

Good Websites Have a Goal

Jump into improving your site with specific and measurable objectives.

By Timothy Howard

Why does the marketing budget get cut when times are tough or when business is going hog-wild?

Frequently, it's because businesses don't measure the value of their marketing dollars. Therefore, in down times, they "can't afford it," and in good times they "don't need it."

Granted, it can be difficult to calculate return on investment or effectiveness of print ads, tradeshows and other marketing. However, when developed properly, the effectiveness of electronic marketing is very easy to measure.

Frequently, when we speak with business owners about why they want a new website we hear "It's Ugly," "It doesn't work on a phone," or "It's hard to update." All of those might be true, but building a pretty, phone-friendly and easy-to-update website doesn't necessarily equate to spending resources effectively.

If you plan to improve your site, start with goals that are specific and measurable. Then design your site with proper content and functionality to meet those objectives.

Let's take a look at five different garden center goals and how to use a website to help achieve them:

1) Increase the Average In-Store Order Size.

There are multiple ways to increase average order size, but we are going to focus on website functionality to promote add-on sales of related plants and products. Don't fall into the trap of "everyone knows this" as an excuse not to add good website content. Adding relevant information and a simple way to add items to

Take Care of Your Hands & Roses



Learn More

ADD TO LIST



Learn More

ADD TO LIST



Learn More

ADD TO LIST

a shopping list they can print out and access from their phone will pay dividends.

Sell Companion Plants

Use your website to show your customers what plants can be combined in the landscape or in mixed containers. Good photography is key to quickly communicate the options. Even if you don't have examples of the planted combinations, you can show headshots:

Increase Sales of Related Products

Be sure to remind your customers about additional items that will help them be successful while increasing your average sales.

For example, promote hummingbird feeders and food with relevant plants. For roses, promote gloves, pruners, trellises, rose food, etc.

2) Increase E-Newsletter Signups.

To increase your email distribution list, focus on two things:

Create an Incentive.

With so much content available online and so many spammers filling our inbox, users need a reason to sign up for your e-newsletter. Don't worry, not all incentives are financial. For example, sign up to receive:

- Early notification of sales
- Advance opportunity to register for events
- Subscriber-only discounts
- Subscriber-only events
- Arrival notification of unique plants and/or products
- Email-only coupons

You May Also Like...



Gladiolus
Mante/ Costa



Dahlia
My Love



Gladiolus
Vista



Lily
Casablanca

Want to learn more?

Catch Timothy at Cultivate'18 from July 14-17, in Columbus, Ohio. In addition to "Good Websites Have a Goal," he'll be speaking on "Online Orders to In Store Pickups," "7 Tips for Garden Center Signage," and "Using Data to Improve Your Website." For more information, visit www.cultivate18.org.



Make It Easy.

The e-news signup form should be easy to access and not require more than their email and maybe one or two other pieces of information.

Adding a popup with an incentive has proven to significantly increase signups.

However, if they choose not to sign up, disable the popup for that device for a period of time, or they will quit visiting your site.

If you have a “specials” or “coupons” page on your site, adding a pop-up there focusing on the offers they will receive will also improve your list.

3) Sell More Bulk Mulch.

Adding a bulk products calculator to your site makes it easy for your customers, and staff, to determine how much product they need.

Take it to the next level of convenience and display the types of mulch you offer; how much it costs and allow your customers to order online.

Use pictures whenever possible. Don't assume people will know what 'Triple Shredded' is.

4) Increase Attendance at In-Store Events.

There are two key components to increasing attendance at your in-store events. First, increase exposure to the right audience. Two, have a high percentage of people who said they plan to attend actually show up.

More Exposure

Don't assume your customers will always go to your calendar or events page. If you have a slideshow on your home page, promote the event there about a week before it starts. Any earlier than that, and it's not relevant for most people.

Most people won't pay attention to more than a handful of slides, so be sure to promote your event in the first three images.

Beyond the home page, promoting events on relevant pages is very effective. For a class on using native plants to create a rain garden, advertise the event on the sections of your site with native plant information and related products like rain barrels.

For the final push, send a reminder a day before the event to your email distribution list.

Pay for a 'Free' Event?

Getting “skin in the game” from potential event attendees will certainly improve the percentage of people who actually show after RSVPing positively.

If you don't typically charge for your events, experiment by charging \$5 for a class, but offer something of greater value they get free at the event.

Event Registration Options

If your website doesn't support event registrations and with online payments, there are a number of good free, or almost free solutions. Some of the more popular include:

- EasySignup.com
- EventBrite.com
- EventSmart.com
- EventZilla.net

You can also have all the event details on your site with a link to PayPal.com to collect payment.

For example, if you have a class on creating low-maintenance container combinations, offer a free container or plant that sells for \$10 or more. Highlight the free item, and its value, so it is the first thing they notice. The fact they paid for the class might provide the extra motivation needed to show up in the rain, after a rough night, or any other number of excuses they would use to skip it otherwise.

5) Get More 'Spur of the Moment' Foot Traffic

As most garden centers don't sell directly from their website, getting the shopper in the door is a critical first step.

After people have finished their meal, yoga class, work, kid's soccer, etc., they frequently use their phone to determine the next step. In addition to being phone-friendly, your website should also be very easy for your customers:

- To know if you're open
- Click to call
- Get directions
- Know what you sell

With Google Analytics you will be able to know what percentage of your website visitors access your site via mobile devices, how many “click to calls” there were and how often the map was used to find your store.

Spending Your Marketing Dollars Wisely

Using a goal-oriented approach to website development will allow you to quantify the value of your online marketing. Over time, you will learn what works best for you and your customers and fine tune your strategy to maximize your returns.

Timothy Howard is the founder and president of Clarity Connect and GardenCenterMarketing.com. For nearly 20 years, they have designed and delivered a wide range of creative, practical and cost-effective marketing and technological solutions for landscapers, garden centers and growers. He can be reached at timothy@clarity-connect.com.