

February 2008

www.lawnandlandscape.com

# Lawn & Landscape

THE SOURCE FOR SMART BUSINESS



## Who Will Do The Work?

The landscape industry addresses the labor crisis.



# man the boards

A look at two white-board driven scheduling systems  
that help contractors stay on track.

BY MARISA PALMIERI/SENIOR EDITOR

**Whether it's Mother Nature's wrath** or customers who add last-minute pergolas to their patios, unpredictable forces can wreak havoc on a landscape company's installation schedule.

When companies are small, it may not be too taxing to facilitate communications between owners, crews and clients. But as firms grow, these tasks get tougher.

Don't fret, seasoned contractors say. An organized, systemized scheduling process allows companies to minimize the internal battles that take place while meeting production requirements and – most importantly – customers' expectations. "You can design and install the most magnificent landscape, but if you didn't satisfy your customer's expectation of completion, you have not done your job properly," says Scott Parker, president of Parker Homescape, Fanwood, N.J. "Learn from your mistakes and make it a priority to meet your deadlines. It can mean the difference between being labeled an average company vs. a stellar company in the eyes of your customers."

*Lawn & Landscape* takes a look at two firms' systems for ensuring their work stays on track.

## **Eight-Week Scheduling Board WinnScapes, Gahanna, Ohio**

At WinnScapes, a 15- by 5-foot dry erase board – known simply as "The Board" – is the company's installation-scheduling bible.

# design / build

"We've looked at some of the other scheduling programs to adapt into Outlook, but with our size and amount of work, we've deemed our dry erase board the most beneficial," says Clark Morris, president of the \$3-million, full-service company.

The board, which hangs on a wall in the company's conference room, covers an eight-week period. It lists crews vertically along the left-hand side and dates across the top. The job name and production hours (based on 10-hour days) are listed in each cell. Maintenance and lawn care jobs are listed on the board, too.

"The benefit of the board is it's so large scale-wise that if you have to make a move it's easy to see what the consequences are," says Dale Shuler, landscape design/sales representative.

The board was developed nearly a decade ago when WinnScapes transformed from a maintenance-only company to a full-service firm. "As we broke into design/build, we needed an intact system for scheduling," Morris says. The board started with just a month's worth of jobs listed, but as the business grew with the purchase of

	MON 18	TUES 19	WED 20	THURS 21	FRI 22	SAT 23	MON 25	TUES 26	WED 27	THURS 28	FRI 29	SAT 30	MON 2	TUES 3
Shuler	Washburn	Washburn	Washburn	Washburn	Washburn		Pike	Pike	Pike	Pike	Pike			
Rafael	190	160	130	100	70		150	120	90	60	30			
Marino	Shelby	Shelby	McConel	Renee	Renee									
Travis	100	20		30			45	25		15				
Kevin	Chen	Pinkie	Monter	Wright	Wright		H.A.		ONE	ACP	Lisi			
Renee	70	10	15	30	10		320		H.A. High		10			
Wick	Gallon	ACP	Hendrix	Hendrix	Hendrix		H.A.	H.A.	H.A.	H.A.	H.A.		H.A.	H.A.
Margal	70		45	25			300	240	220	190	140		100	
Jeff	Benjamin	Benjamin	Harris	Clark	Childers		ACP	Franklin	Franklin	Franklin	Franklin		200	
Chris	60	30	30	30	50			60	30				20	
Don		FH	FH	BH	BH		FH	FH	GM					
Kevin														
Dean	ACP	ACP	ACP	Dagan	Dagan		Dagan							
Glynn				30			Franklin							

The staff at WinnScapes takes a photo of "The Board" before they erase and update it every six weeks. "It's just nice to refer back to if we need to," says Clark Morris, company president. Photo: WinnScapes

additional jobs on its "wait list" – a list on the side of the main board that details the backlog of each salesman's jobs. Every six weeks the production manager, who's the only person allowed to make schedule changes, does a "board move," and adds new jobs from the wait list.

Another feature: each job is color coded by salesman. Because each salesman is required to be on the production site when the crew arrives every day, this color coding system makes it easy to see where the sales staff is deployed every morning.

Change orders are the second biggest scheduling challenge after

externally, Shuler says.

An account adjustment form helps ensure good internal change-order communications. Even for minor changes, the salesman completes an account adjustment form, which he gets the client to sign before turning it over to the production manager.

That evening, the production manager evaluates the schedule and makes any necessary adjustments.

In addition, the production manager is able to track and account for typical job delays because he visits every job site two times per day to stay in contact with crews.

The first thing in the morning, the

production manager updates the sales team on any changes to the schedule and the salesmen contact their clients if their project start dates have changed.

"Keeping our clients up to date on the schedule is a major

factor in keeping them happy," Morris says. "Communication between production and sales staff is the key component, followed up by communication with your clients."

**"We've looked at some of the other scheduling programs to adapt into Outlook, but with our size and amount of work, we've deemed our dry erase board most beneficial."** – Clark Morris, WinnScapes

design/build firm Schmidt Nursery in 1999, so did the need for an extended, eight-week scheduling system. More than two months is difficult to manage, Morris says, so the company logs

weather, Morris and Shuler say, and they occur in about 50 percent of jobs and can affect all projects in line. The key to smooth changes is excellent communication, both internally and

# We've Got You Covered

Whatever you need in ground protection mats, we ARE your Single Source

## AlturMATs

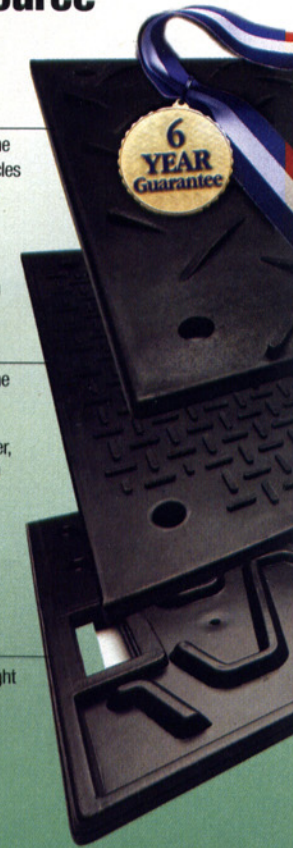
- 1/2" thick polyethylene
- Supports 60 ton vehicles
- Leaves turf smooth in soft conditions
- Withstands record heat & cold
- Never get stuck again

## VersaMATs

- 1/2" thick polyethylene
- Features the bold diamond plate tread on one side and a finer, slip-resistant tread on the other side
- Ideal for 60 ton vehicles as well as pedestrian traffic

## Mobile Matt™

- Slightly lighter in weight
- Features a waffle shaped tread
- Four hand slots for easy handling
- Ultra-high molecular weight high density polyethylene



## One-Piece Plastic Outrigger Pads

Rugged, one piece pads with rope handle. Available in wide variety of sizes to suit the application.

Call for the name of your nearby dealer:  
888-544-6287

**AlturMATs®**

sales@alturmat.com  
www.alturmat.com

USE READER SERVICE # 65

## design/build

### Job-Stage Tracker

Parker Homescape, Fanwood, N.J.

Parker Homescape also uses a white-board grid system to stay on track. The 3- by 4-foot board is prominently posted in the conference room so anyone in the office can see where every job stands.

Typically, eight jobs – one per design/build crew – are listed on the board, though this may vary if multiple crews are deployed to one large job.

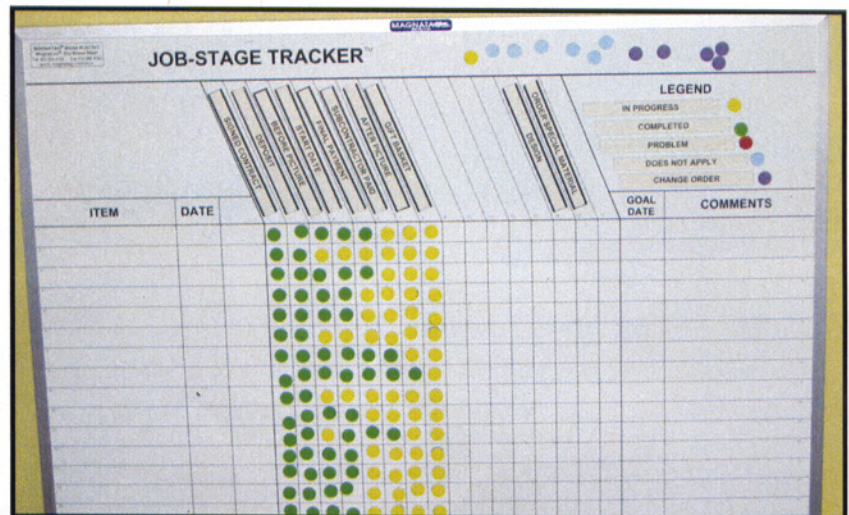
The scheduling manager controls the board; she lists project names down the left side and tracks the projects with color-coded dots to show where they stand. Various stages in the process are listed across the top – they include signed contract, deposit, “before” picture, start date, final payment, subcontractor paid, “after” picture and gift basket.

The system has helped the company become confident enough to put a start date and completion date on every contract, Parker says, noting the contract includes a clause protecting the company from hold-ups like weather, lack of site access or any

other circumstances out of its control. “We have never had a problem other than natural events occurring, which most customers understand aren’t controllable,” Parker says.

Because it’s mandatory that residential clients be home on their start dates, it’s especially important that salesmen keep customers in the loop. “We are conscientious of the fact that our customers take days off from work and are making a substantial investment in their properties,” Parker says. “Our salesmen are constantly in contact with our customers.”

Even so, change orders are a challenge, Parker adds. Even a minor addition to a project can push back other projects in the pipeline. Because of the company’s focus on meeting the start date listed on a contract, it will usually only add to a current project if it doesn’t inconvenience the customers in line who have already been given start dates. Parker says: “Most homeowners are very understanding when we nicely explain that we will be more than happy to add to their project after we complete the projects that already have a start date.” LL



Color-coded dots on Parker Homescape’s job-tracking board show progress, problems, change orders and completion. Photo: Parker Homescape