

# Anything but typical

Pennsylvania landscaper grows from the ground up by using a tech-savvy approach to enhance clients' experiences.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY PATTY VAUGHAN

From a young age, Kirk Brown dug headfirst into the landscaping world.

After starting Kirk's Lawn Care in Spring City, Pennsylvania, at the age of 12 with his parent's lawn tractor and dump trailer, Brown and his 12-year-old business have continued to see consistent growth year after year.

## Up and up

Age never stopped Brown from understanding what his business meant to him. Like most 12-year-olds, he was looking for a quick way to make some cash. Little did he know that his way of making a little extra cash would turn into his full-time dream job.

"I was in sixth grade, so I was just starting middle school," Brown says. "Nobody in my family has ever done landscaping, so it's not like I had any other influences. I got a couple new mowers, and I gradually went up and up."

For its third consecutive year, the company has doubled its revenue and has grown to have more than 80 mowing contracts with a 350-client base. Until two years ago, Brown was handling 40 accounts by himself and working 12-hour days, seven days a week. He would then come home to a desk full of business work.



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He knew he was falling behind "because I was doing so much." To help with the workload, Brown has hired two full-time employees, one seasonal employee and plans to hire more people next year, as well as run multiple crews.

The company offers mowing, mulching, aeration and overseeding, snow removal, snow plowing, plantings, complete lawn makeovers and mulch recoloring to commercial and residential clients.

Brown owes most of his landscaping knowledge

landscaper of the year finalist



Kirk Brown established Kirk's Lawn Care early in 2003 and built his small business on residential lawn care. The business is prospering and now serves commercial customers as well.

to his high school Ornamental Horticulture elective class. "They have a greenhouse there, and you maintain the school grounds, flowers, grow flowers from seed as well as learn to identify plants and pests," Brown says. "That helped me learn a lot of it, and it just reconfirmed that I wanted to do it."

From there, Brown attended community college for a short time, but realized his true passion was for his landscaping business – something that required his full attention.

"During the first semester of college, I started getting a lot of calls and I started to have to decide if I wanted to devote more time to college or more time to my business. That was a tough decision, whether to hold my back business a little bit and get a degree or to go back to college later." After stopping college that semester, Brown stuck with his business. He plans to go back again to study marketing when he is able to come off the frontlines of his business.

## Tech-savvy service

Even in his first year of business, Brown understood the importance of technology and what it could do for any type of company. When he created his business, Brown made business cards and a website with the concept that his company was a brand.



“The landscaper I was interning with a couple of years ago didn’t even have a website,” Brown says. “I talked to some of his employees and they would say how they’re losing jobs and struggling to find work.”

Because of Brown’s use of technology, he had an influx of work, especially around spring. “We would get three or four calls a day, and I would be doing two or three estimate visits every night for a couple of weeks. It would just be that crazy.”

From newsletters to his website to his very own app, Brown has a clear concept of how he wants technology to help his business.

“A lot of that is technology to make it easier for clients to communicate with me and allow me to respond back to them very quickly,” Brown says. “With my estimate request form, which is online, it changes as they’re answering throughout the form. As soon as they submit that, it sends me an email, push notification and a text message.”

From there, Brown can open the app on his phone, look at the address in Google Maps, see what service the client requested, see the size of the property and can call the client back within 15 to 20 seconds of receiving the text.

“Sometimes, they haven’t even left my website yet, and I’m calling them back,” he says.

In addition to his request form, Brown also built his own website and app, which he maintains on a regular basis.



Brown is upstaged during a planting visit to an area day care center. Kirk’s Lawn Care participates in a variety of community-service activities.



About an hour northwest of Philadelphia, the residential neighborhoods in and around Spring City remain a key part of Brown’s business.

“Everything is maintained and edited by me,” Brown says. “I do everything in house, and that’s what my winters consist of.”

In touch with clients

Brown also uses the power of social media to help create a presence and push his brand.

“Some people don’t do it, because they think they won’t get jobs from it,” he says. “It’s not the matter of getting jobs. It’s part of the communication between you and your clients.”

Brown invests a great deal of time in his technology,



Brown knew the importance of branding early on. He uses technology to make his company easy to find and do business with, but also taps it to nurture long-term client relationships through his website and social media.

but he believes it’s what has helped keep his small business booming.

“A lot of the technologies that I use are either free or less than \$30 a month,” Brown says. “I’m not a big business, but you can do a lot with a small budget. You just have to do some searching and you have to be able to have time to set up stuff yourself. If you have the time to set it up yourself, you can save a lot of money.”

Although technology is a large part of how Brown runs his business, it’s not something he wants to overtake his business. He believes in technology, but he says it should enhance the client’s experience, not replace human interaction altogether.

“I think a lot of people hate calling 1-800 numbers and hate hearing automated phone calls,” Brown says. “If you use technology, you don’t want to replace the human interaction with technology. You want it to enhance the communication and customer interaction.”

Brown always does face-to-face estimates, learns customer’s children’s and pet’s names and has even does extra services like help move a piano, move mat-

tresses and pick up grills from a store. “I try to go above and beyond when I can to help them out,” he says. “It goes beyond the 9 to 5 job.”

Giving back

Brown and his company believe in giving back to their community in a variety of ways.

Through monetary and labor donations, the company is a primary supporter of Althouse Arboretum, a new environmental education center in nearby Pottstown.

The company is also involved in Project EverGreen’s GreenCare and SnowCare for Troops, which offers lawn

and landscape services, and snow and ice removal for wounded and disabled veterans and their families.

Additionally, the company will be involved in a charity fundraising challenge for a local dog rescue in which Brown and his staff will compete in various challenges like getting pied in the face.

“Typically, we donate more than \$1,000 in monetary, material and labor donations per year,” Brown says. “Giving back allows us to educate the communities we service on proper lawn and landscaping practices, as well as draw awareness to outstanding local organizations that support worthy causes.”

Because communicating and connecting with customers is so important, Brown and his company play host each year to a customer-appreciation event for vendors, employees’ and customers’ families and business friends complete with hayrides, corn mazes, food and more.

“It’s a great opportunity to really get to know our customers better,” Brown says. “Our team gains great satisfaction in knowing that we are making a small difference within the communities that we drive through on a daily basis.”