

When “not working” makes you more money

By Glenn Young

Early spring, the flowers are blooming, trees are budding out, birds chirping, & the phones start ringing off the wall. After a long winter with little or no work, most are looking to get their cash flow going. You get lots of people ready to start on their yard, eager to get it done. Only problem is that the temperatures are highs of maybe 60 degrees on some days & only 45 degrees on others.

The customer calls & says he is interested in getting the yard done ASAP.... He has grass or weeds and wants a Bermuda grass yard. Some contractors may be tempted to sell and install this job as the customer wished ... ASAP. BUT WAIT.... How much will you profit from this job in the end?? Like robbing Peter to pay Paul, the customer gets his job installed, you get to pay those winter bills, BUT what are the hidden costs??

You will pay to install the job, pay to respray when it doesn't germinate (because a cold front came in right after you installed it) and respray when it washes (because early spring often has hard rains). When it does germinate, it is full of weeds and the customer thinks that is your fault.

Well, it is. Slow germination does give weeds a chance to grow because they germinate at lower temperatures. This is also a problem when mixing Rye or Fescues with your permanent grasses. After the Rye dies off, the weeds remain and there are no safe chemicals that you can apply to young Bermuda or any other type of permanent grasses just planted. The customer can pull by hand, but you know how well that will go over with the customer.

Ok, so you have resprayed and made the customer happy. What about those hidden costs? The hidden costs are the jobs you would have made money on; if you did not have to go back to respray that “early” job. If you think about it, any jobs you do in March or early April, you'll still be respraying in May and early June ... THE busiest time of our season. Turning down jobs in order to go back and respray those installed in March or April can cost a contractor some serious money.

This is also the time when people whose yards you planted at the end of

last season begin calling you to look at their yard. They need help with their yard damaged by the winter (very cold or very wet can damage a yard that has not had the chance to develop enough). By planting too late in the season, you are setting your customer up for failure. The extra money you made last year on this job has been spent and respray cost are coming out of the present year profits, right when you need that money to pay for all the material you are using to respray early jobs. It also takes time away from doing new jobs.

So, here you are...thinking you made lots of extra profit last year, got your cash flow moving early in spring and really you are working yourself to death respraying all these jobs in May with no time for new jobs. It would have been more profitable not to do these jobs at all and made your money on May jobs.

Remember; only warranty what you know you can do. Customers will try to talk you into doing jobs earlier or later in the season to meet their needs or goals. Their attitude will change when you tell them you will be glad to do the job with no warranty and if it doesn't do well, will charge them to respray. Also let them understand the chance of weeds and your limitations of controlling them. By explaining and giving choices, your customer can make an informed decision on his lawn. You will also protect yourself from problems not under your control and increase your profits.

In my experience as a contractor in this industry, I have found it to be more profitable to talk your customer into waiting later to do his job, until weather warms and rain becomes less often. There are always jobs that need erosion control in early spring and permanent grasses can be added to their mix to potentially save your customer money. If erosion is not a problem, explain the limitations and conditions (rain, temperature) and most customers will not only wait, they will appreciate you watching out for their interests. This will gain the customer's confidence, result in a better job and make you more profits by "**not working**".