

beyond you and me

This month I am writing to you on the flight back from AmericasMart in Atlanta after putting down the book "Start Something That Matters." Reading about Blake Mycoskie's journey of founding TOMS got me thinking.

TOMS is a brand known for its "One for One" program, which started with giving one pair of new shoes to a person in need for each pair purchased. Today they've given more than 75 million pairs.

The TOMS mission has since expanded to eyewear for sight, coffee for clean water, bags for safe birth and backpacks for bullying prevention.

This January weekend at the Atlanta International Gift & Home Furnishings Market more than 9,000 brands were represented in over 7 million square feet.

That's an overwhelming amount of products that can stand out for a number of reasons. One that caught my eye, however, had a social component in the same vein as TOMS, although very different.

Solight Design's flat, pop-open lights are waterproof, lightweight and, of course, solar powered.

Designed to withstand harsh weather conditions, these lights not only make for pretty backyard decorations but also have a mission much greater.

Every unit sold helps send these lights to areas without power, often areas affected by natural disasters such as the earthquake in Nepal or hurricanes in Haiti, Ecuador, and, most recently, Puerto Rico.

In this day and age, there are so many products out there with stories of giving back. Also at AmericasMart was Beyond Borders, the outdoor metal art company that empowers Haitian artists. Another one of my personal favorites is Love Your Melon, which provides

a hat to a child with pediatric cancer for each hat purchased.

I could go on and on, but what does this have to do with your garden center? I've read multiple articles about how millennials are driving socially responsible consumption, so having products in this category and helping tell the stories could help get them in the door.

your company

Beyond products though, I think it's even more important to show you're a socially responsible company and a business that your customers can trust. The products and plants already in your store can accomplish this.

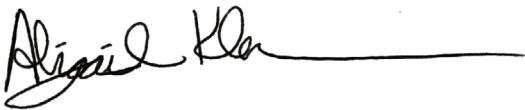
Flip to page 12 to read how Greenscape Gardens in Missouri has embraced conservation and helping the environment. Activism, education, organizational partnerships and more have positioned the garden center as an authentic leader in the community.

Then, turn to page 16 to read about three garden centers from Colorado who are water conscious. Many customers who are purchasing plants with low water requirements have an environmental reason beyond just hoping they will be less work.

I'm about to begin Chapter Seven of "Start Something that Matters," appropriately titled Giving Is Good Business.

Charity for those in need is top of mind, but you can also give back to your customers — through events like the one on page 46 — and give back to your community.

Customers will respond well to all three of these types of giving, and it'll help them relate to and trust your business. This is important for customers of all ages, but I'd assert it's crucial for customers of my generation.



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