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## **You only get one chance at a first impression: Tips for choosing the right landscape provider**

March 06, 2008 - Owners Developers & Managers

The moment they step foot on your property, buyers or tenants have a split second before registering that first impression in their minds. Will it be a good one or bad one? After a quick scan of the grounds, the lawn, flowers, trees, shrubs, if the property is unkempt, they might not make it inside the building. Since that first impression is so crucial when it comes to getting or maintaining business, you want to make sure your landscaping is inviting. But how do you ensure your landscaping is an invitation for prospects?

It starts by finding the right landscape maintenance provider, but unfortunately that isn't always an easy feat. This article will offer tips on what to look for when hiring a landscape maintenance provider. And the advice might just surprise you.

### **Do They Look Good on Paper?**

When evaluating between 10-20 companies, and you have to narrow it down to three, look at their prequalifications and list of references. Does the company maintain a skilled labor force? Does their structure and professionalism reflect the image of the organization? Do they have a high safety record? Once those variables are determined favorably, ask for a list of references and go to visit each of the properties. Get a feel for what the company can do and what level of service they would be bringing to your property.

Once you've narrowed your list, ask for a tour of each of the maintenance firms you are considering. How well they take care of their space will be an insight into how well they will take care of yours. Keep in mind that many landscape firms control costs by operating out of low overhead facilities. But even if their office is a construction trailer, it should still be clean and well-maintained. The image they project while on your site is also important. Do they have newer equipment? Are they uniformed? If they belong to a landscape association, you should be able to find out a lot of information on the company, as well as if they are in good company standing.

### **What Are They Like to Work With?**

Ask for a company's mission statement and values. This is important because you want it to complement your own. What they are striving toward should be similar to your own organizational goals. And if it's not, you could find yourself working with a company where you are both going in two separate directions. Define what you want.

Client service is important, but so is managing reasonable expectations. Know what you expect of your service provider and then determine if that's something they can deliver. Know whether the contractor is expected to be proactive or reactive to problems.

Do an analysis on whether this company could be a strategic partner for you over the life of the relationship. Over a five to 10 year period, many relationships develop into a highly valued contractor position. If that is something that you are looking for, determine whether a specialist or a

general practitioner will do the trick. For example, some firms specialize in maintenance or fertilization only. Others offer internal expertise, such as horticulturists and designers that can help you strategize on the health and long-term growth of your property.

#### Can They Help You Get the Most Out of Your Budget?

When choosing a landscape maintenance firm, look for a contractor you can partner with to get the most out of your landscape budget. If possible, bring them in on your budget process, so they can offer advice on both short and long term projects.

Being honest with a contractor about how much you are willing to spend is beneficial to both parties in the end. Knowing how you arrive at your budget will help the contractor to work with you to achieve your goals and stay within your budget. For example, a contractor may be able to lower operating costs. If your budget is determined by s/f, this is something the contractor needs to know because how you arrive at costs will help the contractor help you.

For some, the budget process is similar to playing poker. You know what your hand is but are unwilling to share. It depends on whether you view relinquishing your hand as a detriment or as being helpful. Most of the time, it comes down to whether you are seeking a win-win situation or a win-lose situation. If you are truly seeking a win-win, then sharing your budget numbers can be beneficial in the end.

#### Closing

Hopefully, these tips will help guide you when choosing a landscape maintenance provider. One last tip when making your decision is to consider using a provider of multiple services. If you use your landscape provider for multiple services, he will be more careful with your property because in the end he has a vested interest in it, too. You want your property to look its best - after all, you only have one chance for that first impression.

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