

## Feature On Landscaping

# Creating The Right Impression

*Pat Fox of Aralia Garden Design talks about the importance of creating the right impression right from the start.*



Pat Fox the prime mover behind Aralia Garden Design

**QUESTION:** what do your customers think about your business? We all know that first impressions are of huge importance, but how many of us question what is the first thing that our customers actually see? A new client for example walks up to your premises, the first thing they see is a row of hanging baskets, withered and crisp dry as a bone. What does this say to your potential client? Well, it possibly gives them an impression of a company who doesn't care about details, who perhaps is a bit sloppy, and who may then

perhaps be a bit sloppy with their clients. No, you may say, it shows that they're extremely busy with a thriving business, that they're too busy with important issues to concern themselves with tiny details such as flower baskets. But surely it is the small things that make the difference between a good company and an excellent one?

The first thing potential clients will notice about your business will be their experience on entering into your site. Take for example a new member of a health club who pulls up into the car park. She tries to open

her door and is immediately struggling to get past a rather overgrown shrub, which could really do with a hard prune.

Next off, having circumvented the offending plant, she steps into a puddle due to poor paving with a lack of run off. By this time she is a little rattled. She now steps onto the main paving leading up to the grand entrance and as she does manages to rip her tights on a prickly *Berberis* hedge, placed there specifically to stop people cutting corners, but now however doing its job rather too well! Just as the client approaches the door she notices some fantastic looking contemporary planters and stops briefly to admire them. But, whatever has happened to the plants within them? They have shrivelled up and died and have been overtaken by some rather unsightly weeds. By now our client has formed an impression of this company, and it is not a good one. She enters into a fantastic reception, beautifully lit and with the most amazing décor, a smiling receptionist who asks "How are you", greets

her, and the client's response I'm sure you can well imagine!

Unfortunately, although this is a fabricated story, it is a story, which happens only too often in the business community. People take the time and trouble to provide an excellent service or product, to their clients, but often forget the 'little' things, which can give lasting, negative impressions to their client base. Companies can take great care to make their internal environment just so, whilst neglecting their external space. Clients and potential clients will form opinions on all of your space, since their opinion will be based upon their whole experience, not just the bit that took place in your office or restaurant.

Landscaping, whether it be a small paved frontage, or extensive grounds, can provide a dramatic impact on a business. Companies can spend small fortunes on this area, and still not get it right. It is imperative that if a business is to spend the time, trouble and budget trying to get it right that they work with landscape designers such as

ourselves, Aralia Garden Design, who can work with them to get the details correct – not just when the space is landscaped, but a design that is sustainable in the longer term. If we take our fictional client we can see a series of errors. The overgrown shrub alongside the parking area is undoubtedly as a result of a client who perhaps wasn't advised about the longer-term maintenance costs behind the 'cheap' installation he signed off on. When shrubs and trees are first planted, their initial size is not always the issue, what needs to be communicated to and understood by the client, is its potential longer-term growth, and the level of maintenance required to keep it at a 'suitable' size. Too often we see shrubs that are totally inappropriate for their use being used by landscapers, since they are cheap to buy and are fast growing. Everybody's happy to begin with and then two years down the road sites become overgrown, out of shape and are too costly to maintain. Does a business have time or the inclination to provide someone to water on a regular basis?

If not, then either drought tolerant plants should be suggested, or an irrigation system should be put in place to allow the business to concentrate on what it does, rather than worrying about the health of their plants. Plant selection and suitability are key issues which landscape designers are aware of. Companies need to be advised at an early stage, regarding the on-going maintenance requirements and costs, before implementation of both hard and soft landscaping, so that they can make informed decisions about their landscaping.

So take a good look at your outdoor space, what does it say about your business? If you're happy with what you see, excellent. If not maybe it's time to organise a consultation with a landscape design firm to get you back in shape.

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