



Pat Jones is president of Flagstick LLC, a consulting firm that provides sales and marketing intelligence to green-industry businesses. He can be reached at psjhawk@cox.net or 440-478-4763.

HELLO! MCFLY!

I've always loved the original version of "Back to the Future." To this day, I want an antigravity skateboard and a DeLorean. Also, Christopher Lloyd, as Doc Brown, reminds me of half the turf professors I've ever met. Part mad scientist, part father figure.

Anyway, one of my favorite catchphrases from that flick is when Biff grabs Marty's dad and, in the process of rapping him repeatedly upside the head, yells: "Hello! McFly!" It's the ultimate cinema noogie.

Well, in that spirit, I'm giving the golf industry a noogie.

One of the unfortunate side effects of the economic challenges our industry faces is carpetbaggers descending on us. You know what a carpetbagger is, right? Originally, they were the unscrupulous Yankees who came to the post-Civil War South to take financial advantage of the carnage the war left behind.

In our case, the golf industry's carpetbaggers are companies trying to sell you stuff cheaper without investing a penny in you and your profession. "Hey, you might never have heard of me before, but you can buy products just like the ones you already use and trust, and you can save money," they say.

You know the usual suspects. I'm sure you've answered the phone before and found yourself entangled with one of those telemarketers selling trash bags, uniforms, biodegradable oils, florescent bulbs, "organic" fertilizers and a whole gamut of other junk. It's easy to hang up on these clowns, but these days, the range of crap these folks are offering is being expanded to include some products that claim to replace key resources for superintendents.

Let's call a spade a spade and just say I'm referring to fly-by-night companies selling knock-off pesticide products. I'm not talking about branded, well-supported, postpatent products offered by legitimate companies and distributors you know already. This isn't about proprietary versus

postpatent. That choice is one you have to make based on research, agronomics and relationships, even though there's much to be said for buying from the company that brought the product to market originally.

Instead, I'm talking about supergeneric stuff that comes in from off-shore (China, Israel, etc.) and is sold essentially off the backs of trucks. During the past year, several major foreign generic chemical companies have hired sales reps who are working our industry like the door-to-door salesmen of old. The market is being flooded by companies you've never heard of with no-name products that are "just like" brand names you've used for years.

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The good news, if you call it that, is that the Wal-Mart-style pricing these folks are offering is driving down pricing across the board for "commodity" products like chlorothalonil and glyphosate. You can probably get the best deal you've ever had for some of those basic chemicals right now. Unfortunately, that's also the bad news. Companies that have supported and invested in our industry for years are being undercut by newbies who are only on the scene to make a quick buck.

The companies – proprietary and postpatent – that reinvest in our business and your profession are getting slammed by the carpetbaggers, and, quite simply, they can't be expected to take it forever. Nor can they be expected to invest even more to bring new products to the market, conduct research to help you use products better, hire first-class sales reps or sponsor the

numerous educational and social opportunities we've all come to enjoy.

Let's be clear: Good companies won't continue to value this market unless you value them.

I would love to provide a list of the good guys and bad guys in print, but the nice lawyers at *Golf Course Industry* would probably be very unhappy with me. Instead, let me offer a quick quiz to help you sort things out as you plan your purchasing for 2008:

1. Does the company have a name you know and trust? (+10 points)
 2. You've never heard of the company, and you couldn't spell their name if you tried. (-10 points)
 3. Is their sales rep someone you've known for years who has demonstrated good agronomic knowledge and who has served you and your friends well even when he wasn't trying to sell you something? (+10 points)
 4. The sales rep is a guy whose last job involved selling ink-jet cartridges ... and he wasn't particularly good at that. (-10 points)
 5. Does the company support your educational needs by sponsoring events, participating in your chapter and advertising in industry journals? (+10 points)
 6. Is the company's idea of industry support bringing along some donuts for an unscheduled call by their salesman? (-10 points)
 7. Does the company work with a solid local distributor that has a reputation for honesty and quality? (+10 points)
 8. The company claims they "don't need no stinkin' distributor" taking a cut so they can give you lower pricing? (-10 points)
 9. You're almost always willing to try new products and services from the company because it has a good track record. (+10 points)
 10. You have to gulp real hard when it occurs to you you're risking your greens – and your job – to save a few hundred bucks on a case or palette of product. (-10 points).
- If you have anything less than 50 points for the quiz, I have two words for you: Hello! McFly! **GC**