

Like A Boss: Filling A Valuable Niche



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Chris Darnell, business development and marketing manager for Bluegrass Landscaping & Maintenance

When bioretention first came to the St. Louis area four or five years ago, [Bluegrass Landscaping & Maintenance](#), headquartered in Bridgeton, Missouri, took the bull by the horns. They made an effort to learn as much about servicing those areas as they could. While other companies have dragged their feet a bit, [Bluegrass sent someone to get certified](#). They have also put effort into training crews to better understand storm water management and they're investing in educating clients with blogs and even a webpage that is dedicated to the service. That effort is paying off.

Chris Darnell, the company's business development and marketing manager, says Bluegrass initially pursued bioretention because [St. Louis' Metropolitan Sewer District \(MSD\) had put regulations on new building to be installed with bioretention rain gardens](#) when displacing land or green space. Darnell says it was initially slow to the market but is now hitting full stride with MSD checking the conditions and enforcing standards. Darnell says the sewer system in St. Louis already struggles under the pressure of storm water and bioretention is addressing that.

"Bioretention areas help slow the water entering the sewer system, filter pollutants and trash, and allow water to be absorbed," Darnell explains.

Since it's still relatively new to those in the area, Darnell says that their effort to learn as much about it and to keep up with the changes has been valuable. It's not uncommon for them to be chosen by clients largely because of their ability to manage bioretention areas when others cannot. As a result, they've been able to sell their other services as well.

Darnell says the company has learned a lot in a short amount of time. While bioretention was initially sold as “low maintenance” (due to the use of sustainable plants) people are learning this is not necessarily true. Typically, the contractor site plans include some recommended maintenance – and that’s where Bluegrass can step up. Those services include trash removal, weeding and plant/tree trimming, mulch replacement, soil aeration, and plant replacement when necessary. These are all areas where crews should be trained, Darnell adds.

“Make sure your team is trained on the differences between weeds and native plants,” he advises. “They look very similar. We have taken over several accounts where other contractors have pulled all of the plants, thinking they were all weeds.”

Our [Like a Boss](#) series highlights some common business challenges landscape professionals face and how they conquer them.