



Connecting the Dots

Your social media efforts should tie into the rest of your marketing mix to create a clear path that your customers can follow. For Calloway's Nursery, that path leads directly through the doors of the store.

By Kimberly Bird

Most of us don't sell anything consumers *must* have. Humans need food, water, air and shelter; most of what we produce or sell isn't at the top of the list of things people need to survive. So when it comes to garden goods, we're competing with all retailers, all home improvement providers and all hobby and leisure activities. Ultimately, people garden to improve the quality of their lives. Whether that improvement is aesthetic, edible, emotional or otherwise, the choice a person makes to garden as a pastime or investment to enhance their life is personal.

And of all those millions of personal choices that happen every day, each time someone

chooses to spend their time and money on the garden goods we offer adds to the sustainability and success of our industry. So what does this have to do with social media? Stay with me — we're getting there.

So if all garden customers making daily choices drive the demand for our goods and services and the ultimate success for our industry, doesn't it make sense to connect with those consumers to influence their choices? That's the aim of advertising, public relations, merchandising, store displays, consumer research, public relations, employee-service and product-knowledge training, and customer service development. And if there's an emerging communications vehicle pulling in new users and exponentially growing every few months, isn't it our jobs to connect with our customers in the way they are choosing to communicate?

Have a Vision

Even in the early 1900s, the father of advertising, David Ogilvy, built an advertising empire and made business history on his advertising principles, in particular, "that the function of advertising is to sell, and that successful advertising for any product is based on information about its consumer."

Ogilvy understood that going beyond newspaper advertising and forging new ground using more targeted and direct communications through the mail (which was a new form of advertising in the 1920s) would make his clients stand out and generate better results. Ogilvy died in 1999, but if he were around today, I think he'd agree that understanding where your customers get their information and meeting them on whatever

platform or source of communications they prefer is an essential part of the business game.

Which brings us back to social media. It's not a fad — Facebook won't go away, no matter how much bad press they receive — and it's time to make it an integrated part of your business and marketing mix. It should be part of your communications, advertising and public relations plan. It doesn't have to be expensive or time consuming, and your program can scale to fit your business model and your resources. But it does need to exist today within your business plan.

Times Are Changing

Having a social media presence and knowing and understanding your customers are not one in the same. Each social media effort needs to be aligned with a purpose that fits your business. The idea is to create a relationship with the people who matter the most to your company. That could be big spenders, opinion leaders or those who are well connected in the communities you serve. Relationships can grow and develop in a number of ways, including service, events or online exchanges of information. The most important thing is to define what you want to achieve, then nail it. Don't stop hammering away at it till you're there. Then decide where you want to go next, and define that step. Start small, and stay committed.

The days of art production, proofing, print processing and publication deadlines as the only means to get your message out are gone. TV, radio and outdoor are no longer the only advertising game in town. Even the not-so-distant days of quick-turn, low-cost, high-yield e-mails to get your messages out are fading. While none of

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the panelists



Kimberly Bird

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Leslie Finical Halleck

North Haven Gardens
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these advertising vehicles are going away completely, they are losing their impact every day as communications channels splinter and consumers' time continues to be divided between communications and entertainment devices. People and information are becoming more

and more transparent each passing day. Traditional advertising alone isn't going to generate the same results with the new consumers. Nowadays, things on the Internet go viral in minutes. Now is the time get on the social media bus or risk getting left behind as social media and

mobile devices grow in popularity and mindshare. But I'm going to let you in on a secret: Almost anyone can do social media.

Drive Traffic

At Calloway's Nursery, the ultimate goal of our social media efforts

Creating the Path

Here are some of the ways we engage social media connections through our online community:



The Cora Vinca Challenge.

Customers post a photo of Cora vinca in their landscape. The entries with the most votes receive store gift cards.

The PlantMaster.

Customers can submit garden questions to the PlantMaster. Once answered, we send an e-mail with a link to the answer. Questions and responses are posted online for others.

is to get customers into stores. We do this primarily by engaging in a dialogue with customers. We build relationships with them that allow us to send information about in-store events and sales. We do this by building an online community. That community grows online and in-store when we deliver on our promises. Most of the links we provide in our posts take visitors to mytexasgarden.com. Fans, friends and followers can exchange ideas, questions and comments with us and each other through our social media outlets and website. They can post questions and read information on our community site. We drive traffic to the site to build relationships and inform. We promote, facilitate and encourage usage. We use our online efforts to drive traffic to the stores.

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The Chef Jeff Tomato Contest. We provide information and entry forms for customers to participate in a tomato contest held at all store locations.

Tomato Contest
Enter the Chef Jeff Tomato Contest and Compete for Gift Cards!

Bring your entries to any Calloway's Nursery (CWN) on June 26 or Cornelius Nursery (Houston) on June 27, between 9 and noon. Fill out a registration form for each entry. First Prize (\$50) and Second Prize (\$25) will be awarded at each store for two categories: Best Quality Tomato and Largest Tomato. Judging begins at noon. Start your vegetable garden today!



Tree Story Contest of 2010 - Entries
Tell Us Your Tree Story
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Participate in O₂ Planting for the Future Tree Stories
Trees support life, add beauty and manifest meaning for each of us. Post a photo of your favorite tree and tell us your tree story in 75 words or less.

See contest details at O₂ Planting for the Future Tree Stories Page
See complete detail by visiting the O₂ Planting for the Future Tree Stories Contest Rules

Enter Today! Click here to submit your entry online.



The O₂ Planting for the Future Tree Story Contest. Customers post a photo and a brief story about a tree that's meaningful to them. The story with the most votes will receive a \$1,000 American Express gift card.

Garden information sheets. We post common garden information sheets online for reference.

The key to any social media effort is to create a path that you want people to follow. You can do this by planning, reaching, communicating and connecting with those that matter the most to you. Build a relationship of trust and admiration, and success will follow.

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LearnMore!

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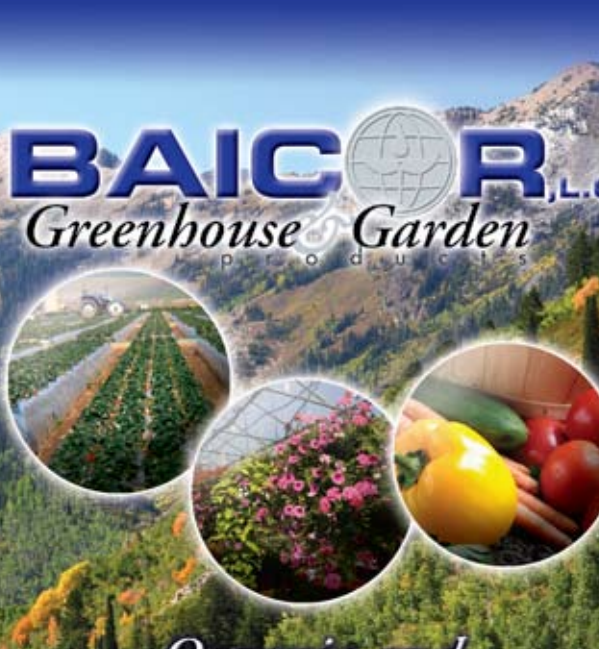
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