

SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

# COXtoday

COX SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

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## IT'S YOUR MOVE

ACHIEVE  
BUSINESS  
GROWTH  
DESPITE THE  
MARKET'S  
TWISTS  
AND TURNS.

### Alumni Profile

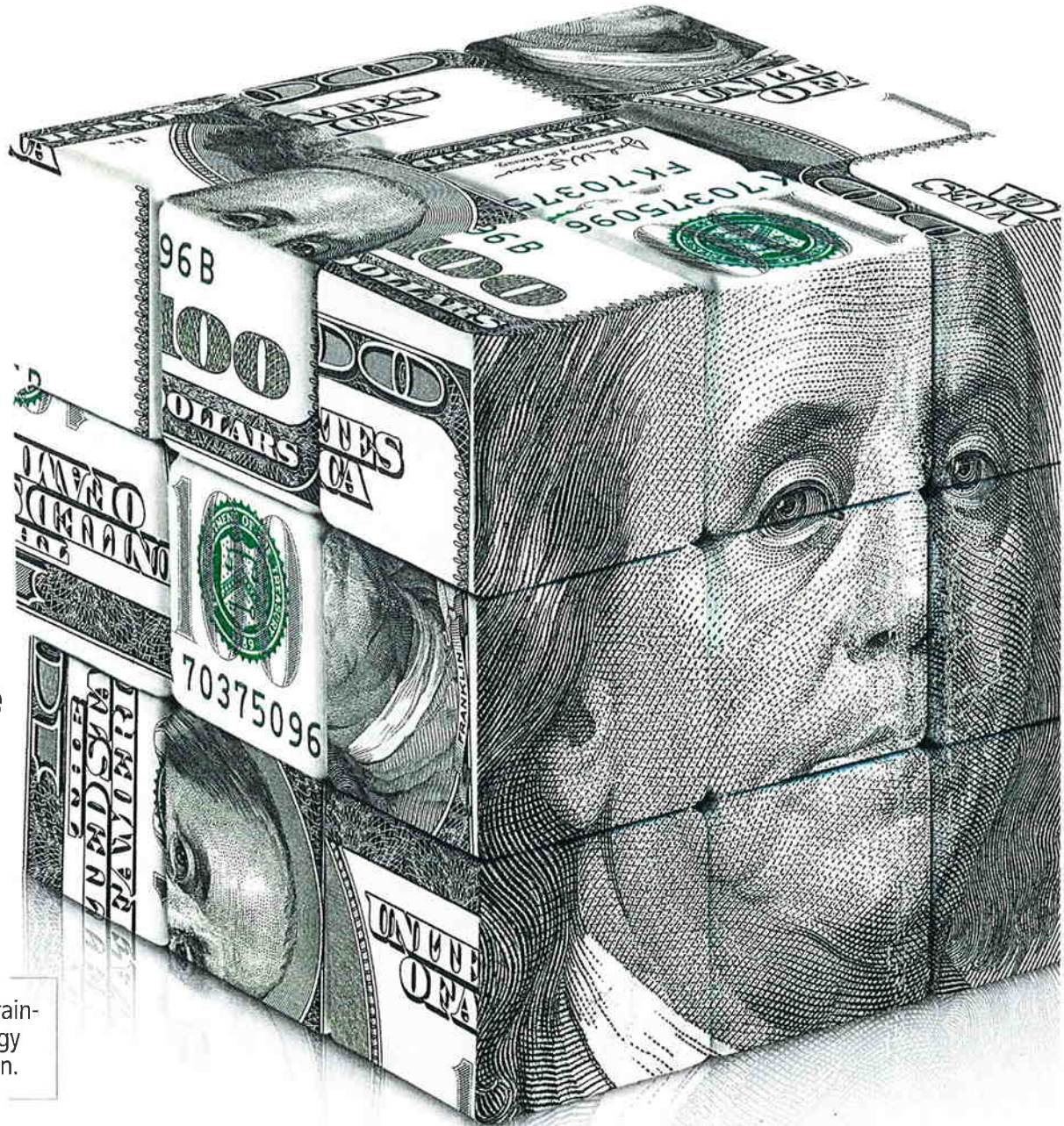
Southern Botanical sees green with extreme customer service.

### Personal Finance

Why investors shouldn't panic—it is all about strategic risk.

### Faculty Research

Cox professors discuss brain-writing, marketing strategy and financial deregulation.



# Alumni Profile James Cali and Andrew Lenz

Growing a Hardy Business Despite Extreme Conditions



Andrew Lenz (PMBA '07) and Jim Cali (PMBA '00) of Southern Botanical

In today's harsh environment, companies are facing brutal choices if they are to survive and hopefully, thrive in the marketplace. Fortunately, smart companies know that cutting customer service can be the kiss of death. In fact, many are choosing to renew their attention to customer satisfaction in an effort to gain and retain prized relationships.

"Whether you're running an international business or a local start-up, the way you approach customer service can be the ingredient that makes or breaks your bottom line," said Jerry White, director of the Caruth Institute for Entrepreneurship. "Savvy entrepreneurs and business leaders know that in order to succeed in business, customer service must start from the ground up. It must be instilled within every employee and throughout every touch point of the organization."

For Cox alumni Jim Cali (PMBA '00) and Andrew Lenz (PMBA '07), customer service is more important than ever before. Despite the recession, Cali and Lenz of Southern Botanical, Inc., a Dallas-based high-end landscaping firm, saw their sales increase 95 percent in 2008, and sales continue to rise this year. Their secret? A business model 100 percent dedicated to the customer experience.

In the fall of 2007, Cali, Chief Operating Officer of Southern Botanical, was looking to expand the company to become a one-stop vendor for complete indoor as well as outdoor décor when he met Lenz, director of operations for a local interior horticulture service firm, at a

Cox networking event. Soon thereafter, Lenz joined Southern Botanical to launch the Interior Division, specializing in the design, installation and maintenance of interior plants, orchids and floral décor.

Today, Southern Botanical has become the Dallas/Fort Worth benchmark for high-end outdoor landscape and irrigation installation and maintenance, with a client list that includes many exclusive hotels and Dallas residences.

Southern Botanical's secret to exceptional customer service lies in the details. They insist on going the extra mile, even when the customer doesn't request it. This may entail cleaning windows after bushes have been pruned, placing "booties" over lawn mower wheels to prevent staining limestone sidewalks, uncovering and covering flowers during a freeze, straightening patio furniture, carrying the newspaper to the front door and straightening the welcome mat. No job is too big or too small.

"We train our staff 52 weeks a year in areas including safety, horticultural techniques, customer service—all the way to how the newspaper falls in front of the house," said Cali. "We train to the details and we don't leave much to the imagination.

We set standards, train the standards, and then have a team that quality checks the standards."

Cali learned first-hand the importance of customer service training during his days at Cox, where he was one of Paula (Hill) Strasser's first students to attend the Disney Institute Program, now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year.

Students who participate in the program have the unique opportunity to take part in one of the most interactive and useful benchmarking experiences in the world, which includes both classroom and field experiences. They learn the "Disney Approach" - how Disney thinks about business from both a strategic and tactical perspective - and how to apply it to any industry.

Cali was inspired. "Disney provided an absolute definition of customer service, and the answer is in the details," he said. "I got customer service before, but seeing it in action with such a large group really put things in perspective."

Southern Botanical takes pride in its ability to encompass all aspects of the landscape business, treating all clients the same, regardless of size or budget. They know that their successful business will continue to grow and flourish because of their unwavering commitment to exceed customer expectations and *always* go above and beyond.

## Southern Botanical's Five Tips for Exceptional Customer Service

- Execute the PACE (Performance Above Customers' Expectations)
- Train, train, train – then inspect what you expect (the details)
- Communicate to every customer like they are your only customer
- Empower fellow team members to make decisions
- Overdeliver every single time