

The Starving-Crowd Test for Your ZIP Codes

Three ZIP codes, three criteria each. Write the evidence you actually saw, not the score you were hoping for.

The three ZIP codes you can reach inside a twenty-five minute drive with a loaded trailer, and why those three:

PAIN — which yard problems near you are urgent this season rather than someday? What did you see that proves it?

PURCHASING POWER — age of the housing stock, owner-occupied share, and what that tells you about who can pay:

TARGETABILITY — how you reach these houses cheaply and repeatedly, and which streets show your work off best:

Your Homeowner Avatar

One person, not a category. Write her the way you would describe her to a crew leader who has to go meet her.

Who she is: the house, how long she has owned it, what the front yard looks like right now:

What she is afraid of when a stranger with a machine comes to the door — in her words, not yours:

What she typed into a search bar the last time she looked at her yard and gave up:

What she has already tried, who let her down, and what that failure cost her:

Personal Runway Worksheet

Household costs only — the business budget lives in chapter 5. Total it, divide your savings by the total, and write the number of months and the month it runs out in at the bottom.

Demand by Month — Landscape Installation

The printed index is national search interest for this trade, detrended and averaged over five years. Pencil your own expectations beside it, then plan the bottom two months first.

MONTH	DEMAND INDEX	JOB'S YOU EXPECT	REVENUE YOU EXPECT	WHAT YOU WILL SELL IN THE SLOW MONTHS
Jan	0.69			
Feb	0.84			
Mar	1.11			
Apr	1.22			
May	1.16			
Jun	1.11			
Jul	1.17			
Aug	1.09			
Sep	0.99			
Oct	0.94			
Nov	0.90			
Dec	0.77			
Year				

Demand index: 1.00 = an average month for this trade nationally (source in Resources). Your ZIP will differ — pencil your own index in the slow and busy months.

Dream Outcome Builder

Her words, not yours. If a sentence here could appear in a supplier catalogue, it is not the dream outcome.

What does she actually want to be true after you leave? Write it the way she would say it to a friend:

The timeframe you will promise, and why you can hit it in a bad week rather than a good one:

The event, season or date behind the request — the reason it is this year and not someday:

What she is most afraid will go wrong, and the one line in your offer that removes it:

Obstacle → Solution Map

Every reason she might not buy, or might buy and be unhappy. Sort each into knowledge, skill, environment or psychology, then reverse it into a line of your offer.

#	WHAT STOPS THE HOMEOWNER	CATEGORY	HOW YOUR OFFER REMOVES IT
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			

Your Value Stack

One row per component. Anything that is worth a lot to her and costs you little stays. Anything that costs you a lot and she never notices is a bonus you should cut.

COMPONENT	PROBLEM IT SOLVES	VALUE TO THEM	COST TO YOU	KEEP / BONUS / CUT

Guarantee and Offer Name

Bound the count, the time, the cause and the condition. Then name the thing so she can repeat it.

Workmanship guarantee — what is covered, for how long, and what you will do if it fails:

Plant guarantee — the count, the window, and the exclusions written the way you will say them out loud:

What sits outside the guarantee — plants in soil you did not prepare, stock she supplied, irrigation you did not install:

Three candidate names — result plus container or clock — and which one a homeowner repeated back to you:

Service Area and Jobs You Will Not Do

Drive time, measured with the trailer on. Then the refusals, written down while you are not hungry.

Your boundary in minutes — the towns in, the towns out, and the real drive time you measured to each edge:

Your suppliers and dump, and the round-trip time from the far side of your area to each of them:

Your ideal customer in one sentence you could hand to a stranger:

The jobs you will not take — licence-gated work, engineered walls, undiagnosed drainage, below minimum, out of circle:

Who you refer those jobs to by name, and what you have asked them to send back:

Ten-Competitor Scan

The first ten map results in your area. The last column is the one that pays — write the gap their reviews are already telling you about.

COMPANY	GOOGLE RATING	REVIEWS	PRICE SIGNAL	THEIR PROMISE	GAP YOU CAN OWN

Your One-Liner and Positioning Statement

Problem, plan, result. One sentence you can say at a parts counter without sounding like an advertisement.

The problem, in her words — what she says to her husband when she looks out the front window:

Your plan in three steps, the way you would say it standing in her driveway:

The result — what is different about her week after you leave:

The whole thing as one sentence. Write it three ways and circle the one you can say without flinching:

Entity, EIN and Bank Setup

One afternoon of paperwork, in this order. Date each line as you finish it.

- | | |
|---|------------|
| ☐ Decide sole proprietor or LLC after talking to an accountant, and write down the reason you chose it | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Check the business name is available in your state and buy the matching domain | DATE _____ |
| ☐ File the entity with the secretary of state and save the confirmation as a file, not a photo | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Apply for the EIN on the federal tax agency site — free, same day | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Open a business checking account and a business card, and stop using the personal ones | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Register for state and local tax accounts your accountant tells you apply to landscape work | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Check the county clerk and city hall for a local occupational licence or business permit | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Set up a supplier account at your nursery, your stone yard and your mulch supplier under the business name | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Ask your accountant in writing whether your installs are taxable, and keep the answer | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Put the annual report and renewal dates in your phone with a reminder a month ahead | DATE _____ |

License Requirements by State — Landscape Installation

Eleven states, straight from the boards, retrieved on the date printed in the sources. Find yours, then open the board page yourself and write today's date beside it — these rules move.

STATE	LICENSE REQUIRED?	LICENSE	BOARD	FEE	EXAM
Kentucky	No statewide	—	Check city / county	—	No
Texas	No statewide	—	Check city / county	—	No
California	Yes	C-27 Landscaping Contractor License	California Contractors State License Board (CSLB)	\$450–\$650	Yes
Florida	No statewide	—	Check city / county	—	No
New York	No statewide	—	Check city / county	—	No
Pennsylvania	Yes	Home Improvement Contractor (HIC) Registration — required for landscape contractors doing more than \$5,000 in home-improvement work in a 12-month period	Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General	\$100	No
Illinois	No statewide	—	Check city / county	—	No
Ohio	No statewide	—	Check city / county	—	No
Georgia	No statewide	—	Check city / county	—	No
North Carolina	Yes	NC Landscape Contractor License — required once landscape contract value at a given job site reaches \$30,000 or more in any consecutive 12-month period	NC Landscape Contractors' Licensing Board (NCLCLB)	\$75–\$175	Yes
Michigan	No statewide	—	Check city / county	—	No

Rules change — confirm with the board before you spend a dollar.

Insurance Lines and Annual Cost Ranges

Researched ranges for a landscaping company. Write your own quoted numbers beside them and note the limits, because a cheap premium on thin limits is not a saving.

COVERAGE	TYPICAL ANNUAL COST	WHAT IT COVERS	YOUR QUOTE
General liability	\$360–\$1,200	Damage or injury you cause to others	
Workers comp	2.19–6.3 per \$100 payroll	Your crew, hurt on the job	
Commercial auto	\$1,200–\$4,800	The truck and what it hits	
Bond	\$10,000–\$25,000	No bond is required for basic planting/mulching/mowing work in any of the 11 researched states. Where a formal landscape CONTRACTOR license is required, a surety bond follows: North Carolina requires a \$10,000 landscape contractor bond (or irrevocable letter of credit) once the \$30,000/site threshold is crossed (nclclb.com); California's CSLB requires a \$25,000 contractor license bond for all license classifications including C-27, effective Jan 1, 2023 per Senate Bill 607.	
Tools & equipment		Theft from the truck or site	
Umbrella		Above the GL limit	

Insurance Quote Log

Three carriers, identical limits, or you are comparing nothing. Ask each one how fast they turn around a certificate of insurance — you will need one on short notice.

CARRIER / AGENT	LINE	LIMITS	ANNUAL PREMIUM	DEDUCTIBLE	DECISION

Questions for Your Attorney and Accountant

Take this page to both meetings. Write their answers in the margin, dated, and keep it — you will reread it the first time something goes wrong.

☐ Attorney: sole proprietor or LLC for my situation, and what does the LLC actually protect me from	DATE _____
☐ Attorney: what should my work order say about scope, deposits, and work added after the start	DATE _____
☐ Attorney: how should a change order be handled in this state so it is enforceable	DATE _____
☐ Attorney: how should my bounded plant guarantee be worded so it means what I intend	DATE _____
☐ Attorney: what happens if I damage a buried utility, and what my locate records should look like	DATE _____
☐ Accountant: is my installation work taxable here, and what about material versus labour	DATE _____
☐ Accountant: what should I set aside from every deposit, and into which account	DATE _____
☐ Accountant: how do I handle the truck and the trailer for tax purposes	DATE _____
☐ Accountant: is the person I am about to pay a subcontractor or an employee under this state's test	DATE _____
☐ Accountant: what do you need from me every month, and in what format	DATE _____
☐ Both: what do you charge, how do I reach you, and how fast do you answer	DATE _____

Equipment Budget — Landscape Installation

Researched ranges. Write your real quoted price in the last column, and mark every line buy, rent or later — the rent column is where new companies stay alive.

ITEM	LOW	HIGH	DAY ONE?	YOUR PRICE	BOUGHT
Open utility/landscape trailer	\$1,500	\$3,000	Yes		
Hand tools (shovels, rakes, tampers)	\$200	\$500	Yes		
Heavy-duty wheelbarrows (2-3)	\$100	\$200	Yes		
Gas string trimmer	\$200	\$400	Yes		
Backpack leaf blower	\$250	\$400	Yes		
Chainsaw (clearing / tree work)	\$300	\$500	Yes		
Vibratory plate compactor (paver/patio base)	\$700	\$3,000	Yes		
Wet tile/paver saw	\$70	\$939	Yes		
Gas hedge trimmer	\$200	\$400	Yes		
PPE / safety gear (gloves, eye and ear protection)	\$50	\$150	Yes		
Bed edger (landscape bed lines)	\$2,000	\$4,000	Later		
Push broadcast spreader (seed/fertilizer after install)	\$75	\$400	Later		
Skid steer or mini excavator (grading, hardscape base) — most starters rent	\$15,000	\$40,000	Later		
Enclosed trailer (equipment protection, scale-up)	\$5,000	\$10,000	Later		
Dump trailer (mulch/debris hauling)	\$5,000	\$12,000	Later		
Zero-turn mower (maintenance/continuity upsell)	\$6,000	\$15,000	Later		
Core aerator (maintenance upsell)	\$2,500	\$5,000	Later		
Stick/walk-behind edger (finish detailing)	\$200	\$600	Later		
Essential equipment	\$3,570	\$9,489			

Ranges are retail prices at the time of research (sources in Resources). Used and rental are the day-one shortcuts.

Total Startup Budget

Equipment, vehicle, first-year liability and launch marketing. Add one line at the bottom the table does not print for you: two months of fixed costs, held in a separate account and not touched.

LINE	LOW	HIGH	YOUR NUMBER
Essential equipment (previous page)	\$3,570	\$9,489	
Used work pickup truck (towing capacity for trailer)	\$15,000	\$25,000	
General liability, year one	\$360	\$1,200	
Launch marketing	\$500	\$2,000	
Licenses and permits			
Software and phone, 3 months			
Personal runway (chapter 1)			
Reserve (10% of the total)			
Total startup	\$19,430	\$37,689	

Funding Sources

Every source you could actually reach, ranked by what it truly costs. Deposits and supplier terms belong at the top of this page, not the bottom.

SOURCE	AMOUNT AVAILABLE	COST (RATE / EQUITY / FAVOR)	SPEED	USE IT?

Client-Financed Acquisition Plan

The deposit buys the material. The profit buys the next customer. Write the rule before you are standing in a driveway improvising it.

Your deposit rule in one sentence, sized to material cost, and what your attorney said about state caps:

The visible milestones you will bill against on a multi-day job, in the homeowner's words:

Where deposit money sits until the materials are bought, and who is allowed to move it:

The share of job-one profit that goes straight back into finding job two, and where it goes:

Suppliers you will ask for terms, what you will ask for, and what you will offer in return:

Typical Jobs and Price Ranges — Landscape Installation

Published ranges for this trade, with the hours behind each one. Write your own price in the last column, and if yours sits at the bottom of every band, ask yourself why before you blame the market.

TYPICAL JOB	LOW	HIGH	HOURS	PER HOUR (HIGH ÷ HOURS)	YOUR PRICE
Sod installation, typical residential lawn (total project)	\$1,048	\$2,992	8	\$374	
Mulch installation, per cubic yard installed	\$65	\$150	0.5	\$300	
Planting bed installation (soil prep, shrubs, edging), per sq ft	\$10	\$25	0.25	\$100	
Paver patio or walkway installation (total project)	\$2,000	\$5,800	24	\$242	
Retaining wall construction (total project)	\$1,500	\$6,000	20	\$300	
Irrigation system installation, per zone	\$500	\$1,500	2	\$750	
Landscape design plan (flat fee)	\$300	\$2,500	6	\$417	
Front yard landscaping installation (total project)	\$1,500	\$5,000	32	\$156	

Crews in this trade bill \$50–\$100 an hour (flat pricing). Technicians earn \$19–\$28 an hour.

Good / Better / Best Builder

Three real options for your most common job. The largest one gets said first, out loud, every time — it is what makes the middle one readable.

	GOOD	BETTER	BEST
Name			
What is included			
What is left out			
Price			
Guarantee			
Who buys it			
Anchor shown first?			

Break-Even Hourly Rate

Everything the business costs whether or not you work, divided by the hours you can honestly bill. That answer is the floor under every number you say in a driveway.

LINE	MONTHLY AMOUNT	NOTES
Your pay		
Insurance		
Vehicle + fuel		
Software + phone		
Tools + repairs		
Marketing		
Other fixed		
TOTAL monthly nut		
Billable hours per month		
Break-even hourly = nut ÷ hours		
Target margin %		
Your rate = break-even ÷ (1 – margin)		

Markup vs Margin Table

Fill one row for every markup you actually use and read the margin column beside it. Then keep this page in the truck, because the arithmetic never gets more intuitive.

JOB COST	MARKUP %	PRICE	MARGIN %

Unit Price Card

Build it once from three real finished jobs, keep it in the truck, and reprice it every spring. Counting a job beats feeling a job every time.

UNIT	TRUE COST PER UNIT	OVERHEAD SHARE	TARGET MARGIN	YOUR INSTALLED UNIT PRICE
Planting bed, per sq ft				
Mulch, per cubic yard installed				
Sod, per sq ft				
Shrub, small				
Shrub, large				
Tree, B&B				
Paver patio, per sq ft				
Wall block, per face sq ft				
Base stone, per ton placed				
Haul-off, per load				
Machine day (owned)				
Machine day (rented)				

Your Attraction Offer

Small, paid, and genuinely useful. If it could be delivered by anyone with a phone and a price list, it is not an attraction offer.

What you inspect on the yard walk — the list you follow every time so nothing depends on memory:

What she physically receives afterwards, and how long you take to deliver it:

The price, and the exact sentence you will say about crediting it against the install:

The problems this walk usually reveals in your market, and the offer each one leads to:

Upsell and Downsell Plan

Upsells are offered on the last day of the job. Downsellings change the shape of the work, never the price of the same work.

The three upsells you offer on every completed install, in the order you will say them:

The same-mobilisation discount you can genuinely afford, and how you will explain it:

Your three downsells — phase, plant size, design only — and the words for each:

The written payment split you will offer instead of a discount, and its schedule:

What you will never discount, no matter who asks or how the conversation goes:

Continuity or Referral Plan

This trade has real continuity — build the annual agreement out of the visits your own installs actually need, then bill it monthly so February has a heartbeat.

PLAY	WHAT THEY GET	PRICE / REWARD	WHEN YOU OFFER IT	TARGET TAKE-RATE

Job-Start Checklist

Every job, including the half-day ones. The small job is where the locate gets skipped and the small job is where the gas line is shallow.

- ☐ Utility locate requested, notice period elapsed, marks visible on the ground and photographed
- DATE
- ☐ Work order signed and on the truck, with the scope and the guarantee on it
- DATE
- ☐ Materials confirmed loaded or confirmed delivered to site — counted, not assumed
- DATE
- ☐ Existing damage photographed before anything moves: drive, walk, siding, gutters, fence, neighbour’s lawn
- DATE
- ☐ Staging area agreed with the homeowner: where the trailer parks, where material piles, where debris goes
- DATE
- ☐ Irrigation and low-voltage lines located or the homeowner told they are unmarked
- DATE
- ☐ Access confirmed: gate width, overhead branches, soft ground, the neighbour’s driveway you were going to borrow
- DATE
- ☐ Crew briefed on the day’s target, the finish standard, and who talks to the homeowner
- DATE
- ☐ PPE on before the first machine starts — eyes, ears, gloves, boots
- DATE
- ☐ Weather checked against the day’s work, and the rain-day alternative named
- DATE

Job-Close Checklist

This page is your marketing budget. Everything on it is the difference between a job that is finished and a job that gets reviewed.

☐ Depths checked against what you sold: base, soil prep, mulch — measured, not eyeballed	DATE _____
☐ Bed lines and edges cut clean and consistent along their whole length	DATE _____
☐ Plants set at the spacing on the plan and watered in before you leave	DATE _____
☐ All hard surfaces blown and rinsed, including the neighbour's side of the drive	DATE _____
☐ Debris hauled the same day — nothing left overnight, not even bagged	DATE _____
☐ After photographs taken from the same angles as the before shots	DATE _____
☐ Watering schedule handed over on the property and explained out loud	DATE _____
☐ Walk-through completed with the homeowner and anything she mentioned fixed on the spot	DATE _____
☐ Invoice sent from the driveway before you pull out	DATE _____
☐ Maintenance agreement offered and the next phase dated while she is standing in the finished yard	DATE _____
☐ Day-14 watering text scheduled before you drive away	DATE _____
☐ Job folder updated: work order, change orders, locate ticket, photos, plant list, invoice	DATE _____

Family Worksheet

Routes, machines, certifications and weather — the four operating inputs that decide whether an outdoor day pays.

Your weekly shape: which day is estimates, which morning is supply runs, which days are build days:

Small-engine and trailer maintenance schedule — daily, weekly, seasonal — and who is responsible for each:

Certifications you need or want, what each one costs in time, and the winter month you will do it in:

Your weather rule: the dry-weather job, the rain-day job, and what you tell the homeowner at signing:

Equipment Log

Every machine, including the trailer. Hours, service, repairs. It tells you when to replace instead of repair, and it is worth money on the day you sell.

Your Warm 100 — 1 of 2

A hundred names, not a hundred leads. Fill every row before you spend a dollar on advertising — this page is the cheapest work in the book.

#	NAME	HOW YOU KNOW THEM	CONTACTED	RESPONSE	REFERRAL?
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20					
21					
22					
23					
24					
25					

Your Warm 100 — 2 of 2

#	NAME	HOW YOU KNOW THEM	CONTACTED	RESPONSE	REFERRAL?
26					
27					
28					
29					
30					
31					
32					
33					
34					
35					
36					
37					
38					
39					
40					
41					
42					
43					
44					
45					
46					
47					
48					
49					
50					

Lead Magnet Plan

Free, narrow, genuinely useful — and it must reveal a problem only a machine and a crew can solve.

ELEMENT	YOUR ANSWER
Narrow problem it solves	
Type (reveal / sample / one step)	
Delivery format	
Name (test three)	
Time to consume	
The next problem it reveals	
The offer that solves it	

LTGP : CAC Worksheet

Lifetime gross profit from one customer against what it cost to get them. Count the maintenance agreement and the second-phase job, or you will undervalue every customer you have.

LINE	AMOUNT	HOW YOU GOT IT
Average job price		
Gross margin %		
Gross profit per job		
Jobs per customer (lifetime)		
LTGP		
Marketing spend last 30 days		
New customers last 30 days		
CAC		
LTGP : CAC		

Rule of 100 — Daily Tracker

One hundred of something, every working day. Fill it in each evening — the tracker only works if the number is written down by the person who did or did not do it.

MEASURE	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8	W9	W10	W11	W12
Cold reaches												
Warm reaches												
Content minutes												
Ad minutes / dollars												
Follow-ups sent												
Estimates booked												

WEEK NOTES

Estimate Visit Checklist

In order, every time. The visit has a shape or it has a monologue, and only one of them closes.

- | | |
|--|------------|
| ☐ Arrive early, park where you would want a contractor to park, and look at the yard from the street before you knock | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Ask the situation questions first: how long here, what did you inherit, what have you already tried | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Walk the property with her rather than in front of her, and let her talk about what bothers her | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Say the bad news first — drainage, grade, anything past saving — before anything you would profit from | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Name plants, depths and mature sizes without being asked, once, without repeating | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Ask the implication question: what happens if this stays as it is for another two years | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Ask what it would mean to have it done, and by when, and write her answer down in her words | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Show two before-and-after pairs that look like her yard, and name a finished job on a street she drives | DATE _____ |
| ☐ State the guarantee out loud, exclusions included, before she asks about dead plants | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Paint the bed lines before you leave so she can see the shape at full size tonight | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Present three tiers, largest first, then stop talking | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Agree the next step with a date on it — never we will be in touch | DATE _____ |

Objections and Replies — Landscape Installation

What they say and what it really means are already filled in. The reply column is yours — write it the way you actually talk, then say it out loud until it stops sounding borrowed.

WHAT THEY SAY	WHAT IT REALLY MEANS	YOUR REPLY
My cousin's buddy said he'd do the whole thing for half that.	He is not comparing two companies. He is comparing a written plan against a favour he is slightly afraid to call in, and he wants you to tell him what the difference buys.	
Can you just give me a ballpark over the phone?	She has been burned by a number that doubled once the crew was already on site, and she is testing whether yours will hold.	
That is a lot of money for some plants and mulch.	He is pricing the material on the trailer because that is the only part of the job he can see. Nobody has ever shown him what is under the mulch.	
What happens if the plants die?	She is not asking about horticulture. She is asking whether you will still be answering the phone in September, and whether she is about to be blamed.	
Do we really need all that soil prep? Just put them in the ground.	He thinks the prep line is padding. He is being polite about accusing you of it.	
Can you knock something off if I pay cash?	He is testing whether your price was real or whether it had padding in it, and he is checking whether you keep books.	
We want to think about it and get a couple more quotes.	Almost always true, and almost always means one of two things: the number is bigger than she pictured, or she is not sure she can picture the finished yard.	

Review Request Script

Asked in person, on the last day, in the finished yard, with your phone already open to the page.

Your ask, word for word — short enough that you will actually say it while loading the trailer:

The two things you will ask her to mention: the town, and what she was worried about beforehand:

What you do when someone says yes but never writes it — the one polite follow-up and when:

What you say and do when a review is genuinely bad, before you type a single word of reply:

First-Hire Scorecard

Evidence, not feelings. If you cannot write real evidence beside a signal, that signal is a no.

SIGNAL	YES / NO	EVIDENCE
Turning away work weekly		
Working > 55 hours		
Callbacks rising		
Cash covers 8 weeks of wages		
A job description exists		
A training week is planned		
A 90-day exit plan exists		

30 / 60 / 90 Ramp Plan

Written before he starts. Safety and clean-up first, machines second, running a small job alone third — that order, every time.

milestone	Day 30	Day 60	Day 90

Org Chart at \$250k, \$500k and \$1M

Draw the boxes and put a name in each — including yours. The boxes with your name in them at the biggest size are the ones to hire out of first.

At \$250k: who does what, and which of your own hours is the binding constraint:

At \$500k: who runs the crew day, who invoices and schedules, and what you stop doing:

At \$1M: crews, leaders, office, and which trades stay subcontracted to licensed people:

The first task you hand over, the person who takes it, and how you will know it is being done right:

Twelve-Month Forecast

The printed index is national demand for this trade, detrended over five years. Start with jobs, not revenue, then work down to profit — and plan the bottom four months before the top four.

MONTH	DEMAND INDEX	JOBS	AVG TICKET	REVENUE	COSTS	PROFIT
Jan	0.69					
Feb	0.84					
Mar	1.11					
Apr	1.22					
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Jun	1.11					
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Dec	0.77					
Year						

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Cash Flow Log

Weekly. The deposits-held column is the one that keeps you honest — that money belongs to work you have not built yet.

Profit First Allocations

Split the money the day it lands, into separate accounts. Set the target shares with your accountant and write them here so nobody has to remember them.

ACCOUNT	TARGET %	THIS MONTH \$	ACTUAL %
Income (100%)			
Profit			
Owner pay			
Tax			
Operating expenses			
Materials / subs pass-through			

KPI Scorecard — Landscape Installation

Researched benchmarks for this trade, printed with their targets. Fill it weekly — a number you look at once a quarter is a historical record, not a control.

MEASURE	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8	W9	W10	W11	W12
Gross profit margin target, landscape construction/install work (target 50%)												
Net profit margin, landscaping services industry average (target 7.9%)												
Marketing spend as % of revenue, residential-focused landscape firms (target 5%)												
Cost per lead, Google Ads (small landscaping company) (target 75 USD)												
Share of new leads from referrals (target 35%)												
Lead-to-close conversion rate (paid search leads) (target 30%)												
Labor as % of total installed project cost (target 50%)												

WEEK NOTES

Monthly P&L

One row a month. Keep direct costs and overhead in separate columns, or the gross margin line will lie to you and you will believe it.

MONTH	REVENUE	MATERIALS + SUBS	LABOR	OVERHEAD	NET PROFIT

Days 1–30: Get Cash

The goal is a signed work order and a cleared deposit. Everything here serves that and nothing else does.

☐ Entity filed, EIN issued, business bank account open	DATE _____
☐ General liability bound and the certificate saved on your phone	DATE _____
☐ State board and county clerk checked, findings written down with the date	DATE _____
☐ Unit price card built from three real jobs and kept in the truck	DATE _____
☐ One named offer with three tiers and a bounded written guarantee	DATE _____
☐ Paid yard walk defined, priced, and credited against the install	DATE _____
☐ Map business profile claimed, filled, with ten photo pairs on it	DATE _____
☐ All hundred warm names written down — and twenty contacted this week	DATE _____
☐ Yard signs and door hangers ordered before you need them	DATE _____
☐ First estimate delivered in writing within one day of the visit	DATE _____
☐ First job sold, deposit collected and ring-fenced for materials	DATE _____
☐ First job closed with the job-close checklist and the invoice sent from the driveway	DATE _____

Days 31–60: Get More Cash

Same number of jobs, more money out of each one. This month is talking, not spending.

- | | |
|---|------------|
| ☐ Upsell offered on the last day of every single job, without exception | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Price raised once on the next three estimates, and the outcomes written down | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Autumn phase priced and dated on at least half of the jobs you finish | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Review requested in person on every completed job, phone open, in the yard | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Before and after photographs taken from the same three angles on every job | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Rule of 100 tracker filled in every working day for four straight weeks | DATE _____ |
| ☐ The one leak you already know about, found and fixed | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Supplier terms asked for at the nursery, stone yard and mulch supplier | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Three agents or property managers met, listened to, and not pitched at | DATE _____ |
| ☐ Weekly office hour held four times — all four, on the same day | DATE _____ |

Days 61–90: Get the Most Cash

Turn a run of jobs into next year. Two decisions and one habit.

☐ Seasonal maintenance agreement written, priced annually and billed monthly	DATE _____
☐ Agreement offered to every customer you have served this season	DATE _____
☐ Referral ask made to every happy customer, by name, for a specific neighbour	DATE _____
☐ First-hire scorecard completed honestly, and the decision made either way	DATE _____
☐ Ramp plan written before any advertisement is placed	DATE _____
☐ Twelve-month forecast filled in, with the four slow months planned first	DATE _____
☐ Separate accounts open for tax, profit, owner pay and reserve, with shares set	DATE _____
☐ Friday scorecard read four weeks running, with the numbers written down	DATE _____
☐ Pre-mortem tripwires reviewed and updated with what you actually learned	DATE _____
☐ Next ninety days planned before this one ends	DATE _____

Milestones and Tripwires

A milestone with no tripwire is a wish. Every row needs a number or an event that tells you it is going wrong while there is still time to act.

MILESTONE	TARGET DATE	TRIPWIRE (WHAT TELLS YOU IT IS OFF)	HIT?

Decision Log

Every decision that costs money or changes direction, with the reason you made it and the date you will look at it again. Memory is a liar and this page is not.