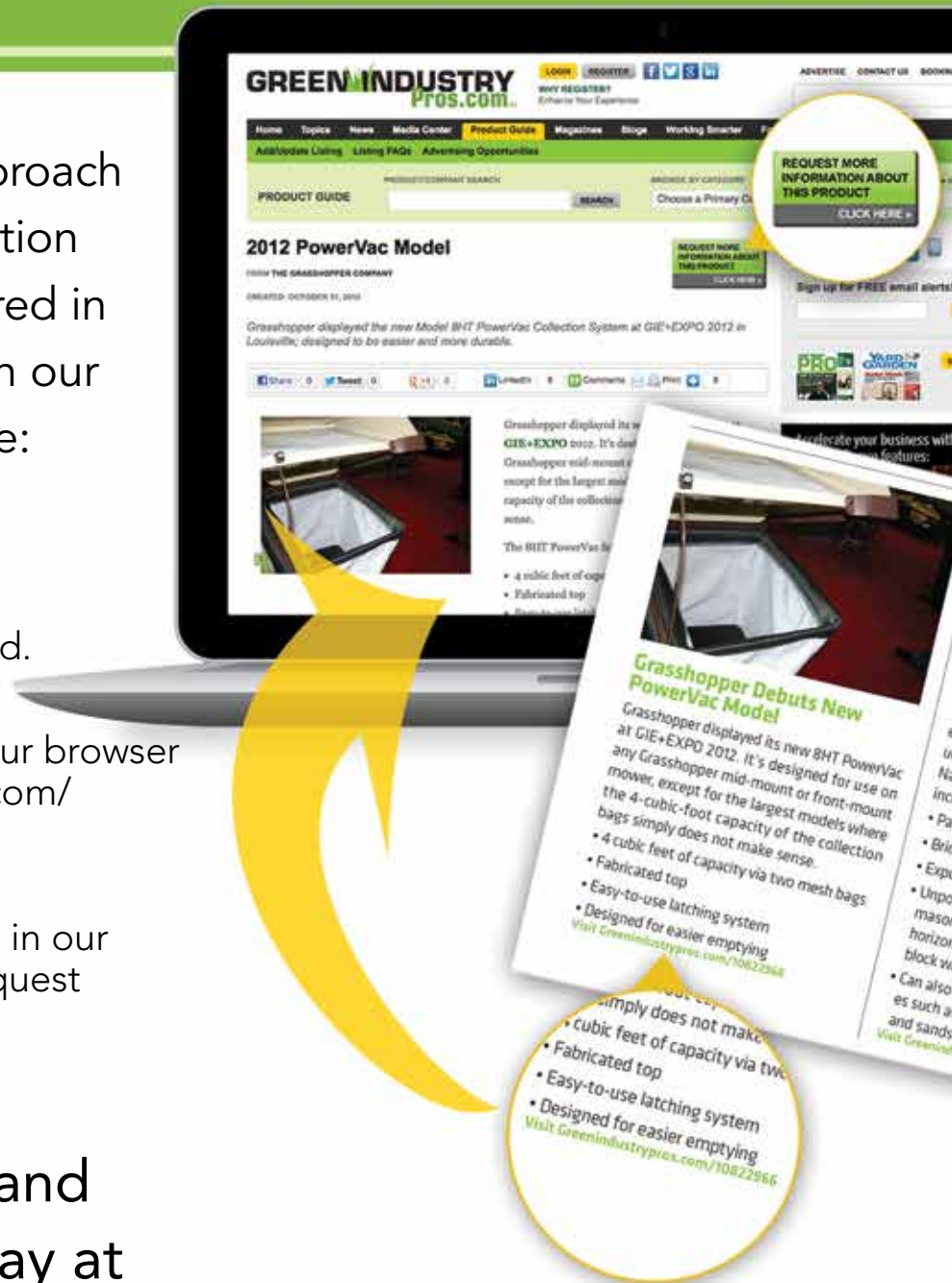


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### Stihl FS 90 Trimmer

Stihl says its FS 90 bike-handle trimmer adds greater comfort and leverage when performing long trimming jobs with wide, sweeping motions. It also produces less exhaust emissions without sacrificing power.

- Solid drive shaft accepts a wide range of heavy-duty cutting heads, including metal blades, for maximum versatility
- Multi-Function Control Handle delivers easy access to on/off and throttle controls on one comfortable handle
- Adjustable front handle can be positioned for optimal comfort
- Adjustable harness
- Easy-access air filter and starter assembly
- Heavy-duty steel-on-steel clutch helps reduce slippage while providing long-lasting wear
- Easy-View Deflector provides easy-to-see cutting and is also designed to protect user against flying debris

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### Oregon ST250 40V Max Trimmer/Edger

With no cords to get cut or tangled, the ST250 40V Max Trimmer/Edger is "Always Ready". The Oregon lithium ion battery pack features premium cell technology for long run time and fast, powerful cutting. An ergonomic, in-line design allows for comfortable use and quick and easy conversion from trimming to edging.

- Powered by a 40V Max Lithium Ion Battery
- Instant Start with no pull cord, gas or warm-up
- Flip-down guide for precise edging
- Swift load trimmer head means fast and easy string loading
- Platinum Gatorline resistant to cracking and breaking
- Bump feed line advancement
- Variable-speed throttle increases control and run time

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### Husqvarna 128C and 128L Trimmers

Husqvarna says this lightweight trimmer is perfect for homeowners looking for the ergonomic features unique to a straight shaft. Equipped with E-Tech engines, Husqvarna's 128C and 128L trimmers combine reduced exhaust emissions without compromising power.

- Weighing 9.7 pounds, the 128C has a curved shaft for extended reach and improved ergonomics
- 128L weighs 10.6 pounds and has a straight shaft for larger lawns
- Both are equipped with the Smart Start recoil system and a fuel pump designed to make the machine start quickly with minimum user effort
- The starter cord resistance on both models is reduced by up to 40%

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### Shindaiwa T254 Trimmer

Shindaiwa says the T254 provides remarkable torque to the lower end and great fuel economy.

- Hybrid 4 engine technology provides lower emissions, better fuel consumption, more torque and a low tone sound
- Speed-Feed head
- Weighs 12.1 pounds
- 24.5cc engine displacement
- Handle positioned at an 8° angle to provide natural wrist position
- Comfortable rubber over-mold grips
- 8mm steel main shaft for reduced weight

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### Core Outdoor Power CGT400 Gasless Trimmer

The wire windings and iron laminations used in conventional motors has been eliminated in Core Outdoor Power products by embedding copper-etched conductors into a multi-layered printed circuit board to form a stator that works in conjunction with permanent magnets to produce torque. As a completely gas-free system, Core technology provides the unique ability to exceed noise, efficiency and emission standards without increasing costs and without sacrificing performance. The CGT400 Trimmer is reliable, lightweight and will run just as long as a tank of gas. It features an instant trigger start, high-energy power cell, dual-mode controls for torque and speed, open view grass guard and a comfort grip handle.

- Weight: 8 pounds without power cell, 11 with
- Power cell: up to 70 minutes
- Three-hour rapid charger available
- 7,000 RPM head speed /5,000 RPM torque
- Dual-line bump-feed head

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### Stihl SG 20 Manual Backpack Sprayer

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- Equipped with an external piston pump to pressurize the SG 20's fluid reservoir
- Reservoir is separate from the main tank, which makes it easier to maintain a working pressure of 40 psi, allowing for less pumping action
- Large tank filler opening with strainer
- Clear fluid level indicator
- Adjustable brass nozzle for broadcast or pinpoint spraying
- 11.2 pounds (without fluid)
- Spray wand locks into a vertical position for transportation and storage

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### Grasshopper Shielded Sprayers

Aerodynamically designed for an even spray, Grasshopper says its shielded sprayers apply a constant, accurate balance of small droplets that "stick" to vegetation, achieving greater coverage with less chemicals. The company also states that shielded sprayers are the

most efficient and cost-effective way to apply liquid fertilizer, pesticide, herbicide and adjuvant, especially for large-acreage applications.

- Cover up to 5.5 acres (240,000 sq. ft.) with one tank
- Independent floating chambers follow the ground contours for precise application, and Grasshopper zero-turn maneuverability is maintained, even in tight spaces
- Available in 53- or 133-inch widths and 30-gallon capacities

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### Earthway S25SS Spray-Pro Push Sprayer

The S25SS Spray-Pro push sprayer is the newest model in the S-series product line from Earthway Products.

- All stainless-steel chassis
- Designed for spraying ice control products, pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers
- Adjustable spray system makes sidewalks and parking lots easier to manage
- Ability to apply precise amounts of liquid
- Use it on lawns, driveways, paths, and any area that your boom sprayer will not go
- No gas, no batteries

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### TurfEx TL-80 and TL-80SS Electric-Powered Push Sprayers

The TL-80 and TL-80SS electric-powered push sprayers from TurfEx are capable of spraying all liquid solutions. The company says these

units provide higher productivity than competitive ground-driven models.

- The TL-80 comes with a powder-coated frame, while the TL-80SS features a stainless steel frame
- Both sprayers include 12-gallon tanks, which are constructed of lightweight, corrosion-resistant polyethylene
- Front-mounted, adjustable-height boomless nozzle is capable of spraying between 48 and 72 inches wide
- Professional-duty, variable-tip spray wand on an 8-foot hose
- Convenient switch toggles between nozzle and spray wand operation

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### JRCO Zero-Turn Sprayer

The JRCO sprayer is intended for contractors that need high-quality, dependable parts combined in a complete unit.

- A self-contained sprayer, no electrical hookup is required
- The nozzle height and spacing are preset for an even pattern
- Uses a high-capacity Udor diaphragm pump driven by a Briggs & Stratton 5.5-hp engine to provide power for all-day spraying
- Ultra low-drift Turbo TeeJet spray tips minimize spray drift
- Check-valve nozzle bodies prevent drips when not spraying
- Tip strainers prevent clogging
- Hydraulic agitator keeps chemicals mixed and fresh in the tank
- 30-gallon sprayer quickly attaches to a mower with four clevis pins
- Compact, rigid frame with pneumatic swivel wheels and rigid two-point hitch prevents jackknifing when backing
- Three-section break-away boom folds to 5-, 8- and 11-foot widths with individual zone control valves

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# Maybe I'm just a terrible salesman.

I mean, I'm not the kind of guy who can convince you that you need something I wouldn't use myself. That's why I sell Grasshoppers. I have to believe in what I'm selling, because it's my reputation at stake. And with Grasshopper, I know I'm carrying a brand I can count on. You don't want to keep coming back to have something fixed, put back on or updated. You want to come in just to chat. Put a dent in my cushion. Drink my coffee. Tell me you think the Vipers are going to beat the Barons on Friday. Oh, I'd disagree, but in the end, we'd cool down and vow never to argue about high school football again. I'm not good at changing people's minds, but at least we can agree about Grasshopper.



Model 335 Big Block



For more information, visit [grasshoppermower.com](http://grasshoppermower.com) or call 620-345-8621.



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\*Source: Statistical data from an independent study conducted by a major university in 2009 - 2010.

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