



CalScape Expo
Where the Industry Grows

Reinvention Forum: Short term Rentals

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by Peter Harleman

Greenjeans Interiorscape, Edmonton, Alberta.

Marketing of your Short-term Hire service

- **Build relationships** with event management companies, conference / event facilities. That's where you'll find regular demand for jobs that are big enough to be worthwhile. Do you have any existing clients who are in the event management business? If you do, you're halfway there – you already have a relationship that you can use as a springboard.
- **Target trade shows** – negotiate with the show management to become a preferred supplier – get your contact details & flyer included in the exhibitor packs, making you the “go-to” company. Show up with extra plants on the day, as some people are only inspired to include or organise plants for their stand once they see them arrive & enhancing other stands.

Once your tradeshow clients are established in their hiring habit, they can be trained to expect a call prior to each show reminding them to place their order while the greatest choice of foliage is still available. They often like the reminder, as the hireage of extras isn't a priority in the stress & hassle of setting up their stand. Keep a note of what they had / prefer, as most calls will end up as a quick & easy confirmation of “what we had last time”.
- **Your Website** – include a gallery for short-term hire on your website. Show typically used plants & pots. This may save you time when you receive enquiries, making site visits unnecessary. The customer can place an order over the phone with confidence, since they can see what they're getting & don't have to try to visualise from a description.

- **Weddings** – Are there opportunities for you to specialise in this area? There are certain types of foliage often requested for weddings, eg. matching sets of topiaries or ivy shapes for formal weddings / lush palms for a softer effect in a romantic or more casual ceremony. Enhance your reputation & the impression you make by adding value with personal touches, such as colour-matched ribbons added to designs (eg ribbons wound down the stem of a topiary). Market to the wedding sector via wedding planners, shows & magazines. Wedding clients tend to be fussier & take up more of your time. If you deal directly with the client, beware of time-wasters & bridezillas. The advantage of wedding jobs is that you usually have a longer notice period, allowing plenty of time to plan & source stock.
- **Advertising** in appropriate magazines/trade periodicals may help, but most important is establishing a good relationship where organisers can rely on you to turn up & install with a minimum of fuss & then remove at their convenience & within their pack-out schedule.

Resources related to offering the service

- A flexible labour resource – odd delivery times outside of office hours are common. Last minute orders are also common, so you need the capacity to stage & deliver the plants at short notice.
- Plants you use should be strong enough to withstand regular handling & moving without sustaining damage to their foliage or structure.

You need plant stock with a variety of shapes, sizes & textures to enable you to work within given themes. Some examples:

- Tropical theme – Palms, Strelitzia, Schefflera, Natal Mahogany, Ferns, large-leafed Ficus species like F. Lyrata
- Desert theme – Yuccas (simulate the effect of yuccas with Cordylines & D. Marginata – much more friendly to handle than a Yucca), Crassula, Euphorbia
- Native theme – depending on where you live...
- Formal theme – Topiaries, (simulate the effect of a Buxus column / cone with a less expensive plant such as columnar Buddhist Pine or columnar varieties of

conifer), tidy standards of any variety, low trough planters uniformly planted with small spaths / ferns / sanseivieria.

- Flowering theme – Kalanchoe, Orchids, Chrysanthemums, Bromeliads.
- Containers – plain black matching containers will suit most situations, but make the most of your second hand containers to add to the diversity of looks you can offer.
- Props – add value & uniqueness to your jobs with with props – eg. logs, lanterns, artificial rocks, bridges, uplights, swathes of fabric (fabric can be used as an alternative to decorative planters – fabric can be draped around plant rootballs to hide the growing pots – even something as simple as clean black frost-cloth can be used to create an elegant finishing touch). Once you've acquired something it can be used again & again to add value & a special touch. Supply Xmas lights / fairy lights to the client to add to a feature plant near a power supply.
 - Imagine how good you can make a function organiser look by making an impact on their clients with your designs, (and therefore ensure future business) - simply by supplying a small bridge, a few swathes of fabric & a few plants. In a few minutes you can transform a room entrance into an enchanting tropical forest scene – place a bridge over a length of shiny blue fabric that winds like a stream through a variety of lush-leaved plants like strelitzia, schefflera & palms of varying sizes.
- Delivery vehicle with heating.
- Moving equipment – trolleys, bungees, slings – anything to make your job as simple as possible – turn up with everything you need to install efficiently & endorse your impression of professionalism.
- Staging materials that are easily dismantled & re-usable eg. foam strips, polystyrene blocks. Topping - a lightweight, manoeuvrable topping to finish off the staging – eg coconut fibre or moss will hide all your staging materials, give a finishing touch to the plants with a natural look that has uniformity. Because of its fibrous nature it is easily removed & reused many times over.

Pricing the service

- Labour – consider the time taken for staging, as well as time on the road & installation at the site.
- Value is usually perceived by the public in term of size, so in most cases price according to size - desktop, floor plant & specimen plant. There will always be exceptions, eg. Orchids, flowering desktops. To simplify the pricing structure for the client, include labour (design, site visits, set-up) in the plant hireage cost & not as a separate item.
- Plants – use hardy plants that can be re-used at least 3 times. The first hireage of the plant must cover the cost of the plant & and labour, as well as provide profit. Subsequent uses of the plant are straight profit. If the plant is a second-hand one that has been removed from a long term contract in good condition, any income derived from short term hireage is likely to be instantly profitable.
 - Plants are a perishable commodity – you can't afford to keep them warehoused & maintained when they're not working, so what are you going to do with them if your short-term hireage gets a little quiet for a few weeks? The advantage of including short term hireage in your interiorscaping business is that following a short term job, your next batch of plant replacements has just been paid for by some other guy! You've got some nearly new plants that can now be put to work on a long term contract – free replacement plants to refresh & upgrade your long term contracts.
- Delivery costs
- Servicing costs if the installation is going to be in place for an extended period.

Special clauses to add to the contract/service agreement

- Deposit required & payment of the balance is required upon completion of installation. (Unless it's a well established client who has established good credit with you)

Start up costs

- Initial purchase of plant & container stock
- Advertising
- Time

Ease of implementation

This depends on your current set up. It's a relatively simple service to implement if you're already set up with a warehouse/nursery space, a vehicle suitable for larger deliveries, and staff available for set up & delivery.

Pitfalls

- Weekend & occasional night-time work – after hours labour may be required.
- Debtors – if you bill after providing the service, there's a chance a one-off client may not pay after the service is provided, since they have nothing to lose (whereas the non-payment of a long term contract will result in their plants being removed).
- Climatic extremes – avoiding exposure of plants to extreme cold during winter deliveries – could involve extra packing/boxing/insulation, which increases the labour, cost & time required.

What size company is this a good fit for?

- Medium to large, because of the stock & delivery capacity required.
- Smaller businesses could specialise in weddings, where the personal service & extra attention to the client is required.

Ability to subcontract

- **Subcontracting stock** - for large jobs that require more stock than you have - rent plants from local greenhouses/garden centres.
- **Subcontracting the work** – means loss of quality control & control over design. My preference would be to keep the work in-house & source casual labour to assist where

needed, unless you had absolute confidence in the subcontractor to keep to your own standards. Being onsite & visible during installation also helps develop customer confidence & your rapport with them, especially during early stages while you're still establishing the relationship.

- ***Subcontracting props*** – once a conference organiser knows what you have, these items can earn money by being hired out to them where you're not using them. A request for prop hireage is a lead for plant hireage.