

# TREETISE

WINTER 2015

ROOTED IN KNOWLEDGE

VOLUME 7 | ISSUE 1

## Who's Coming With Me?; Thinking Outside the "Commercial" Box

The New Year is a great time to reflect on the past twelve months and evaluate how things have gone. It's the time when I ask myself why things are done a certain way and whether they could be better. It's funny because at the end of the day, I'm just an arborist and we're just a tree company. How complicated does it really need to be?

Recently, something has been eating at me. The terms "commercial arborist" and "commercial tree care company" have become part of my normal professional dialogue. Sure, they're accurate terms and there are a lot of us out there, but what bothers me is that tree care has become so commercialized that it isn't making good use of the money spent on it. So many companies are joining the pricing race to the bottom and meanwhile forcing themselves to offer poor-quality care. Even though many of these companies have great customer service reps, care has become so standardized that it frequently serves no functional purpose. As a company, we have seen countless bid requests where the specifications that are supposed to allow for an apples-to-apples comparison have little or no connection to which trees actually need to be trimmed, what kind of trimming they require, or the overall objective for the property. It would seem that trees are just a box to be checked and then forgotten until next year. For some simpler projects this can be the most sensible approach because there's not a lot of variety or guesswork involved. However, in many cases a commercialized approach results in complacency, over-pruning, and a total disregard for the big picture.

### Consider the following scenario:



A large residential community with over 300 trees invites multiple companies to bid on the tree care, providing each vendor with a scope of work created by the previous contractor as an apples-to-apples template. The specifications state that all the pines and eucalyptus trees are to be trimmed every other winter using a "crown thin" or "structure prune" or "lace canopy" technique. The specs may even include the seemingly tree-loving instruction, "prune canopy to thin by no more than 20%." Usually, no further explanation follows. Are there dead branches to remove? Am I pruning to increase the tree crown diameter? Are we supposed to prune these trees to reduce end weight on branches or will any old cut do so long as it's not more than 20%? Even when the specs include an explanation of what each requirement should accomplish, it

### Message from the President

To most of us, the start of each new year signals the chance for new beginnings. A hard lesson learned, a simmering desire for change, a persistent idea of how things could be better, these come to the forefront and we take what two months earlier might have felt like an impossible step.

Something that is changing for us this year is the way we think about the term "growth." Instead of striving simply for more business, we are dedicating ourselves to



n. (tree<sup>e</sup>tise) a formal and systematic exposition of the principles of a subject; more detailed than an essay.

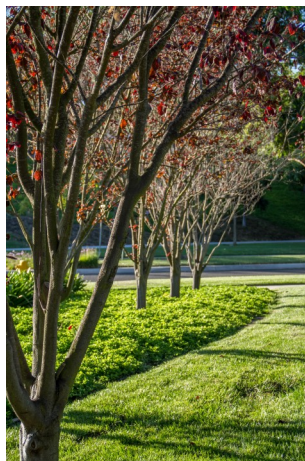
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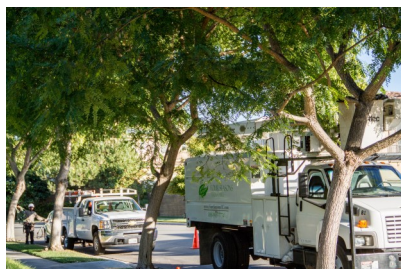
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does not always follow that every tree requires pruning. But the trees are trimmed anyway because it would take too long to identify each tree's unique needs. Sometimes we receive a map of the trees' locations and, if we're lucky, the scope contains the correct number of trees on the property. Most of the time however, massive discrepancies become apparent and more questions arise than the customer is likely able to answer. But this is how we do things because it's the best way we've had to get the work done with the limited time available to everyone involved. It's a frustrating process for both the customer and the arborist, who is balancing the cost of doing a good job and taking care of the customer's needs with securing the contract. As discouraging as all this is, we commercial arborists have not provided our customers with a better way to do things. And it should be better!



It's possible that I'm having a Jerry Maguire moment and any minute Bob Sugar is going to swoop in and maintain the status quo, but I think things can be done differently. Instead of bulking trees by species, why don't we isolate trees in our specifications and prescribe specific care? Instead of general descriptions of where trees are in the community, why don't we embrace technology and create visual depictions of our clients' projects that include digital information about each tree? Imagine all the property's trees digitally mapped on an aerial image of the property. Then, imagine that every action performed on those trees is permanently stored in a database. Instead of showing up once or twice a year and guessing what care trees will need in three years, let's make quarterly visits that result in intentional and individual recommendations. The only problem with all of this is the cost. Wouldn't that level of service be prohibitively expensive? Maybe. Maybe not. We might have a solution and we think that customers who take advantage of it will find it to be exactly what's been missing.

As 2015 begins, we will begin rolling out a new approach to tree care. We want to shift the paradigm in the industry by increasing the level of attention, intentionality of care and overall service that has been stuck too long stuck in the "commercial" box. We want to be more than just tree trimmers. We want you to know that every dollar you spend with us is taking you where you want to go, moving you towards a predetermined objective. We want trees to be as familiar to you as landscaping. We want you to use our account managers' names more than our company name. Our goal is shifting from being the best company to providing the best possible service, and we're excited to see how that changes things.



We want to thank all of you who have supported us. It is your feedback, encouragement and consistent support that motivate us to become better. We wish you a happy new year and look forward to an exciting 2015.

Adam Heard, VP of Sales

building a company that grows steadily over time while remaining stable, profitable, and a great place to work. Health over growth will be our watchword.

This change in philosophy will mean both small and large adjustments in the way we conduct our business. From marketing to bidding to customer service; training and safety to scheduling; from the way we price small jobs to how we manage large communities; everything we do will focus on our desire to build a strong, long-lived company that serves our customer's needs better than anyone else.

In August, Four Seasons Tree Care will celebrate 8 years of doing business. It's incredible to me how much we have grown as a company in that time. We could never be the company we want to be if it weren't for our amazing clients, outstanding management staff, and talented field crew. Thank you all for your support.