



Departments - My Turf
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RUNNING ON ALL EIGHT
David Snodgrass understands the importance of diversification.

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Chuck Bowen

David Snodgrass understands the importance of diversification. The president of Dennis' 7 Dees in Portland, Ore., runs an \$18 million-plus operation that includes residential design/build, commercial bid/build, landscape maintenance and five garden centers.

The subject of this month's cover story – "Diversified by design," page 34 – Snodgrass knew the inherent risk of running any green industry business, and what he had to do to fight it.

"The green industry is never hitting on all cylinders in all areas," Snodgrass says. "Sometimes there are pockets of strength and pockets of weakness. Being diversified allows us to leverage the pockets of strengths into the pockets of weakness."

Landscape contractors and other green industry professionals have seen that bumpy ride first hand. Companies too focused on residential design/build have folded. Nurseries with too much stock have set fire to their fields. For some, only serving a particular niche is a recipe for disaster.

Snodgrass and other landscape contractors who have taken the same road to diversify their operations are on the right track. Some in the North offer snow and ice removal; companies in the Southeast take up perimeter pest control. It seems everyone has started a maintenance division to build up a stream of recurring revenue.

Many successful business owners will tell you to focus on one thing and do it really well. And that's great advice, until nobody wants to buy that one thing you do, no matter how well you do it. But, in reality, Snodgrass hasn't strayed from his core strength – landscape design. He's just repackaged it and found five storefronts to sell it in, and to sell it to more customers. Through his Planscaper program, he makes his designers available to homeowners who want a professional installation but want to do the heavy lifting themselves. The clients buy the plants from his garden centers and, sometimes, he upsells them to projects in his landscape division.

"We're trained landscape designers and contractors. That's our grounding. We have brought that into the retail garden center arena, so we have a level of professional design that's not going to be part of a garden center that expands into landscaping or a garden center that's going to offer some type of DIY service," he says.

Every company has a core strength – something you're better at than anyone else in your market. The challenge is to think about that strength broadly enough to make it marketable and salable to customers. It's not snow removal, killing bugs or cutting grass. Anyone can do those things. It's managing two dozen subcontractors, setting up efficient routes and developing profitable systems.

David Snodgrass was able to find a new channel to highlight his expertise and stabilize his firm. And he's right, the green industry's disparate segments aren't usually all booming. But when you find your company's strength – and the right market – you'll start running on all eight cylinders.