

STEVE DOWNIN & JEFF ROCKER

*Right-of-Way-Turf-Ornamental and Spring-Green Franchise Owners
Columbus, Indiana*

Striving for Success

Successful lawn care pros accelerate their million dollar plans with Spring-Green.



Steve Downin's lawn care roots run deep; since graduating college in the 1980's, he has worked in the industry, first for his father's lawn maintenance company and later growing his own company, Right-of-Way-Turf-Ornamental. He was not in the market to diversify his business when Spring-Green first reached out several years ago.

"They were persistent," Downin said. "The more they talked, the more I liked what I heard." He was intrigued by the collective knowledge offered by Spring-Green's other franchise owners.

"The idea of all performance reporting, peer groups, regional, and national training conferences and the Spring-Green support team could be harnessed and shared was something I thought was worthwhile." Eventually, he asked his business partner and attorney, Jeff Rocker, to investigate.

The Decision Stage

"I looked at the franchise information and disclosures; I read reviews," Rocker said. "I looked at everything from SBA loan default rates for Spring-Green franchises to forums, discussions, and root groups to Angie's List. I couldn't find anything that led me to believe Spring-Green was anything other than an upstanding, honest, and reputable company. Still, there were lots of hesitations about buying a franchise."

Downin had owned a lawn spraying company earlier in his career which he eventually sold to another large national company. "I understood the work," he said. "What I didn't have a clue about was the franchise part of the business."

Numerous phone calls and discussions followed until Downin and Rocker made the trip to the Naperville support center for their first face-to-face. "The discovery day, meeting with all the department leaders, seeing how the business ran, that got me going," Rocker said. "Meeting everybody, the energy that Spring-Green had in the office, we came away with our heads spinning," Downin said.

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A Formula for Accelerated Growth

Downin and Rocker recognized that even with the deep experience they had in the industry, Spring-Green offered something vital to their long term vision.

"Path and process," Rocker said. "It saves us from having to reinvent the wheel. Even though Steve had been very successful at the spray business some 15 years ago, today he'd be in the middle of a crowded field. So the prospect of doing this without Spring-Green's process was too daunting."

The process most attractive to the pair was marketing. "I'd say impact-wise, marketing was the biggest factor that made us give Spring-Green that second, third, and fourth look," said Rocker.

Their instincts have proved dead on as their growth has far exceeded forecasts. "I wasn't anticipating being half as busy as we are right now," Downin said. "We are at about 50 percent over our business plan projections."

"Spring-Green's planning cycle and high recurring customer base has really helped us make our business predictable and profitable," Downin added. "Even with the element of seasonality, with Spring-Green, our business now is designed to generate year round cash flow."

Rocker pointed out that having a business that was already successful has allowed him and Downin to pour more resources into Spring-Green and accelerate its growth.

"It's giving us the ability to let this grow without harvesting from it," Rocker explained. "I mean, the only person that gets paid from our company right now is our field service professional. The idea, of course, is as Spring-Green grows it's going to pay more benefits downstream."

The partners recognize they are in a unique situation where their existing business permits this strategy, so they are making the most of it. "I don't want to wait ten years to be a million-dollar company," Downin said. "This business, so far, has been great. If we stay on the same path, we expect to do very well," Rocker added. "The franchise, if you do what they ask you to do, it works."

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