



# A 'Constant' Companion

Can your regular e-newsletter be a form of social media, too? Well, your customers have given you their e-mail addresses and invited you to communicate with them...what's more social than that?

By Leslie Finical Halleck

With all the social media options available these days, it's a wonder we don't all have ADD trying to keep up with them all. Even I, a solid Gen X-er, have opted out of opening a personal Twitter account and have more than once shut off my Facebook page just to have a break from it all! All of these media outlets can seem both impersonal and way too personal at the same time. The key is figuring out exactly which outlets are going to work for you, your business and your customer. An informative e-newsletter, can be a cost-effective and efficient way to manage direct relationships with your customers while keeping a personal touch — it has been for North Haven Gardens.

The key for us at North Haven Gardens is that our e-newsletter must always be of value to our customer — at the right time without abusing our relationship. We can abuse our relationship by sending too many e-mails, not offering up something of value in each e-mail or simply making them too long. Just as we have to respect our customer's time in the store, so do we in our e-mails. We typically send out one e-mail per month and, occasionally, an additional "postcard"-type message if we have something time sensitive to notify them about. We try to keep our e-mails short, limited to a page or less of content, and include plenty of links and photos.

## What Makes You Special?

Customers at North Haven Gardens have high expectations of our staff's horticultural knowledge. As I like to say, they bag up all those gardening questions they can't get answered at the big box or big chain stores (despite what the new staff-focused Lowe's ads are trying to pitch) and they bring them to NHG. I'm sure your customers do the same with you: They might go to Home Depot or Lowe's if all they care about is price point, but they come to us when they decide they really want to learn how to be gardeners. So we continue that theme with our e-newsletter and focus on helpful information rather than just prices or sale information.

Yes, the goal of every advertisement or marketing effort is to generate sales. That really goes without saying. But the better informed your customers are when they get to your store, the easier things will be for your staff and the higher your average sale. The main purpose of our e-newsletter has been to inform our customers of educational programs and special events. That seems to be what pulls the most traffic as a result of the e-mails. Of course, if we do have a special deal on products, we use our e-newsletter to let our

**Dear Nikki,**  
[Miss Debra](#) [Lynette](#) [Garden Solutions](#) [Garden Cook](#) [Specials](#) [Directions](#)

**Rose Weekend**  
 Sat & Sun, March 6-7

**Open: Saturday 7am & Sunday 8am**  
 Shop early to get great deals, including a **FREE rose plant or bag of Vital Earth Rose Mix for the first 50 people through the door each day who make a purchase!** Enjoy morning coffee and pastries! Details [here](#).

Shop the best selection of more than 200 rose varieties including AARS Winner 'Easy Does It', EarthKind™ & Knock Out™ Roses, & more!

Other in-store specials include **Nature's Guide Rose Food 20lb only \$19.99** reg. \$24.99  
**Medina Hasta Gro 32oz only \$9.99** reg. \$11.99

Sat: 10am-3pm **The Cultured Cup** - sample & purchase teas!  
 Sat: 1pm **Grow Quality Hybrid Tea Roses**  
 Sat: 2:30pm **Organic Pest Control & Proper Pruning for Roses**

Sun: 11am-2pm **The Cultured Cup** - sample & purchase teas!  
 Sun: 11am **EarthKind Roses**  
 Sun: 1:30pm **Right Rose for Your Garden**

**Right Now at North Haven Gardens**  
**4" Cole Crops ONLY 99¢**  
 The next 3 weeks are optimal for planting broccolli, green or red cabbage, kohlrabi, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower & collards. Plant this weekend!  
reg. price \$1.99

**March Programs** Details [here](#)  
 Wed, 3/10 Noon-1pm **Just Tomatoes** by Leslie Finical Halleck

**Thurs-Sat, 3/11-3/13 : 10am-5pm African Violet Show & Sale** Details [here](#).

**Sun, 3/14 : 1pm-4pm Vegetable Gardens 101** by Leslie Finical Halleck, growLively Blog, NHG GM, MS Horticulture. Leslie offers a comprehensive class on how to grow the best harvest in North Texas! Registration Fee: Grow Card Members \$20 / Non-members \$25 Register in-store, over the phone. Call 214-363-5316. Application [here](#).

**Sat & Sun, 3/20-21 Spring Weekend** Details [here](#).

**Sun, 3/28 : 3pm Growing & Using Culinary Herbs in North Texas**

**North Haven Gardens**  
 7700 Northaven Road  
 Dallas, Texas 75230  
 214-363-5316  
[www.nhg.com](http://www.nhg.com)

## Connect With North Haven Gardens!

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/northhavengardens](http://www.facebook.com/northhavengardens)

**Twitter:** @nhgdallas

**Web:** [www.nhg.com](http://www.nhg.com)

**Leslie's blog:** [growlively.typepad.com](http://growlively.typepad.com)

Some may say that an e-newsletter doesn't qualify as "social media," but I see it as just that. If I've given you my personal e-mail address so you can send me e-mails at your will, I'd say that's pretty social. I've decided by giving you my e-mail address that we have at least some basic form of a relationship.

## the panelists



Kimberly Bird

Calloway's Nursery  
 Dallas/Forth Worth  
 and Houston, Texas  
[mytexasgarden.com](http://mytexasgarden.com)



Leslie Finical Halleck

North Haven Gardens  
 Dallas, Texas  
[nhg.com](http://nhg.com)



Mark Saidnawey

Pemberton Farms  
 & Garden Center  
 Cambridge, Mass.  
[pembertonfarms.com](http://pembertonfarms.com)

The North Haven Gardens newsletter arrives packed with colorful photos, helpful gardening information and great deals on garden center merchandise. According to Leslie Halleck, it's also easy to put together on the back end!



We always try to tie specific product or price information to an event or program that will also help educate customers.

customers know so they can take advantage of the opportunity. We always try to tie that specific product or price information to an event or program that will also help educate them.

### Keep it Constant

Before joining North Haven Gardens in January 2005, I'd heard about Constant Contact and knew of a handful of nonprofit organizations using it. So I looked into it in August 2006, when we decided to get our NHG e-newsletter rolling. The costs were comparatively so low and the plans so flexible for a small business like us that it seemed the best way to go. Constant Contact manages your e-mail database for you, offers an easy-to-use online interface for creating your

e-mails, and charges based on how many actual e-mails you send each month. It was important for us to be able to match the look of our e-mails with our website, and that's easy to do within their interface. As a business that markets differently for each season, we freshen up our e-mails and website regularly. My marketing manager, Nikki Crain, and I create and send all of our e-newsletters — anyone can learn to do it with a little trial and error.

### The Nitty-Gritty

We'd been collecting e-mail addresses from our customers before we started our e-newsletter, so we had about 1,000 addresses when we opened our account. We have a customer loyalty program called the Grow Card. When customers sign up, they can give us their e-mail address. We then use a report within our POS (Microsoft RMS) to generate an updated e-mail list each month. We upload that Excel file directly to Constant Contact. Customers can also sign up directly for the newsletter through our website using a piece of code offered up by Constant Contact. Their e-mail address then goes directly into the database they manage for us. Customers can also opt-out at any time, which means the number of e-mails that are sent each month will rise and fall depending on customer demand. Currently,



Customers can sign up for the North Haven Gardens e-newsletter online at [www.nhg.com](http://www.nhg.com), but they can also offer their e-mail address in the store when they sign up for a Grow Card membership.

# create inspiration today

View the new edition of **Color-Up Close**, the e-magazine brought to you by Syngenta Flowers.

Packed with exciting retail ideas and gorgeous images, it will inspire you and your customers to greater success this spring and summer.



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**syngenta** flowers



we have an active e-mail list of close to 5,800 customers.

Currently, our open rate on e-mails averages about 34 percent. According to Constant Contact, who recently featured us as one of their local success stories, that's high. Of course, we'd love nothing

less than 100 percent, but we realize that people are busy and already get a lot of other e-mails. Our e-mails also move a lot of traffic to our website: Upward of 20 percent of the folks who open the e-mail also click through to various website pages, where they will find even

more helpful gardening information. There also was a huge upturn in program attendance once we started sending out the e-newsletter. Overall, we feel that it has contributed greatly to our



The Grow Card, North Haven Gardens' loyalty card program, is a great way to collect e-mail addresses and reward members. Constant Contact automatically updates NHG's e-mail list every month to stay current.

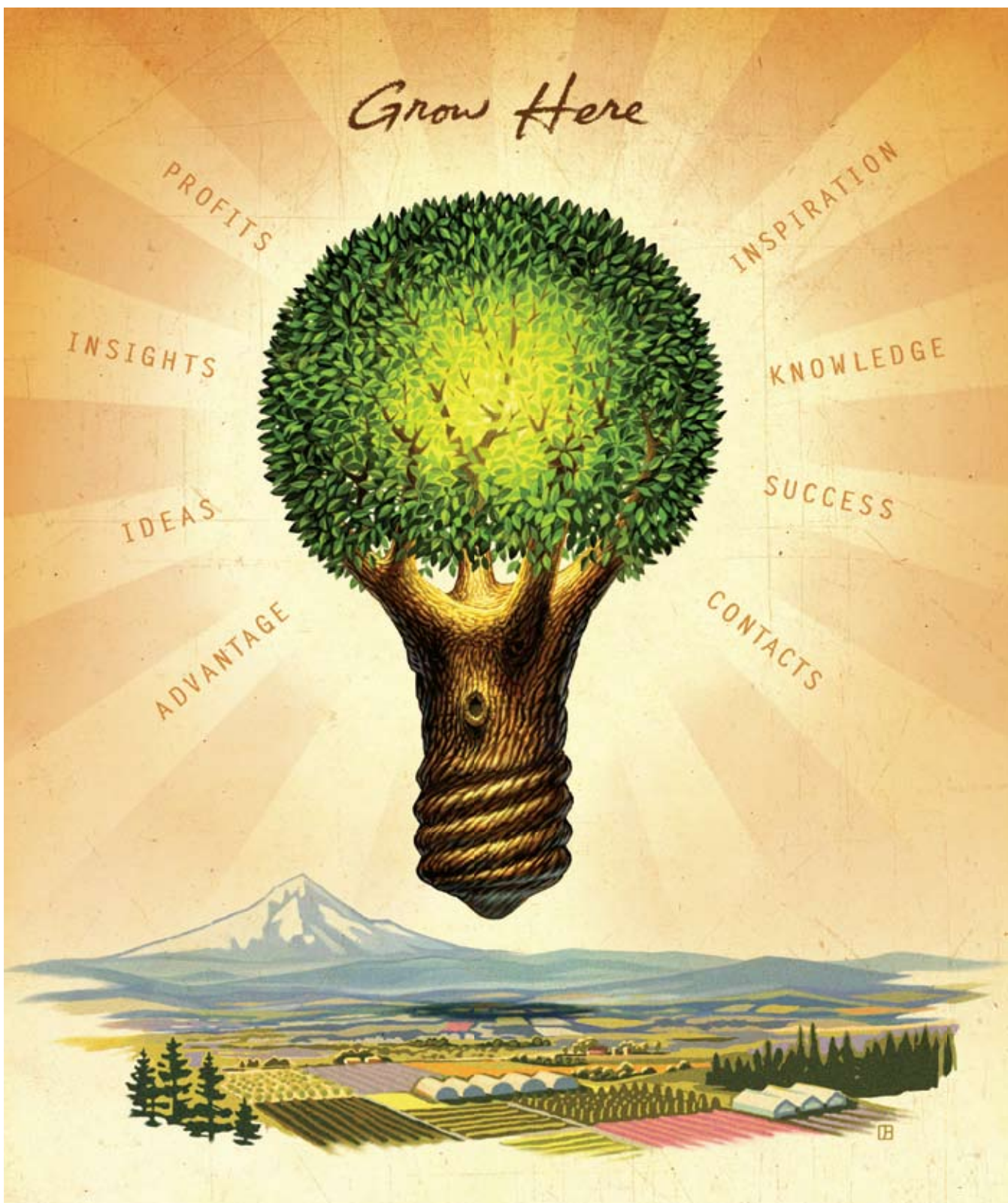
continued success over the last four years.

### Print Versus Online

Our bi-monthly paper newsletter goes out to an average of 13,000 customers and costs us exponentially more money and time to generate. Not to mention, we have to nail down details at least two months in advance to meet printing deadlines. Once the newsletter has gone to print, there's no changing anything even if we have to reschedule an event. While we have no plans to abandon our paper newsletter anytime soon, the e-newsletter allows us a huge amount of flexibility and last-minute contact with our customers for a fraction of the cost.

Now, let me warn you: E-newsletters can go really wrong. Yes, you want to maintain a personal relationship with your customers...but do they really need or want to know what you did while you were on vacation? Or read long narratives about what TV show you're currently watching? Even worse, specific details about how well, or not well, your business is doing? Um...no. How does that information help them be better gardeners? I mention these examples because I see things like this regularly in other e-newsletters. So just remember to keep your e-newsletter customer-centric and focused on useful information they need — or your subscribers may start billing you for therapy time.

**Leslie Finical Halleck is general manager at North Haven Gardens. She can be reached at [lhalleck@nhg.com](mailto:lhalleck@nhg.com).**



August 26-28  
**2010**

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