

There's An App For That



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New Plowz and Mowz apps connect contractors to customers at the touch of a button.



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As consumers turn to their smartphones to not only find information but also to schedule services, it was only a matter of time until someone would capitalize on the opportunity in the landscape industry. But it was actually an industry outsider who launched the first service-offering app that allows consumers to get their driveway plowed or their lawn mowed at the push of a button.

The idea was born out of frustration, as so many good ideas are. Co-founders Wills Mahoney and Andrew Englander were roommates at Syracuse University. Mahoney was frustrated that his mom was unable to get out of her driveway after a big snowstorm. Despite the fact that a number of plows were driving right by her home, she couldn't get a hold of anyone, so he shoveled her car out.

"It didn't make any sense," Mahoney says. "I figured there had to be a better way to do this—a way to optimize the system."

That was the beginning of Plowz, an app that helps consumers find snow and ice management service providers. Mahoney launched the app last fall with about eight drivers in Syracuse, New York, and expanded to more than 300 drivers in Syracuse, Cleveland and Minneapolis areas within a month and a half. Snow and ice management companies sign up with Plowz as providers. Possible customers' GPS is tracked in real time, and if a job comes in that is on the provider's route, it is pitched their way. It's free to join, but

the app takes a cut of 10 to 30 percent, depending on the market and arrangement with the provider.

Following the success of the Plowz app, and requests from both providers and customers for a similar lawn care component, the Mowz app went live in May of this year. Just like the plowing app, customers can schedule mowing services with just a few taps to their smartphone.

Services at the touch of your fingertips

The Mowz app was a natural transition.

“We know that the majority of plow providers are also landscapers,” Mahoney says. “Plus, it quickly became obvious that there was going to be a demand for lawn care services from the same app users of Plowz.”

The company knew it was on to something good when 800 consumers downloaded the app within a day and a half in Tampa. In this day and age of fast service expectations, some consumers like the idea of scheduling services at the push of a button. Today, Mowz works with more than 400 service providers and is continually expanding into new areas.

While this model doesn’t encourage consumers to build an ongoing relationship with a landscape contractor or to sign up for a long-term contract, it’s also not taking any work away from existing landscapers. These are consumers who weren’t looking for an ongoing contract in the first place. They actually prefer that “mow-and-go” mentality and they want their lawn serviced on their own time frame.

“I never see the customers for these jobs,” says Jeff Ungerman, owner of Grass Man Lawn Care, LLC, based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who has been providing services through the Mowz app. “They’re never home when I’m there, and honestly that’s the way they want it. It’s mow and go. They might not want the teenager on their block doing it because they know they can’t fully trust him. They do want a reputable company with commercial equipment. But they don’t want everything else that comes with a long-term landscape contract.”



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Ungerman says he gets about 40 to 50 extra jobs each week from the Mowz app. The jobs are always on his route, so it’s easy to swing in and do the extra work. “It’s easy money,” he says. “And it’s fast.”

In fact, the payment is incredibly fast compared to what landscape businesses are used to. Providers get paid in 24 hours.

“Once a job is complete, the money is dropped right into your account,” Mahoney says. “We feel that this is a huge benefit to the landscape business owner who might be tired of chasing down invoices. As a provider for us, you don’t have to worry about that.”

Ungerman agrees it's a huge plus—and worth the 30 percent cut that Mowz takes. "As an owner who is often stuck in the field all day, the last thing I feel like doing when I come home is bugging people that they're eight days late on a bill," he says. "I don't have to do that with services provided through Mowz, though. It's simple."

And Ungerman adds that he's not very affected by that cut. He's appreciative for the extra work Mowz has thrown his way that fit into his regular mowing routes. "With 40 to 50 extra jobs a week, 30 percent isn't a big deal," he says.

Quality control = instant reviews

But some providers do only choose to take a few jobs from the Plowz and Mowz apps, and they still say that's worth it. It's a little extra cash in their pocket that they hadn't banked on and it didn't take them off route. Of course, Mahoney understands that providers can't take every job. Providers are never under any obligation to take a job pitched their way, but that's why the company also aims to get a lot of contractors signed up and in its system. For Plowz and Mowz to be successful, service needs to be provided efficiently.

Service also needs to be quality, and as a result it's monitored. Plowz & Mowz stays on top of their providers' level of quality by asking customers to rank the work each time. Providers that don't maintain a good rating can ultimately be dropped from the app.

Tackling Buffalo's Winter Storm Knife

New York typically sees approximately 7 feet of snow throughout a normal winter season. But in November, Buffalo, New York, experienced its first major winter storm of the season, dumping more than 5 feet of snow on the area in just a few days followed by another storm that dumped a few more feet of snow a couple of days later.

Dubbed the Winter Storm Knife because it cut right through the heart of Erie County, the snow was a result of what meteorologists called a "thundersnow," a phenomenon caused when wet air from Lake Erie encountered the colder atmosphere over Buffalo. The storm paralyzed 140 miles of I-90, the main highway crossing New York State. Some roofs, porches and homes collapsed under the weight of snow.



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Plowz helped Buffalo recover from the Winter Storm Knife by sending in extra providers from neighboring states to help dig the city out with specialized equipment. One of the providers, featured on the [Plowz & Mowz blog](#) as November's provider of the month was Chuck Glogouski of GreenEffect Landscaping from Cleveland, Ohio. (In the photo, above, Glogouski is visiting the Plowz & Mowz office in Syracuse, New York.) Glogouski has been a Plowz &

Mowz provider since March 2014 though he's been in business for six years.

Mother Nature showed Buffalo "who's boss again," said New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo in reference to the storm in Business Insider. "This is an historic event. When all is said and done, this snowstorm will break all sorts of records, and that's saying something in Buffalo." -Nicole Wisniewski

The only other requirements to sign up as a provider are having commercial-grade equipment and \$500,000 in general liability insurance.

With the success of the Plowz and Mowz apps (the apps have expanded into more than three markets across the U.S. since their creation), Mahoney says that there are plans to expand in the future. "We just added on-demand leaf removal to all the markets we're currently in," he says. "Tap a few buttons, and customers can have their leaves cleared."



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And the company is looking to get into other add-on services that could be offered via the app. This may include snow shoveling in the winter (for those who don't need full-blown snow plowing) and aeration in the summer.

"Before we expanded into these other services, we wanted to make sure we really nailed the mowing and the plowing part of this business, since those were our primary focuses," Mahoney says. "But now that we've done that, we're ready to look at other features that will make this more lucrative for us and the provider while also fully meeting more of our customers' needs."

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