



# The More Things Change...

After 80 years in business, much at Pemberton Farms has changed, but a lot has stayed the same. In today's age of technology, is there still room for good, old-fashioned customer service?

By Mark Saidnawey

**W**hen my grandfather Tofic Saidnawey first opened Pemberton Market in 1930, his philosophy was simple: Offer quality products at great prices, build a relationship with every customer who walks through the door and treat each customer the way you would want to be treated.

## Connect With Pemberton Farms

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[www.pembertonfarms.com](http://www.pembertonfarms.com)

### Facebook:

Search for Pemberton Farms & Garden Center

### Twitter:

<http://twitter.com/PembertonFarms>

As Pemberton Farms celebrates its 80th year, our philosophy as third-generation business owners remains the same, but the way we do it may have changed a bit!

My brother Tom and I have worked hard to maintain these simple values. Open seven days a week, we make sure at least one of us is at our store every day, 363 days a year. (We're closed only on Christmas and New Year's Day.) Whether it's the busy spring garden gardening season or a cold

winter's day, one of us is there. We've learned the importance of customer service and work hard to continue the traditions that were passed down to us. We are in front of our customers, listen to what they are asking for, keep a close eye on our products (many are perishable) and thank every person who walks through our doors. A little kindness goes a long way.

Currently Tom and I own and operate Pemberton Market, the original grocery and liquor store; Pemberton Farms, a full-service garden center and gourmet food store; and our online catalog gift business, [www.pembertonfarms.com](http://www.pembertonfarms.com), one of the largest in New England. Though we carry on the philosophy of our grandfather; our father, Leo (who, at 82, still comes in every day); and his brother Alfred, we also have had to look for new ways to bring customers to Pemberton Farms. The dot-com bust in the late '90s, 9/11 and the recent economic downturn forced us to be more creative as a business. Fortunately, we have so many new tools to use to attract new customers, tools our father and grandfather never had.

## On the Internet Bandwagon

As I wrote in a previous article in January's *Lawn & Garden Retailer*, "Facebook and Twitter and iPhones, Oh My!," the Internet, particularly social media sites, has been extremely beneficial for our business. Facebook and Twitter are both easy to use and, more importantly, free! We currently use them to let customers know about upcoming events, new introductions, specials, gardening ideas and more. To date, more than 600 customers have "followed" us. Review sites are also helpful,



Google asked Pemberton Farms & Garden Center to play host to a national press conference — thanks to one Google employee's customer service experience at the garden center as a college student.

and they're often more important to potential customers. One review site, Yelp ([www.yelp.com](http://www.yelp.com)), is used by millions of consumers a month. All it takes is one bad review that spreads for customers potentially to stop coming. Pemberton averages 400 page views a month. To date, customers have written 75 reviews about us, and our rating is 4.5 out of 5 stars. Thanks, customers!

## The Google Payoff

One of our most successful tools for promoting our business has been Google AdWords. Although used mainly for our online gift basket business, it has given us tremendous success

## the panelists



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through purchasing key words and search phrases from Google. "Gardening Supplies," "Gifts" and "Gift Baskets" are among the terms that have helped us target new customers and bring new business opportunities to Pemberton Farms. We have

been using AdWords for eight years and have reaped a profitable return on the dollars we've spent.

Thanks to our success with Google, they recently contacted us and asked if they could use our garden center to hold a national

press conference with Google executives, state and local politicians, and reporters from various TV networks and local newspapers in attendance. Of course, we said yes! (For a look at press coverage on the event, visit <http://bit.ly/pemberton-google>.)



Brothers Tom (left) and Mark Saidnawey, third-generation owners of Pemberton Farms & Garden Center, with their father, Leo (center).

This event was a major accomplishment for our business. It was on the news that night, in Boston-area newspapers the next day and all over the Internet. For Pemberton Farms to be mentioned in the same sentence as a multibillion-dollar company like Google was such an honor. From a corner store to a nationally mentioned business — I'd like to think our grandfather would be proud. After the event, I asked a Google executive why they'd selected Pemberton to host this event, with so many larger corporations in the Boston area. She told me that when she was in college in Boston, she used to visit our store often. She loved the store then and remembered how wonderfully the staff had treated her. So when Google decided to have the press conference in Boston and she saw that Pemberton Farms was a customer, she knew it would be the perfect place to hold the event.

Eighty years later, treating people the way you'd want to be treated paid off, and our business was rewarded with national media coverage. Thanks Tofic, Leo and Al, your lessons have sunk into the third generation. It is now up to Tom and me to ensure that the fourth generation of Saidnaways continues this tradition. Hope you're listening, Amanda, Laynie, Greg and Dana... 🌸

**Mark Saidnawey owns and operates Pemberton Farms & Garden Center in Cambridge, Mass., with his brother, Tom. He can be reached at [mark@pembertonfarms.com](mailto:mark@pembertonfarms.com).**



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