



Creating Grounds That Welcome Customers and Create Value for Your Casino

by Mike O'Connell

With the move to more diversification within Indian gaming operations, the modest bingo hall of yesterday has evolved into today's multi-million dollar resort and spa offering virtually every amenity. Along with this growth comes the need for more casino operators to create beautiful outdoor environments that keep welcoming customers back. Here are some of the key issues that you might want to consider as you think about your landscaping program.

1. Staff Expertise - When selecting the next landscape maintenance firm for your casino, find out if they have sufficient expertise. For example, are the employees properly licensed to handle and dispense chemicals? Do they have horticulturalists and landscape architects on staff? Further, you might want to check if the potential bidders are members of appropriate professional trade associations.

2. Grounds Needs Assessment - You might consider walking the grounds with each potential bidder. This way you can assess firsthand if the contractor is an expert at knowing which parts of your casino offer the greatest "bang for your buck." Find out how each would approach a cost effective solution for your casino's high visibility areas. These high visibility areas could include landscaping solutions for interior spaces as well as your exterior landscape.

3. Creativity - Hopefully your casino serves many repeat visitors. If so, you want to anticipate their high expectations. If your grounds look exactly the same every time your guests return, their excitement may diminish. Can your landscaping company provide a strategy for introducing creative new landscaping designs, including seasonal changes in colors of flowers and plantings, or construction of waterfalls or fountains, to add interest?

4. Environmental Strategy - As your customers become more conscious of "green" and other environmental issues, you might want to consider a landscaping partner that is capable of helping you plan and execute your strategy for this very important need. Besides the advantages of being "environmentally friendly," a potential added benefit is that you may achieve some savings in the long run by reducing costly, labor-intensive mowing and watering.

5. Workforce Scheduling - Ask the landscape company how it plans to schedule its workforce. Can they offer you a



seasonal team when you need it? Do they have the ability to send larger teams of workers so work can be performed quickly and projects can be completed simultaneously? This characteristic is particularly important in the hospitality industry because a major goal is to minimize disruptions to guests. When evaluating which landscape maintenance firm is right for your casino, ask how each firm schedules its workload to ensure work is performed during off-hours with minimal guest intrusion.

6. Insurance and Indemnification - Due to the nature of the services provided, determining appropriate levels and types of insurance coverage is essential. This can be complicated, but it is critical that your landscaping supplier possesses adequate insurance coverage and, in addition, provides appropriate indemnification to protect your investment and to limit your liability.

7. References and Experience - When conducting your search, ask for references of properties that are similar to yours and follow up with calls to discuss performance. You might want to consider firms with a minimum of two consecutive years of resort or casino experience, but at the very least validate that they have sufficient commercial experience including large customers, such as parks, malls, office complexes or golf courses.

8. Contract Scope/Contingent Services - Are there provisions to terminate for poor performance? Does the contract

automatically extend for another year without requiring your written consent? Is seasonal tree trimming or flower planting included? What if you have a disaster? Floods, earthquakes and other natural disasters can seriously damage your casino and its grounds. To make sure that you are prepared to deal with the impact of these events, you should ask potential bidders about their disaster recovery capabilities and how you will get scarce resources (sandbags, turf and new plant materials) following a natural disaster. Importantly, how much more is the mark-up for these add-on services?

9. Immigration Verification - A longstanding issue within the landscaping industry is the widespread use of undocumented workers. In order to protect your casino from any wrongdoing it is imperative to have verified workers.

10. Ancillary Services for Seasonal Needs - Just like natural disaster planning, some parts of the country need ancillary services such as winterizing and snow and ice management. Can your landscaping company provide any of these services? If your guests have difficulty navigating your parking lot due to a poorly plowed surface, it could have a negative impact on their stay. Even employees may be

affected, resulting in less efficient operations and low morale. Operators that experience the best snow removal efficiency are those that begin lining up contractors in the off season, recognizing that the best snow removal teams require a comprehensive knowledge of their parking lots - and traffic patterns - before they are buried under a mass of snow.

When selecting a potential contractor for your landscaping needs, preparing a comprehensive list of requirements is critical. Developing a scope of work that specifically outlines what services will be provided and at what frequency helps you to communicate expectations up front. This also allows all parties to clearly understand the individual needs of your casinos. It also enables you to know if firms are providing comparable bids and that you are actually comparing "apples-to-apples," always a challenge in this arena. In the final analysis, you want to make sure that the landscaping contractor is capable of providing the necessary expertise, service, terms and overall value. ♣

Mike O'Connell is Director of Strategic Contracting for Landscaping and Golf for Avendra. He can be reached by calling (301) 825-0039 or email mike.oconnell@avendra.com

FLATH & ASSOCIATES
MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS

Practical Solutions
to
Real Problems

Serving the Tribal Gaming Community since 1991

Our Organization Development Programs include...

- Setting Goals and Performance Management for Executives, Supervisors and Staff
- Communication & Conflict Resolution
- Work Related Stress Large Scale Change Programs
- Executive Development & Coaching Labor Market Demographic Studies for Staff Programs

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE TRAINING & CONSULTING

How to recognize the signs before it happens, respond to it as it's occurring and handle the internal and external effects after the crisis has passed.

Call us today for a free consultation 203.318.1803 or visit us on the web at:
www.flathassociates.com