

# When Serendipity Meets Strategy



By Christina Salwitz

Many of us have heard the old quote, “Success is when preparation meets opportunity.” But, so many people struggle in our industry as they are investing in either being busy without a real strategy or having a well thought out strategy and missing obvious opportunities to execute it when there’s an optimal time to do so.

In this generally quiet month in the garden center, many of you are planning for the holidays and next spring, so it seemed like a good time to tell you a small story of what happened to me recently as it relates to containers and container design sales.

Maybe it will help to inspire your strategic planning, or at least inspire you to think out of the box for sales opportunities.

## The Container Conundrum

Here’s a little bit of background on this so you have some context. Many of you may or may not know that I travel the country as one of the parts of my business talking about numerous industry related topics for The Garden Center Group as well as speaking to many private groups about design and my books.

One of the topics that gets the most questions by far is container design and sales. It’s a huge challenge on a number of levels for certain regions of the country. They are frustrated by a customer base who are often stuck in the design trends of the 1980s and/or the lack of access to high-quality, well-designed containers to feature at affordable prices.

After most talks, I’d say 90 percent of questions are about vendors, pricing of designs and how we can sell more container designs when containers are such a large portion of the cost for the design.

Granted, I’m hyper-aware of the lack of access to great container options by virtue of the fact that I’m based out of Seattle. That makes Asia practically across the street and access to a wide array of containers reasonably cheap and available efficiently. I don’t have to worry about prohibitive shipping costs; I have three huge wholesalers within 20 minutes of my house!

I fully recognize that I’m more than spoiled by this accessibility. So, the aggravation I encounter with garden centers who have to send one truck three states away to buy small quantities and then divvy it all up between them is fully understandable.

## Making Pottery Sell

Recently, I was contacted by my Facebook friend Karyl Seppala from Kinsey Family Farm in Georgia about my containers. She designed and manages the Campania International portion of their website and online sales for the garden center and wanted to know if I’d be willing to share my photos that featured Campania pottery with a finished design in a home setting. Of course, I was flattered and honored to help her sell more pottery.

We chatted at length online about Karyl’s mission to help the garden center sell more pottery and to show what a difference it makes to anyone shopping online to see the finished product versus a generic grouping of empty containers in various sizes and colors.

Even the most well-designed product looks better when shown as a complete thought. Karyl didn’t hold back any enthusiasm for her connection to the Kinsey Family Farm: “They are amazing people. Good to the bone. We’ve been close for years and we’ve seen it all together. I maintain and market the site for them and for that I get a portion of sales from the online store.”

This is one of the main reasons why I stress over and over in my talks and in numerous articles that planting up containers in the garden center and creating a “curated gallery” experience will always sell more than just stacks of empty pots. It will sell more containers, more plants and more sales opportunities for every single department. Period.



Karyl was honest about her talents at writing code, building websites and her comfort level with making sure that Google rankings are high and stay that way. But, she was also very up front with the fact that she knew without a doubt that given the right photos, she could sell much more pottery for her garden center and bring much more exposure to her partner Campania.

This unique partnership that Karyl has developed has become a passionate endeavor for her; she is devoted to it and enjoys the wonderful products and people.

Working closely with Campania has given Karyl some great insight into what works online and what Google responds to favorably as well. So, with that in mind, she began uploading

my photos and links for my contact information to her product pages to nearly immediate response. Both of us got really excited! But, what really had us thrilled was how enthusiastic the Campania company was with this idea of Karyl's.

"Yay! Everybody wins! I love it when everybody wins!" said Karyl during one of our chats. "It really helps when people can see what an individual container can become. It's hard for people who are visual; they can't imagine what it could look like finished. I had to learn that."

One container photo that I sent to Karyl was a particularly tough sell because people simply couldn't envision this green color and style in a home setting. I have to admit, when I bought this same one, it had been sitting at the wholesaler for quite some time, but as a designer I could see it in a finished setting and knew it could be stunning. I've since used more of them with other clients who have also fallen in love with them once they were planted.

It's very common for people to tell me once they see certain containers finished, "I would have never chosen that style, but now that I see it, it's perfect." And this is precisely what Karyl wants to capitalize on for her garden center and online sales.

When a wholesale company has a "challenging color or style" to sell in any product, using photography to show it in its best light will always sell more. Just like a model showing how a dress hangs on a body, it's the same thing when it comes to selling online, not to mention helping to get customers into your brick-and-mortar store. "Everyone sets up sites and then they don't 'sell'", said Karyl, "it's about opening those doors and proving your value."

To put a nice little bow on this short story, I just got a note from Karyl as I wrote this article, "You just sold a pot for me to a new customer and it wasn't even on my site yet, but I sent the customer to your Facebook page to see the finished photos."

It turns out this customer is an interior designer in New York and this lovely pot will go into a fancy bathroom. Once they saw the photo, the designer came back to the site and purchased it (\$629) in under one minute. Karyl took the order while on a mountain bike trail during her time away from the computer. 🌱

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