

Estimate everything

Account for small job costs that can add up

By Kevin Kehoe / Contributor

Making a profit means managing the details, and that means making your bid complete. You can miss many items or underestimate them when bidding, and these items are often significant. Those who catch these items, too often, are the project managers and production staff, who are left to make the job work and get change orders where possible.

It would be simpler to bid it all in up front. Since it's impossible for the project manager and production staff to review every bid, use a checklist to compel the designer/salesperson to check for items and costs — before the contract goes to the customer and to production. ■

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Profit Killers Checklist

Access: Did we allocate enough time and money to get in and out of the yard, leaving it the way we found it? Did we consider the cost of repair and rebuilding? Have we considered the cost of using labor where machines won't fit?

Permits: Have we included all the costs, and the time required, to obtain permits?

Drainage: Did we include all drains and lines? Have we itemized the fixtures, pipe size and pipe length to ensure easy purchasing? Were we generous enough with material quantities?

Material pricing/specificity: Did we double-check material prices with our vendors to make certain that the costs did not increase since the takeoff was done? Have we specified material names to ensure easy purchasing?

Spoilage: Have we planned for spoilage in hardscape materials for walls and flat work — about 10%? Have we planned the same for sod?

Demolition: Are demolition time and special machinery costs included? Have we included the cost of mobilization for demolition, dumpsters and dump fees?

Site preparation: Did we account for grading and leveling labor?

Amendments: Did we include the cost of soil amendments in materials?

Damage repair: Have we included potential damage caused by access or egress? What about material and labor costs for replacing existing plants, irrigation and drainage?

Warranty: Did we add a plant material warranty

factor of at least 2% for live materials?

Close out: Did we anticipate potential costs like clean up, power washing and detail corrective work?

Subcontractors: Were we clear with the subcontractors about their scope of work? Are they, or we, responsible for clean up and damage repair as a result of their work? If not, do we have these costs covered for our labor?

Travel/mobilization: Did we estimate the number of daily mobilizations required?

Water features: Have we clearly specified all the fixtures, liner sizes, pump specs, overflow, electrical and filter costs? Is the cost of customization (first time install) included in the bid to compensate for Murphy's Law when installing a water feature?