

give this a try

I worked at a small, family-owned coffee shop on and off for six years. From the day I turned 16, I learned that the more I smiled when customers walked in the door, the more tips I got. I learned that remembering a customer's name and extra-shot, half-skim, no-foam order made a person's day. I learned that the only way to sell the new muffin flavor or latte of the week was to cut up samples or offer to whip up something else if they didn't enjoy it.

Not all retail is created equal, but the experiences created can translate from store to store. This is the idea behind our monthly Outside the Vines feature (page 58) and also hit home in July during the Retail Road Show at Cultivate'15 in Columbus.

After seeing two impressive garden centers, the buses rolled up to Giant Eagle Market District at Grandview Yard, one of a dozen more upscale stores for the Giant Eagle supermarket chain.

Similar to my barista experience, Giant Eagle places immense value on allowing customers to give something a try before purchasing it. The store budgets 3 percent strictly for product giveaways.

Our tour guide at Giant Eagle, along with the rest of the staff, said he is trained to open up a bag of pretzels if a customer is looking at it for too long. Some employees have only one job: to walk around with samples.

It's hard to let a customer try out a plant at the store, but what about free classes, giving

away a single plant or cutting up some of your veggies?

Customers need confidence the product will be exactly what they want before handing over their credit card. Sometimes that's not possible, but sometimes it is, and that extra touch can make a huge impression.

calculated design

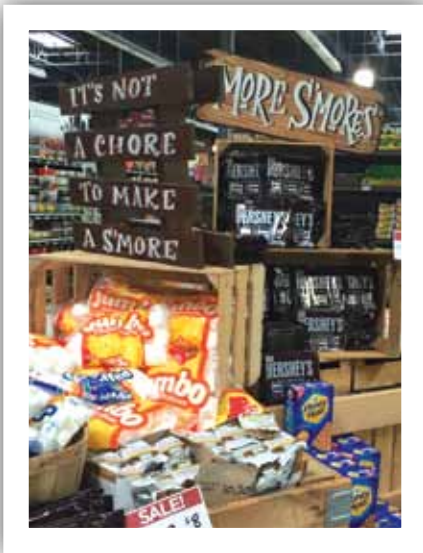
The Giant Eagle Market District does a lot of things right. The store includes not only expected grocery items but also unexpected experiences: a wok station, smoothie counter, wine bar and registered dietitian on staff, just to name a few.

In the "party side of the store," as employees call it, subdued spotlights are used instead of large, overhead lights to create a more relaxed feel. The regular grocery section, however, is much brighter.

Graphic artists, employed by the company, handwrite all of the signage. Cross merchandising is key — as seen with the s'mores display at left. Separate vignettes give

shoppers a million things to look at, but the sheer size of the displays makes sure nothing gets lost.

These are some of the things garden centers do as well. Take a look at Lawn & Garden Retailer's 2015 Merchandiser of the Year finalists on page 12. This is what customers want to see when they walk through your doors. **LGR**



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