

INTERNET

Turfgrass on the Web

By Bob Boufford

A day doesn't go by when we don't see or hear the statement, "Visit our Web site on the Internet," with an odd looking address that starts with "Http://..."

The Internet and the myriad applications available on it, particularly the World Wide Web, or "Web," are fast becoming the new communications media and will soon become as necessary as the fax machine has become in business operations.

The turfgrass industry has not been left out of this growing media. Along with many associations, including the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) and university turfgrass extension services, several lawn care companies also have a presence on the Web.

First, a little background on the Internet and the World Wide Web. Even though they are often used interchangeably, there is a difference between them. The Internet is basically a "world wide network of cooperating smaller networks." Any network can hook into the larger network that comprises the Internet.

A good example of a similar type of network is the telephone system. The local phone companies (GTE, Unitel, Ameritech) are connected together with the long distance carriers to form a large nationwide telephone network system. We can easily make phone calls across the country as long as we have the correct phone number and someone is willing to answer a call. The Internet is similar in that we can access any computer system on the Internet as long as we have the correct address and someone is willing to allow you into their system.

There are several different application systems that can operate over the Internet, just as the current phone system can handle not only voice, but also fax, digital and video. Of particular growing interest is the World Wide Web, an application system consisting of a global collection of media (text, graphics, audio and video) linked using the Internet as the connection scheme. A common term used for this collection of linked media is hypermedia or the term "hypertext."

Hypermedia or hypertexts are documents that reside on one computer with links into other documents. Of course, the document might be within the same file, in a file on the same computer, in a file on a computer within the same network, or in a file on a computer in another network somewhere else on the Internet.

Unlike CD-ROM databases or books that have a unique method of access, the World Wide Web consists of a variety of browsers and servers that follow a standard for the delivery and display of content. It is also a very associative system where just about anyone can attach links from their Web document to any other Web document in the entire World Wide Web space.

So, the World Wide Web is about making content or information available on the Internet. For those of us in lawn care, it is a means of providing specific information about lawn care while also providing information about related issues without having to reprint or reproduce the auxiliary information.

For example, one lawn care company on the Web has links into university turf extension Web sites containing extension bulletins related to lawn care.

Connecting to the Internet and the World Wide Web is becoming easier as the interest for accessing the Web grows. Several options are available even to the small, one-person lawn care service. All that is required is a computer, a fast modem, some software and a local dial-up access phone number.

The Web browser software, with its point-and-click interface, has been the key to making it easy to access the Web.

Even though there are several Internet providers available in most communities, for those of you new to "surfing the



The purpose of the World Wide Web is to make information accessible. An example is the "Green Net" page of Adams Publishing Company — which can be accessed by typing in the address "http://www.aip.com/Green/Horticulture.html" — where full editions of *sportsTURF* and related magazines are available.

Internet," I would recommend obtaining an account with one of the major computer information services such as CompuServe or America OnLine. Along with their own proprietary high-quality content, these services now provide access to the World Wide Web, including some hand-holding for those who get overwhelmed by the "Net." (Author's note: I am partial to recommending CompuServe as it is an Ohio-based company even though America OnLine is easier to use.)

Both of the services, along with several other Internet service providers, supply the means for a lawn care company to create its own Web site and establish a "presence on the Web." But, that is for a later article. For now, take a look at the Web and what it has to offer you. At least take a look at PLCAA's new Web site at <http://www.plcaa.org>.

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