

OUTSOURCING DESIGN:

Two firms use market trends to do design differently.

By Lyn Dean and Becky Garber

Within the last year, two sets of industry veterans have started design outsourcing firms that provide traditional landscape design – but their business models are outside the traditional box. In both cases, designers spotted niches they could fill if they tweaked their offerings to match what they saw as market needs. Their business models could be called either responsive or proactive – but most likely, some of both.

Responding to the market

Cooperative Design Resource (CDR), Denver, and Remote Design Solutions (RDS), Colorado Springs, started new design companies knowing that with an improving economy, landscape companies often have more design work coming in than they can handle. Companies that already had in-house designers and/or use outside designers had a backlog stacking up. They were getting beyond their ability to get work done in a timely manner. In addition, more small landscape companies that until now relied on the owner for designs were in that uncomfortable place of having more work, but not enough resources to hire an in-house designer.

“Cooperative Design Resource was conceived when I got so busy that I needed help with design work,” says co-founder Tom Trench. “But it was more than design. I saw the opportunity to help sell design for landscape companies.” Their model takes outsourcing design one step further by doing the sales function on behalf of the contractor. It’s the designer who develops rapport over time with the client, so isn’t he/she the most logical person to sell the job?

The driving force behind CDR has been that they can cut a contractor’s expense by taking advantage of the rapport they develop with clients via the design process and applying it to sales. Whether they work with a small or large company, the result is the same – more time for the landscape company to



focus on other priorities such as estimating and managing the installation.

Remote Design Solutions, on the other hand, does strictly design – but what makes them unique is their remote orientation. Whether they create designs in town or on properties halfway across the country, they never step foot on the site.

Their concept began when Matt Hiner, owner of Hiner Landscapes, found someone to whom he could hand off all the firm’s design work. When the designer suddenly had other commitments out of state, they came up with a detailed system whereby Hiner fed the site information to the designer and he in turn, created designs remotely. The result? “The pretty, visual quality of his designs literally sold jobs from the kitchen table. The first question from clients was always, ‘when can you start?’”

The innovative workaround to their own situation led to a serious off-season conversation between Hiner and the remote designer, Bob Maryott. If they could be so successful with Hiner’s firm, could they market this service to other companies?

They already had real numbers to show how this model saved Hiner Landscapes substantial overhead. Hiner says, “it takes about \$1.5 million in revenue before you can hire a full-time designer who will cost somewhere around \$40,000 a year.” On the other hand, he knew from his experience that outsourcing \$20,000 in design fees brought in \$800,000 worth of work. That was the confirming data Hiner and Maryott needed to move ahead with a concept they knew worked.



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