

Invest Your Resources Wisely



By Stan Pohmer



There are a few things that you, your business and your customers never have enough of ... time, money and energy.

There's a limited supply of each of these, and we often don't consider how best to invest them to achieve the best results (or at least the result we desire!) when we are trying to keep our heads above water focusing on accomplishing our day-to-day responsibilities and putting out fires.

And we're so focused on selling the products in our garden centers that we almost never think about the resources our customers have to invest when both shopping in our stores and using our products.

Yet, if you look at these investments through a customer's eyes, you may uncover core reasons why they do and, more importantly, don't use our products or shop your garden center. Let me relate a few personal experiences that might illustrate this ...

A Complicated Headlight

Have you tried to replace a burned-out headlight on your car lately?

Years ago, it was relatively easy; pop the hood and there was lots of room to navigate around the engine, and access to the mounting springs or screws that held the headlight in place were very accessible. All one had to do was to disconnect the wiring to the bulb, remove the old headlight and insert the new one, simply reversing the process.

It was a job that was relatively easy and required little effort and time investment. And retailers of every ilk ... auto parts stores, auto super stores, home improvement and discount stores ... all carried the replacement bulbs, and because buying and installing the bulb required little expertise, it made sense to buy it from the most convenient retailer or the one who had the lowest price.

It's a completely different story today. Pop the hood and the computerized engines and all of the electronics, turbo chargers, pumps, fans and wires leave almost no room to navigate. And instead of

changing the bulb, you change just the filament ... if you are a contortionist who has rubber arms and fingers that allow you to snake your way to access the headlight casing.

Now all of the same retailers of every ilk carry the replacement filaments, but do I want to tackle the job of replacing them knowing that I'll have to invest major time and energy/effort to unbolt myriad parts of the engine so that I can reach the headlight casing (all the while keeping the grandkids at bay so they don't learn a new vernacular of the English language being screamed!) just to save a few bucks by avoiding having the job done by my car dealership and paying a premium price?

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Demonstrate to them that you value and can maximize their resources investment, saving them precious time, effort and energy. If you can deliver on this, then their monetary investment becomes less of a decision factor for them.
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From my experience, I learned long ago to head to my local NAPA retailer to buy anything automotive. Though their store is farther away than other car parts retailers, their staff has incredible knowledge and expertise.

Tell them what you need and they pull it from inventory, whipping out a manual and schematic for my specific make and model of car, and then they walk me through the installation process. And oh, by the way, they also suggest a \$3 tool that allows you to access the headlight casing without removing anything else.

Did I have to invest a few dollars more to purchase from the NAPA store? Sure did, but buying from them saved me an incredible amount of time and effort, both of which I valued more than a few bucks.

Trips to the Store

Here's another example. I used to measure the complexity of a home improvement project by the number of trips I had to make back to the



store to buy parts and materials I didn't anticipate needing when I started, especially on projects I had no prior experience with.

Though I was always happy with the finished project, the amount of time and energy invested made me a bit skittish about tackling another major project, no matter what the monetary investment might be.

I can't speak for the chain on a national basis, but my local Home Depot must have felt my frustration (and those of other DIYers); they now have master plumbers giving advice in the plumbing aisle, licensed carpenters in the lumber and hardware departments, and master gardeners in the garden center.

When I relate to them what I want to accomplish, they explain the process, often sketching out a rough diagram showing how it all flows, ask me for measurements, and then recommend a bill of materials for everything needed to complete the project.

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What previously might have been a four visit project became a one visit project, saving me time and energy ... and making me more inclined to tackle additional projects!

In last month's Lawn & Garden Retailer, we discussed "what makes you special" to the consumer. Your competitors carry much of the same products you do, some at lower prices, so why should the consumer select you as their destination?

From personal experience, one way is to demonstrate to them that you value and can maximize their resources investment, saving them precious time, effort and energy. If you can deliver on this, then their monetary investment becomes less of a decision factor for them.

Think about positioning the services you offer in terms of saving the customer time, energy, effort and, yes, sometimes even money.

Think about ways to make the shopping experience more efficient and faster, both from a merchandising and operations standpoint.

Think about ways to ensure that the customer has all of the pieces and parts, tools and materials to make

it a one visit project and to eliminate (or at the very least, minimize) the installation frustrations when they get home.

You and your customers have finite resources ... time, money, effort and energy ... to invest, so it's important that you invest it wisely to achieve the best results.

To answer the question, "what makes you special," think

about investing your resources in ways that generate the greatest return on your customers' investment in you ... **LGR**

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