



your customers are TALKING

By Mason Day

Hear what 275,000 consumers are saying and how these trends should impact your business.

Let's face it: As an industry we aren't always the first to adapt to changing consumer technologies. We're hesitant, we've been burned a couple of times, and due to the role that seasons and weather play into our yearly profits, it's understandable why we don't jump on every bandwagon that passes by.

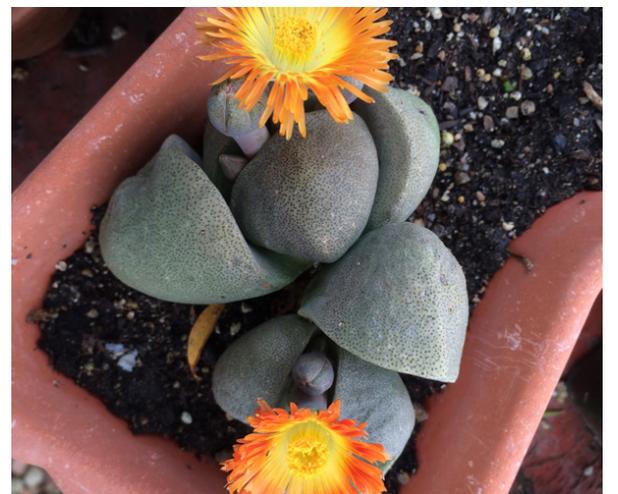
However, now we are at a point where change is going to happen, whether we as an industry are ready or not. All across the board consumer trends are changing. The ways people interact with retailers, buy products and just in general act as consumers are vastly different than they were 20 years ago.

Technology is advancing at a rate that is disrupting consumer buying habits faster than ever.

We often blame our consumer disconnect on the fact that millennials are coming into the equation, but the truth is that it's not just millennials. Consumers in general are starting to behave differently.

Three years ago we started GrowIt! as a way to give the industry insight into the mind of the consumer. We wanted to figure out what plants and products were driving people's interests. We wanted to see what was motivating people to get into the garden, or grow plants on their balcony. We wanted to entice young people to grow more plants. We wanted to connect with consumers where our industry hadn't yet: their mobile phones.

There were a few apps out there that fell into the "Garden App" category, but there wasn't a whole lot going on there. There were a couple of apps with plant information, and a couple garden planners, but nobody was really having



Succulents were the most added, searched and rated plants on GrowIt! in 2016. Some favorites included (clockwise from top left): sedum, lithops, aeonium and crassula.

a conversation with consumers or, to that point, spurring conversations between consumers.

We looked around to other industries. Amazon was storing and analyzing data not only on what people were buying, but also what people were looking at when they surfed. They were tracking how long people hovered their cursor over the “buy” button.

Pandora was tracking demographic information and using it to advertise specific events to specific users because of what they had shown an interest in, and where they were located.

Companies like Facebook and Google were using beacon-enabled technologies and geofencing to send people notifications on restaurants near where they were located and to ask for a review after they had been there.

We saw all of these companies using technology to better understand who their customer (user) was, and how to benefit from it. Technology was helping to make industries more money. We looked around and said, “How do we do that for our industry?”

In the past three years of GrowIt! we’ve learned more than we could have imagined already. Since then we’ve grown to a community of over 275,000 members who have uploaded photos, created projects, asked questions and ultimately rated over 2.5 million plants.

On the front end, GrowIt! has become a go-to app for plant and gardening information. We’ve given the public the ability to crowdsource knowledge on whatever plant or question they have. They have access to the answers they need no matter where they are. Whether someone needs a plant identified or has a question about a pest or their soil, there’s someone in the GrowIt! community that will help them out, and timely too!

However, it’s through tracking these interactions, photos, questions and answers that we continue to gather consumer insight and information.

Every project that is created is a potential action list of plants that a person is interested in using in their lifestyle.

We compile all of it, over 20 million data points (and growing), to see what’s going on out there with consumers. We’ve picked up some pretty interesting information.

Here are some of the things we’re seeing.

Making Assumptions

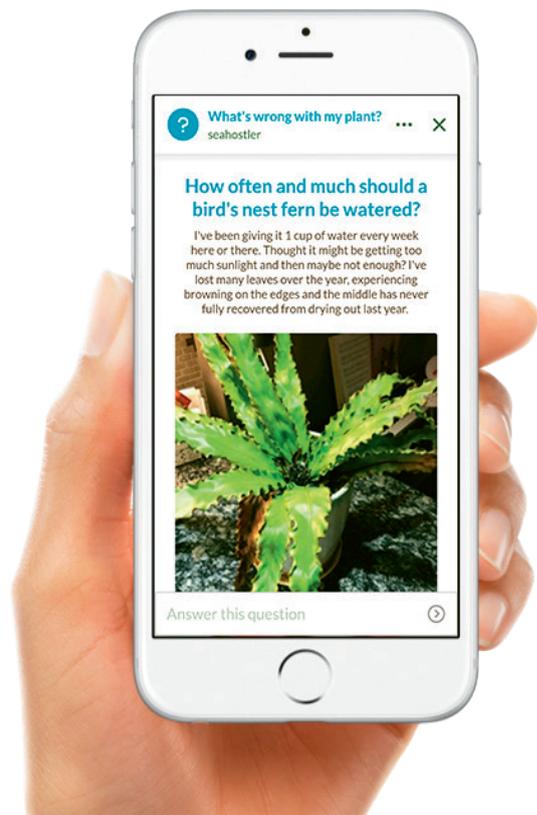
For the most part, we give people too much credit about what they know.

For years we’ve been lining things up (perennials especially) in the garden center alphabetically. Achillea on down.

People could come in, find the specific plant they were looking for, and be on their way. We made it so “easy” for consumers to find their desired plants.

Sure, for the small percentage of gardening gurus out there perusing our aisles, it was great. What we failed to acknowledge is that people for the most part don’t know the names of the plants ... or what they’re good for.

We made that mistake too. When we first launched the app we wanted everyone to label their plants. What we found out was people had



GrowIt!’s new Question and Answer feature is where people can ask any plant or garden related question to the community.



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CONSUMER TRENDS

these beautiful plants that they loved but to them it was “the pretty pink one” or the “wavy blue one” or better yet “those daisies.” We had to give people an option to say they didn’t know.

In 2016, over 40,000 plants were identified on GrowIt! We’re not talking about one-of-a-kind specimens either. The top three plants identified were Daylily, Hosta and Peony.

Those three plants made up one of every six plants identified. Not everyone cringes at the idea of “another hosta.” Most people just want to know, “Is this green thing in my yard supposed to be here or not?”

Succulents (but Really)

Succulents aren’t just a piece of the pie anymore. It’s a whole pie in itself. Succulents were the most added, most searched and most rated plant on GrowIt! in 2016.



This series — Fresh Perspectives — provides tips from Generations X, Y and Z. GrowIt! co-founder Mason Day (along with fellow co-founder Seth Reed) is a member of GPN’s 40 Under 40 Class of 2017. For more information, visit www.gpnmag.com/40-under-40.

Many in our industry thought (and hoped) that this succulent craze was just a passing fad. That’s not what we’re seeing.

To a lot of people (especially young ones), it’s all they seem to want to grow ... and it makes sense!

There’s a tremendous amount of diversity out there. They come in every color you can think of, they are textured, and they don’t need to be watered every day. When they think of plants, they think of succulents.

We see so many garden centers that have a “succulent table” or a “succulent section,” when in reality the interest level is so much higher than that.

On the app, people search for succulents four times more than the next most popular plant.

There’s a danger here too. If we as an industry don’t start accepting these succulent fanatics, we’re going to lose out.

Succulents are durable, which makes them easy to ship and easy for other stores to sell them. People don’t have to come to your garden center to buy them. It’s up to you to make them want to stop and shop.

The Garden Center Connection

There is a big disconnect in the world of plants. After traveling the country, and working with folks in all different areas of the industry, it’s clear that even though it’s a small world, we need to do a better job of working together.

The public and private sectors MUST do a better job of coordinating with each other. Public gardens are inspiring people to get back in the garden, and a lot of them are even showing younger people how they can get growing in their smaller abodes.

Yet, there are little to no resources at these gardens telling them where they can actually

purchase these plants (unless the garden conveniently has a gift greenhouse).

Then when these people get home, they have no idea what to search for to find someone who sells plants. They aren’t familiar with the term garden center, and nursery to them means babies. So they end up settling for a box store or Amazon when they should be walking through your door.

People for the most part don’t know the names of the plants ... or what they’re good for.

As a garden center, you can’t afford to wait for people to walk in. It just won’t happen. You have to go out and find these potential customers, and think outside of the box a bit.

It’s been a wild ride the last three years with GrowIt!, and we are really starting to see a tipping point in information. We’re starting to get a real handle on what people are interested in, and what they are actively seeking out.

The consumer landscape is changing and to compete with the Amazons of the world, we have to change as well. In some cases it’s about new products, but in most it’s just about a new mindset. **LGR**

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