

Contractors Newsletter

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HORTICULTURAL TRADES ASSOCIATION
landscapeontario.com



Welcome

This is the second Contractors newsletter. It's late. For that, I apologize but I'm hoping fellow contractors will commiserate and forgive me due to the summer workload.

At the time I began writing this, we were all taking stock of the global financial situation. The outlook for a prosperous summer of landscape contracting did not look rosy. Over and over again we heard the dire financial news regarding the painful outlook for a period of prolonged economic downturn. In Ontario alone, January saw the loss of 71,000 jobs. The once stalwart automobile giants, the housing market and banking industry all reported record losses and record numbers of bankruptcies. The permit office at City Hall in Toronto, saw permit requests for new condominium projects drop from 30-40 in a typical year to 0!

Without question and because bad news 'sells', the media whipped consumers into a state of fear and reticence toward spending. Lean retail shopping results from the recent Christmas season, a kind of 'wait and see' attitude, crept forward into the New Year with no end in sight.

In our office, (Alliance Landscape Contractors), we were very concerned. We had several jobs to complete from 2008 and although there were a few new projects on our plate, there was no real 'meat and potatoes' work for 2009. By the time we turned the calendar page on March and at the time of year we're usually fielding several calls each day, the phone was dead. Day after day no calls, no emails. Then all of a sudden, after 2 or 3 warm days at the beginning of

April, as much as the 'needle' pointed down in February and March, it rebounded up to heights I'd never seen before. We literally could not keep up with all the qualified appointments we made to see prospective clients. Recession weary homeowners suddenly shed the dark heavy cloak of restraint and sprung into spring spending. People it seemed, got fed up hearing the negative economic news and, multiplied by the usual spring thaw thinking, many decided landscaping was a priority.

The start of the season was not typical; neither was our thinking regarding our approach to this unique year. Expecting that the bad economic forecast would cast a shadow of uneasiness amongst our employee, we worked hard at staying positive and keeping them motivated. And more than ever, we assured our clients that landscaping was not only meant to beautify their home, but it should be looked at as an investment. No question, the HRTC was a good selling tool especially for smaller jobs.

Were you nervous, concerned, or at least cautious in your approach to the 2009 season? How was your thinking about profit affected? What aspects of your approach to business changed? Did you cut back in any way? Drop me a line and let me know how you were thinking. You can reach me at shibui@rogers.com

I hope the rest of the season stays busy for us all.
Arthur Skolnik
Alliance Landscape Contractors