



# The Computer as a Maintenance Tool

by Tim Moore, CSFM

**T**hinking about a computer as just another tool in your shop may be a rather foreign idea, but that is how you should think of it. It really is no different from the rotary spreader or nursery spade or triplex. You rely on those tools to get your job done in a professional and efficient manner. The computer can do the same thing and, just like most of your other tools, you'll get out of the computer what you put into it, literally!

For those that are not computer friendly, this article should help to open you up to the potential of this tool. For those that are familiar and currently using it as a tool, it should perhaps show you some new ways to utilize the PC.

## Conquer Your Fears

The first thing one has to do is conquer the fear of the new technology. Do you remember when the first hydraulic reel or rotary mower came to market? They were to become the best, most efficient and effective tools for the sports turf manager. They also were a little intimidating. With the belt driven models you could see how the machine worked and how to repair it if necessary. The hydraulic models were more abstract. The closed system was a bit mysterious; you couldn't really

see how it worked; it all happened inside. The computer has and will prove to be the same way. Over time you will become as comfortable with the computer as you have become comfortable with hydraulics. All it takes is time and the willingness to learn.

## How Can You Use It?

You can, and should, use the computer much like a closet or storage building. You should put or store things in it that are to be used later. The storage building in the computer is really a database. You can use a database to track inventory, such as pesticides used and in stock; machinery and parts; fertilizer used and in stock; soils and amendments, such as mound clay or topdressing agents; and general supplies, such as pitching rubbers or irrigation flags.

You can track degree days, daily temperatures, humidity and rainfall amounts and any other weather-related data that will be beneficial to know in developing and carrying out your maintenance program.

You can use the computer to track labor costs. By using a simple arithmetic formula in Excel you can have instant labor costs. You can track the performance of contractors on your site, the number of hours spent there

and materials used. This information can help you when it comes time to pay for their services.

You also can track your budget. By using a subtraction formula in Excel you can input expenditures and have a running declining balance. It sure is nice knowing how much money you have at the click of a button.

Can you do all this tracking without a computer? Absolutely! But just like the hydraulics made it more efficient to mow, the computer will make it easier to store your information, and you'll only have to look in one place to retrieve it.

## What Else Can You Use It For?

Just like the materials you store in the closet, eventually you'll need to pull them out and produce something. The data collected in the computer can be pulled out to produce reports. Those reports can be month-end or year-end labor, or inventory, or even budget reports. These types of reports can be a great help when justifying your maintenance program and asking for future funding. You will have credible, realistic data. Believe me, that goes a long way in budgeting.

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Has your turf maintenance program ever experienced a disease infestation that was difficult to diagnose? The meteorological information stored in your computer can help in your diagnosis and perhaps even give you the ammunition needed to ward off a turf disease or weed pest.

You also can take your information one step further. You can turn your database into a multi-media presentation. The use of power point or other presentation software in your program also lends to your credibility and professionalism. It holds the audience's attention better than written documents and the visual aids help you in presenting by taking the focus off you and putting it on the screen.

### Tap Into the Communication Equation

Let's not forget the most common

use of the computer these days, Internet communications and e-mail. Within seconds or minutes you can retrieve information from sites that in the past would have taken you days to track down and access, let alone review and retrieve. You also can communicate more efficiently with colleagues and other employees. Often it takes much less time to send or respond to an e-mail than to pick up the phone and talk to the other individual. Mind you, this does not decrease the importance of personal contact, it simply adds another dimension of communication when personal contact is not necessary.

E-mailing also allows you to send the same message to several people at the same time. This can become an excellent management tool when the same information needs to be received by several employees or contractors. You can "broadcast" changes in scheduling or other specific aspects of a project rather than contacting each individual directly.

### Conclusion

If you are not using the computer in your sports turf management program, you really should do so. Start slowly and get comfortable with the new machine. Little by little you will be able to do more. You certainly don't need to know everything about the computer program before you begin using it. You'll find that you will learn about it as you need it, expanding your understanding and capabilities as you expand your computer use. Eventually you will become as comfortable with the computer and rely on it to give you results just as you rely on your favorite spreader, spade or mower.

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