CHANGING LANDSCAPE

In a new series, **Peter Wilder** considers the role of technology in landscaping and why the internet is key to staying competitive

Innovation has long defined humankind's aspiration to improve the world. Our competitive nature has led us to develop complex systems and approaches that have reduced the need for manual labour and improved productivity in just about every area.

Landscaping has become ever more mechanised and technology-reliant to improve efficiency and health and safety. Firms that embrace technology are more likely to succeed and improve profit margins over competitors. In the race to adopt new technology, there will be winners and losers, and those that invest will require new skills and a different breed of employee to maintain their edge.

> " FIRMS THAT **EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY** ARE MORE LIKELY TO **SUCCEED** AND **IMPROVE PROFIT MARGINS** OVER COMPETITORS "

Communication

It is hard for me to believe that my journey as a landscape architect began before the internet and mobile phones, and before personal computers were seen as anything other than something to play games on. Since then, computers have become a central part of every office, and smartphones enable us to run our practices from anywhere in the world.

One of the biggest things to come out of mobile communication and smartphones is the use of social media. Social media is now one of the most powerful and pervasive tools used by businesses to profile their services, attract new employees and promote the brand, due to the ability of its messaging to 'go viral'. Social media transcends boundaries of gender, geographic location and wealth bracket, and specialist apps such as LinkedIn focus purely on building a business network. With so much to gain, it is hard to understand why so few companies use social media as a platform for advertising or reaching out to key clients.

Although most people today are social media users, most do so in a personal capacity, and few firms have a dedicated marketing manager who oversees a social media account. Perhaps the biggest block to the use of social media is time. With so much information available, there is a tendency to be overwhelmed with data competing for time. Email marketing floods inboxes, and spam or unsolicited emails compete for our attention along with bids and requests from clients and project managers. The average person spends 28% of their time reading or deleting emails, with more than half unrelated to their work.
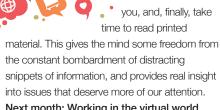
This is one of the reasons why social media has overtaken emails as a route to market. Information on social media is less intrusive and offers the reader the opportunity to choose how and when to access the information, organise it into themes or topics and to follow the influencers that most appeal to the interests of the user. Apps such as Hootsuite, Keyhole, Klout and Mention even help to track keywords and filter multiple social media channels, as well as reporting on the market penetration of your own.

Communication used to be a two-way dialogue, but now it is carried out over multiple devices by voice, text, image and video. The smartphone has enabled every person to become a broadcast platform. With so much noise, it is not only difficult to stand out but also to find the time to be productive. The only way to survive in the information age is to set boundaries. Dedicate time to view and post meaningful content at least once a day, and then put the phone away. Turn it off completely in meetings – there is nothing worse than a client feeling they are only getting part of your attention. Create filters to ensure only relevant information reaches you, and, finally, take time to read printed material. This gives the mind some freedom from the constant bombardment of distracting snippets of information, and provides real insight into issues that deserve more of our attention.

Next month: Working in the virtual world

ABOUT PETER WILDER

Peter Wilder is a landscape architect and principal of Wilder Associates. He lectures on Landscape Design and Technology at the University of Greenwich. In 2015 he established Survey Drone Ltd, an aerial mapping and remote sensing company employing a fleet of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

www.wilder-associates.com
www.survey-drone.co.uk