

Water...water...anywhere? HighGrove implements KnowWater program

by Deborah Kuo

In September 2007, much of the Southeast had reached the most severe category of drought, creating a record-breaking emergency so serious that some cities were only months away from running out of water.

Alarming news of Lake Lanier's dwindling water supply made headlines daily. Watering restrictions became increasingly stringent and finally resulted in a total outdoor watering ban in 61 North Georgia counties, including all of metro Atlanta. The drought and associated watering ban took a heavy toll on many companies in the state's \$8 billion green industry.

What was a landscaping company in Atlanta to do in order to survive, let alone thrive?

Management team members at HighGrove Partners, a full service landscape company based in Atlanta, quickly convened to discuss how to survive the crisis in the short term,

but more importantly, how it could be turned into an opportunity in the long term. The watering restrictions had already resulted in more than a third of clients opting to not plant fall seasonal color, a large revenue source for the company.

"We pulled together a team of individuals from different areas across the company to brainstorm how to creatively handle the current drought and beyond. Despite this being the most severe environmental challenge we had ever experienced, we kept our attitude very positive and explored all kinds of ideas, including many off-the-wall thoughts. In fact, we strongly encouraged out-of-the-box thinking. Sub-groups were formed for idea exploration. We did not want to get swept up in the 'gloom and doom' mood and dwell on lost revenue. Instead, we focused our efforts on long-term strategic planning and finding innovative ways to turn this crisis into a real opportunity for both us and our clients. Building value for our clients is something we seek constantly and this circumstance proved to be a tremendous opportunity to do so," explains McCutcheon.

As a result of their brainstorming efforts, in early 2008 HighGrove Partners launched KnowWater, an environmental stewardship program developed to help clients maintain landscapes in ways that are water-sensitive, aesthetic and that would yield a positive return on investment. The program includes education on how to keep landscapes healthy and beautiful while using less water as well as

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a suite of water management services that are designed for clients to generate a solid return on investment in a short timeframe.

One of the key program offerings centers on irrigation system assessment and renovation. Through a water conservation survey, HighGrove is able to identify nine potential areas of water savings for clients and recommend the best renovation options. The program is completely customizable and allows for clients to implement as many or as few pieces of the program in a timeframe that is most suitable for them.

“One of the big lessons that Atlanta learned from this historic drought is how to be better stewards of water, a precious resource that we’ve been spoiled with. When we launched KnowWater, we conducted a symposium for clients featuring experts who discussed water conservation and how proper irrigation can save tons of water and money. They really educated our audience on how landscapes can thrive with using less water and how there are so many common expensive irrigation ‘sins’ being committed every day,” explains McCutcheon.

In a year when irrigation systems weren’t permitted to be used outside of new installations, HighGrove was able to help clients save water and generate a return on their investment while actually tripling the company’s irrigation revenue.

“When we implemented KnowWater, we said that everything we did through the program had to pass through what we call our ‘Why Wouldn’t You’ filter. In other words, every offering we provide needs to make complete sense environmentally, aesthetically and financially so that it becomes a ‘no-brainer’ for our clients,” says McCutcheon.



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KnowWater is an example of HighGrove’s company culture of promoting innovation throughout the organization. “KnowWater was not only successful from the standpoint that we were able to create value for ourselves and our clients, but it demonstrated the importance our organization places on promoting innovation. Opportunity truly knocked at our door in this situation and we proved that positive and creative thinking can make a real impact during the most daunting times,” says McCutcheon.

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For more information on HighGrove Partners and the KnowWater program, visit:

www.highgrove.net
www.knowwater.com

Deborah Kuo is Director of Customer Service & Marketing for HighGrove Partners.