

Divine Design Strategy: Finding the 'Pain Points' that Make Higher Quality Sales



By Christina Salwitz

When spring begins to burst in earnest and sprouts begin to shoot up, you can feel the energy in the garden center change each day that trucks start rolling in with new product.

From the bare root plants, sawdust beds getting ready for new trees, spring bulbs and, my personal favorite, the signature scents of spring here in the Pacific Northwest of the hyacinth, sweet box and early daphne all perfuming the crisp clean air at the same time. It's heady stuff that spring magic

Yet it can be hard to focus on those early season customers when we're so ravaged by the tick-tock alarms going off in our heads about how much we need to get done before Mother's Day.

The customers who come in to visit in February, March and April are often an intrepid bunch and frequently eager to get going and get things done. Container design customers in particular!

Discovery

For years, I had one such customer who was always the first person in spring who insisted on getting her spring pot done for a family Easter event at her home every year.

She was a very nice lady and incredibly easy to make happy, so it was a pleasure to drop everything that seemed like it was urgently needing to get done and simply focus on how I can make this container design showy for her.

I did however, go through the "Design Discovery Process" and ask the questions to get almost all of the other pertinent info; I wasn't totally out of my mind yet!

Even a client with no directives may have hidden needs that are important to discover. So here are a few questions to ask:

1. Do you have colors that you LOVE? HATE?
2. Are there any plants that you simply MUST have or MUST never have in your container design?
3. Will you be OK with doing some minor maintenance, such as deadheading, fertilizing etc.?
4. Where will this pot sit? Sun, shade, partial? On concrete, a deck, a dock?

Now the funny thing is that she brought me this sad former hanging coco-coir lined basket where the hanging parts had been removed as she liked it much better sitting on a large pedestal in her garden as the focal point at the end of a path.

This poor thing had seen better days and when I first got it, the coco-liner was in bad shape and I couldn't get a replacement in time, so I had to line it with plastic just to make it hold together. But, she was happy nonetheless!

This nice customer never asked me to adhere to a price point and, frankly, I never asked initially. I was just so slammed with projects, I was focusing on her directive to "just make it pretty!" Oh, and the best part, of course it was in shade too. Not always an easy task in freezing cold early spring with no coleus, no begonias, no impatiens. You get the drift, but as usual I'm always up for a design challenge.

The major thing I did find out in the discovery process was that she had what I'm going call a "pain point."

If you know anything about sales at all, then you know that 90 percent of sales is finding out how you can solve the customers problems, quickly, efficiently and hopefully with good design in mind and gently finding and pressing on that "pain point" can help a lot.

The pain point was the problem that she needed me to help her solve. This may sound familiar to many of you: "I love container gardening, I enjoy



all of the colorful foliage and flowers, but I want something that will last a little longer than just a bunch of annuals."

In other words, "I don't want to spend very much and have nothing to show for it." DING! DING! DING!

Prepare Your Staff

This is the crux of my design sales strategy. Having a gameplan in your training background for what scripting to bring out when customers approach you with various pain points.

This is something every garden center should practice. It doesn't have to be an embarrassing role play exercise in a staff meeting. It can be as simple as a game that everyone plays.

On the fly, in two seconds, anyone can randomly think of a scenario that presents a sales and design

