

5 Reinforcing the ROI

The art of persuasion is key to Conserve LandCare's water-saving footprint. It's specifically persuading clients about the monetary and environmental

payoff that comes from investing in and upgrading irrigation systems.

"It's hard to get them to let go of those dollars to make the necessary changes in their irrigation that will then allow them to save down the road," says

Randy Mitchell, senior account manager for the Thousand Palms, Calif.-based firm. "The return on investment (ROI)

in the water savings could be three, four or fivefold."

To that end, Conserve, which is 35 percent irrigation and does \$5 million in annual revenue, has gotten creative over the years with emboldening its mainly commercial clientele to invest in their systems.

Two years ago, for example, it financed the installation and cost of a smart controller for a customer who was wary that the more expensive device would provide greater savings than their antiquated one.

The customer agreed to pay back



Conserve LandCare focuses on saving money for clients with controller upgrades (above) and analyses, such as irrigation audits (right).



Conserve over a three-year period based on its ability, due to its water savings.

"It put the ownership off of them and put it on us," Mitchell says. "We had to show them it works...and it's a neat way to get a new piece of technology to a client who maybe wouldn't be able to afford to do so."

The outcome: The client paid the bill within a year due to its 25 percent water savings.

While that was the first and only time Conserve took the financing plan approach, Mitchell says the company is willing and hopes to do it again for another customer.

Also in Conserve's corner is the rebate program offered by the Coachella Valley Water District for some services the firm already offers, including a turf conversion to a "desertscape."

The district rebates \$1 per square foot of converted turf. Conserve provides customers with a water-savings calculation prior to their conversion so they're aware of that ROI, too. It's typically around 60 percent, Mitchell says.

The company also held an open house in September where it invited current customers and prospects to its facility to learn about its service offerings. Mitchell manned the water conservation station along with a representative from manufacturer Weathermatic, who assisted him with demonstrating how one of the smart irrigation controllers works, including how Mitchell operates them from his computer.

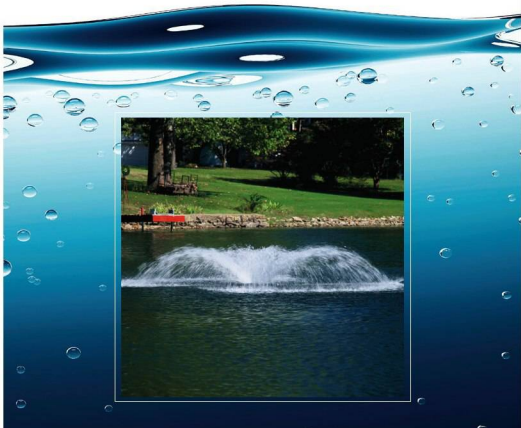
Thereafter, Conserve saw a boost in interest of smart controller installations. The reason for that, Mitchell says, is the company again convinced customers to consider the ROI. LM



Randy Mitchell

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