

A CUSTOMER'S SUCCESS STORY

Volvo Construction Equipment

"Volvo equipment has definitely helped with our growth"

— Cameron Stevens



Two of Accent's Volvo skid steer loaders load and carry crushed fines for landscaping at an elementary school in Rio Rancho, New Mexico.

BEATING A TOUGH ECONOMY

Accent Landscape Contractors stays aggressive amid fast-rising costs, lowered project volumes.

Business will slow somewhat this year, but revenues have climbed rapidly in recent years for Accent Landscape Contractors, Albuquerque, N.M. In 2005, work-in-place reached \$9.3 million. In 2006, the number jumped to \$12.2 million, then hit \$13.4 million last year.

Cameron Stevens, Accent's owner and president, aggressively seeks out new sources of landscaping projects, especially

as the economy slacks off. "We work all over the state of New Mexico, southern Colorado, eastern Arizona, and West Texas," says Stevens. "When things dry up here in Albuquerque, we hit the road."

Stevens employs two estimators who bid 15 to 25 projects a month — and that's about 25 percent more this year, because the economy has slowed. "A year ago, if we would see a \$100,000 job in Clovis, New Mexico, we might not have bid it because we were too busy," says Stevens. "This year, we'll bid on it."

Accent employs 12 landscaping crews that range in size from five or six workers up to 12 or more. Crews are kept hopping on as many as 15 projects. Typically one crew will install an irrigation system, do some finish grading, plant trees and lay down sod. The more experienced crews get the larger, more complex projects, and each crew finishes the jobs it starts.

Volvo A Key To Success

"Volvo equipment has definitely helped with our growth," says Stevens. "The machines help us get more work done faster." Since 2005, Accent has purchased five **Volvo BL 70** backhoe-loaders and 10 Volvo skid steer loaders — both MC90 and MC90B models.



Cameron Stevens, President, Accent Landscape

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"We owned Bobcat loaders for years, and then bought some Case models," says Stevens. "Then we tried Volvo skid steer loaders. The guys seemed to like them better than Case or the Bobcats, so we made a decision to stick with the Volvo machines."

Volvo. The Performance Standard

"We standardized on Volvo for a couple of reasons," says Stevens. "For one, you can operate and train people on the same equipment. For another, we have one dealer, Golden Equipment. We show them loyalty and expect the same loyalty in return. And they deliver for us. If a machine goes down, they give us a loaner. We don't miss a beat. And that's a key to success in our business."

What's more, Accent's work force likes the way Volvo machines perform. "I like the breakout power on the Volvo backhoes," says Neal Tanner, a project manager for Accent. "I like the all-around strength of the hydraulics. The hydraulics are responsive and they're fast. Like when you're loading something, you can start lifting and moving forward at the same time – when you get there the bucket will be up there, not to worry!"

"And I like the push-button to control forward and backward motion. That control is all on the joystick for the front loader boom. You don't have to take your hand off the stick."



A Volvo BL70 backhoe puts the finishing touches on the grade at Tingley Park in Albuquerque, N.M.

Tanner also likes the fact that the operator can toggle the control pattern from right to left and vice versa. One joystick controls the excavator boom and swing; another controls the dipper stick and the bucket. With the flip of a switch, you can switch those controls from right hand to left hand and back again.

Volvo Skid Steer. A Hit.

And Tanner likes Volvo's skid-steer loaders, especially the MC90B models. "They have plenty of lifting power," he says. "More than once I've lifted the rear wheels off the ground, trying to lift something that's a bit too heavy. And they ride well; they don't bounce too much, for a skid loader."

"Plus, the skid loaders have a good heavy frame," says Tanner. "They have to stand up to a certain amount of our abuse, and



despite that, we've had no problems with them. We keep the oil changed, and the filters changed, and they run like a champ."

Cost Control is Key

Stevens says his biggest business challenge these days is the rapid escalation of costs. When costs for materials rise so quickly, he says he has to "bid a project with one number and purchase it with another number." Frequently Accent bids a job with one price, and 60 to 90 days pass before the contract is signed and the materials can be purchased. Prices for PVC irrigation pipe, for example, climb quickly, because PVC is derived from petroleum.

Pre-Purchasing Success

One solution to the price escalation problem is to pre-purchase materials that Stevens knows he'll need. An example is a geogrid product called Grasspave, made by Invisible Structures Inc. "They gave me a 3 percent discount for paying up front," says Stevens.

For a project in Hobbs, N.M., Accent bought a \$25,000 pumping station as soon as Stevens knew he had the low bid – but before he was awarded the contract. "So we took some risk, but we knew we were the low bidder," he says.

Stevens says that knowing he has the full support of Golden Equipment, his Volvo dealer, gives him peace of mind. "We feel that when we've got to get the work done, they will support us," he says. "And by having the same manufacturer for all of our backhoes and skid steer loaders, it gives us commonality of parts and service. We like to keep things simple, and Volvo helps us do that."



Two skid steer loaders load crushed fines for use in landscaping an elementary school in Rio Rancho, N.M.