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From the Editor



Ah, technology. It's great when it works—and a nightmare when it doesn't. I first started this business with a cell phone and a laptop, and that was it. Today I have an iPhone, (there have been a number of new cell phones over the years), a large touch-screen desktop PC for doing graphics, an iPad mini for travel, a digital projector the size of a paper-back book, a digital microscope that weighs just a few ounces, a robust website that puts the first one to shame, and most of my documents on the Cloud. None of these were available when the business first started. Now I don't know what I would do without them.

In this month's issue we have articles by two experts. Nanette Seven from Include Software tells us how to select software programs that will grow with our business. And our very own web designer, Terri Bushnell of WebDesignsbyTerri.com, tells you why you need to have a mobile-responsive website and what you can do if your budget doesn't allow for a completely "new do." Terri designed our fabulous new mobile website last month and we couldn't be more pleased with the results!

And our popular John Mendoza writes about the ZZ plant, one of my favorites and one of the easiest to grow indoor plants.

Plus—be on the lookout for our new magazine, *Office Plants Magazine*, launching next month. It's targeted to your end users—architects, designers, office and building managers. You are welcomed to forward it to your clients—a great and FREE way to stay in touch!—and advertising is available starting at just \$49.

As always, thank you for your support of *I-Plants Magazine*, the only trade journal for the interior plantscape industry! We couldn't do this without the support of our subscribers and advertisers.

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Choosing Software that will Grow with Your Company

By Nanette Seven, Co-authored by Megan Childs

Nanette Seven is the Vice President of Include Software Corporation, makers of Asset, the industry's fully-integrated business management software, and iCREWtek, the iPhone-based application that gives owners real-time operational control of their technicians.

Nanette oversees Include's customer service, marketing, and business development departments. She started in the industry in 1991 doing scheduling and account management for a design/build and maintenance company, and joined Include in 1994.



Companies often reach a plateau at a critical point in their expansion and growth. They are still doing things the “old way,” which worked when they were smaller. Now, the “old way” is resulting in a paper-shuffling mess, repetitive data entry, lost clients and missed appointments. The ever-growing company's schedule is a white board that one swipe of a finger could send into a tailspin. Owners and managers rely on several different software programs to house data, but everything must be re-entered into each one, causing inconsistencies, missed billings and lack of organization.

Does this sound familiar? If so, the time has come for you to invest in a software program that will grow with your company. As you explore your options, remember these key points: streamlining current processes, integration and client testimony or references.

Current Processes

When shopping for a new software program, begin by reviewing your company's processes from

start to finish. Look at everything from answering initial inquiries to the completion of work. Where can you save employees' time, YOUR time and affect your bottom line? Try to decide a few key features you need from software to make your business simpler.

Focus on software that will provide contact relationship management and estimating options for your salespeople. Find a product that is comprehensive, yet intuitive and logical. You and your staff will be using it daily, so make sure you see the reports and data you know you will need regularly or ones that can easily take their place. The new software should allow you and your sales staff to spend less time in the office and more time out selling and interacting with clients.

Find a product that will remedy your accounting and administrative staff's constant replication and re-entering of data. For example, your office manager may currently be entering time and payroll information into Microsoft

Excel, then QuickBooks, then another form for your payroll company. If they only need to enter data once and run a handful of reports weekly, they will be ready for that next 100 or 1,000 clients (and the associated work) when you get them.

Integration

The next step is finding a single product that is going to perform everything you need. If you use multiple software products to house your data, you face several problems from inefficiency and time loss to inaccuracy.

When using multiple programs to obtain reporting and data about the company, your staff (or sometimes, you!) is forced to re-enter data repeatedly. This increases the chance of human error, plus drains money, time and resources. Also, you may be creating your own reports and hoping they provide the data you need, without the sophistication and level of detail that would benefit your business.

Find a software package that provides accounting, production, scheduling, contact relationship management and payroll functionality. Some programs,

such as Asset™, also have estimating and job costing capability. The purpose of the investment is you only need to enter your data one time, then let the software do the work for you.

As you shop around, ask your sales representative about integration and the program's ability to work for a company your size (and the size you want to become). Each company should be able to provide you with details about current functionality, planned development for the software, and integration, such as mobile tracking.

Client Testimony and References

Another sure sign of a good program is happy clients. As you are shopping for new software, see if there is any client testimony available, either on their website or in files they can send you, and listen to what the clients are saying. Ask your sales representative if there are current clients using the program who are willing to recommend the product.

If there are videos and documents available, try to note any recurring themes in the testimony. Sometimes, you will find the same one or two features in the program repeatedly being mentioned. This will indicate to you that these are the obvious strengths of the program, but keep in mind what is not being mentioned. Are these potential weaknesses or features that are not available? As you watch and read, create a list of questions about all the features *not* mentioned in the testimony.

When you are preparing to call one of the software developer's current clients for a reference, provide your sales representative with accurate information about your own business. Convey to them where you currently are and where you would like to be in terms of size and organization. Hopefully, they will be able to provide you with a client of theirs whose business was comparable to yours in size, but has now grown since implementing the new software. If they are not able to provide comparable references, this is a good indication that the program is not designed to meet your business' needs.

Choosing to invest in comprehensive software for your business is a significant decision, and one that will require research, time and money. However, once you find a program that can streamline your current processes, is integrated, and has enabled others like you to achieve a new level of success, you will know your money has been well spent.



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Your Clients Are Mobile. Are You?



By Terri Bushnell, WebDesignsbyTerri.com

Over the years I've seen three distinct generations in the history of the Web, especially in regards to Website design and development:

1. Portals / Web 1.0,
2. Social / Web 2.0, and now
3. Mobile

While we've yet to truly reach a post-PC era, it can't be denied that the "mobile generation" continues to grow bigger and stronger everyday. Helping to drive sales of mobile devices is the growing number of public Wi-Fi spots. It's more practical to browse the Internet with a mobile device than a laptop. According to comScore (a leading internet technology company that provides Analytics for a Digital World™), tablet pc's continued to gain traction in the US in 2012. In fact, by December 2012 there were more than 52.4 million US tablet owners.

No Mobile Site=Lost Customers

Why should you care whether or not visitors to your Website are getting the best possible mobile-user experience? First, your customers and clients are spending more of their time on their beloved mobile devices, and you

don't want to frustrate your first-time viewers.

According to studies, site visitors will move right off your site and onto your competitors in a heartbeat if they find your site too frustrating to use on their mobile device. The way Google Research sums it up is: "No Mobile Site = Lost Customers." Then again, they would say that since a poor mobile experience reflects badly not only on the sites but on the Google searches that sent them to an unfriendly mobile experience.

Google Speaks, the World Follows

But even more importantly, when it comes to Mobile sites, Google has spoken.

Last year Google introduced a new mobile user agent for Googlebot-Mobile Smartphones, which is responsible for detecting mobile content. Google is now finally offering specific recommendations on which way to build your mobile sites. While there are various methods of

having a mobile ready/friendly site, their preferred method of choice is Mobile Responsive.

Why a responsive design? According to Google's Developer's site:

"We recommend using responsive web design because it has many good aspects:

- Using a single URL for a piece of content makes it easier for your users to interact with, share, and link to your content, and a single URL for the content helps Google's algorithms assign the indexing properties for the content.
- No redirection is needed for users to get to the device-optimized view, which reduces loading time. Also, user agent-based redirection is error-prone and can degrade your site's user experience (There are pitfalls when detecting user agents.)
- It saves resources for both your site and Google's crawlers. For responsive web design pages, any Googlebot user agents needs to crawl your pages once, as opposed to

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crawling multiple times with different user agents, to retrieve your content. This improvement in crawling efficiency can indirectly help Google index more of the site's contents and keep it appropriately fresh."

But what if having your entire Website redesigned from the ground up is not in your advertising budget? One solution is to create a mobile responsive site and set up an auto detection and redirection on your main site.

The Future According to Google

This begs the question: Will Google favor mobile sites in their rankings? I would imagine that if that's what will keep their advertisers happy (the stakes are higher than ever before as advertisers look to build successful digital strategies), then they'll come up with an algorithm that favors mobile sites. But that's just my wild guess – and I could be flying too close to the sun on this theory.

Mobile responsive websites are still in their early stages of development, however, I believe they will replace the mobile ready, or mobile friendly, sites for a vast majority of businesses. My personal opinion is that having a responsive site results in a much better user experience than having a website with detection and redirection to your mobile version, which is typically a watered down version of your full site. So, the question becomes WHEN should you adjust and adapt your site to All Things Mobile, and not IF you should make the conversion. The answer is: TODAY would be a good time!

The Take Away

If the cost of redesigning your current site to a mobile responsive

site (which is not the same as "Mobile Ready" or "Mobile Friendly") is an issue, but you want to maintain your brand/corporate image, there are a few things you can do that will help your web visitors to at least have a better mobile experience while on your site. Consider the auto detect and redirect method, or if your site is a WordPress site you can opt for a plugin, which is a good temporary solution. Doing SOMETHING is better than doing nothing.



Terri Bushnell is President of WebDesignsByTerri.com. She is also the web designer for our parent company, Johnson Fediw Associates. To view her work and to contact her, visit <http://webdesignsbyterri.com>

The advertisement features a large, green, cylindrical portable watering system on a two-wheeled cart. The system has a pump handle, a hose, and a spray nozzle. A small potted plant sits on top of the tank. The background is a scenic view of a waterfall cascading over rocks into a pool of water. The text is overlaid on the image in various fonts and sizes.

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Zamioculcas zamiifolia “ZZ”

By John Mendoza, Morning Dew Tropical Plants, Inc.

'ZZ' plant (*Zamioculcas zamiifolia*), is a member of the Araceae family. Other members of this family include *Aglaonema*, *Pothos*, *Philodendron* & *Spathiphyllum*. It was first described as *Caladium zamiifolium* by in 1829 and moved to the new genus *Zamioculcas* in 1856 and given its established name *Zamioculcas zamiifolia* in 1905.

ZZ bears little resemblance to any other members of the ar-oids. It has pinnate leaves and round tapering petioles, with naturally dark green, glossy leaves that are so shiny that the plant appears to have been polished.

This variety is great because it tolerates low light levels and can go without water for long periods, sometimes 3-4 months! The drought tolerance is probably due to its waxy and shiny leaves and fleshy stems, which have extremely low rates of transpiration, and its thick rhizomes, which store water. Additionally, few diseases or pests and physiological disorders have been found on this plant in production and interiorscapes. They do not do well in cold conditions. Ideally temps should remain at a minimum of 60 degrees to be safe. Overwater is the biggest problem with ZZ, so err on the side of dryness.

ZZ is one of the most important foliage plants used in interiorscaping today. ZZ's ability to handle low light levels rivals *Sansevieria* species and *Aspidistra elatior*, two species long favored

for their great performance on the job. ZZ are easily maintained and adds stalks and new leaves even in low light interiorscapes. ZZ are commercially produced in FL from 6-inch to 17-inch pot sizes.

If you are not using these awesome plants, please start.

Your customers and your techs will love them!



ZZ 17 in.



ZZ 6 in.

Care tips:

If you need to cut back a stem, give it a good twist near the bottom close to the bulbous rhizome—it should snap off cleanly. Not sure if it's time to water? Look at the base of the stem near the bulb. If it looks slightly puckered, go ahead and water. Still not sure? Wait another one or two weeks!



ZZ 10 in.

John Mendoza is president of Morning Dew Tropical Plants, Inc, and can be reached at John@morningdewtropical.com. Photographs are copyrighted by John Mendoza, please contact him for permission to use any of these photos.



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UPCOMING EVENTS

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June 14-15: FNGLA Annual Convention, Westin Florida. For more information go to www.fngla.org

June 18-21: International Floriculture Expo, Miami Beach Convention Center. Go to www.floriexpo.com

June 25-26: The National Plant Show at Stoneleigh Park, Coventry, Warwickshire, UK. For more information go to www.nationalplantshow.co.uk

July

July 13-16, 2013: OFA Short Course, Columbus, Ohio. Educational sessions and trade show, produced by OFA. Kathy Fediw will be facilitating two sessions, getting feedback from techs about their job and reporting the results back to their managers in the second session. Go to www.ofa.org

July 21, 2013: Plant & Pest Management workshop, Chicago, IL. For more information go to www.piagrows.org

July 31 to August 1: Penn Atlantic Nursery Trade Show, Philadelphia, PA. Go to www.pantshow.com

August

August 1, 2013: Garden Idol @BloomPa-looza, Litchfield, MI. For more information go to www.ofa.org

August 7-9: Garden Center University Semester 4, Raleigh, NC. For more information go to www.ofa.org

August 13-15, 2013: Plantscape Industry Expo, Las Vegas, NV. Kathy Fediw will be speaking on how to make your business more "green." For more information go to www.piagrows.org

August 20-22: The Independent Garden Center Show, Chicago, IL. For more information go to www.igcshow.com

September

September 16-22: National Indoor Plant Week in the US, for more information go to www.4aplant.com

October

October 23-26: Green Industry Conference, sponsored by PLANET, Louisville, KY. For more information go to www.landcarenetwork.org

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