

hello? anybody there?

While looking for a place to head to lunch with a couple friends, I called one of the most hyped burger places in the city of Chicago to see how long of a wait it would be. I knew the chances of them answering the phone in a chipper mood in the height of rush hour would be slim, but it was 2 p.m., so I thought I'd give it a shot.

I didn't expect what I heard on the other end: "This is a dedicated line for voicemail. We operate on a first-come first-serve seating basis and do not take reservations ... The fastest way to reach us is by email."

I was frustrated, and we did indeed take our business elsewhere. Did they realize that not having someone answering the phone was costing them customers?

On page 20, Danny Summers of The Garden Center Group talks about a mystery shop program that many of the group's garden centers use to gauge how well a business and its staff are doing with customers. One of the first categories is "telephone." The goal is that staff answers in four or less rings and the voice is enthusiastic all while giving his or her name, answering the question and inviting you to come into the store.

The burger place would've scored a big zero in this category. But maybe, just maybe, they don't realize how important the phone might be to customers, or they do so well in some of the other categories such as appearance, employee attitudes and skills, and products that they don't care.

I think in this case the latter is true. They have people lining up outside regularly to taste what many lists have named one of "the best burgers in Chicago."

Henry's Farm & Greenhouses is one of these businesses that has discovered what it needs to operate with great success while still having "a semblance of life beyond the greenhouse," according to Anna Mary Barcus, retail manager and second generation.

Flip to page 14 to read "When 'Wrong' Works Well." Henry's has focused its efforts on certain aspects of the business that it knows will bring customers into the store, choosing to leave out other things, like having a phone number for people to call.

Knowing what your customers want and how and why they find you is far more important than following the "rules." But I'm not advocating getting rid of your phone!

#houseplants

Houseplants have made a huge comeback, and hopefully at this point that's not news to you. On page 34, you'll find some of the "Must-Have Houseplants" for your stores from Justin Hancock of Costa Farms.

Justin also provides some merchandising tips for each of them, one of which is social media. Houseplants seem to be the millennial's way to garden, which I can verify just among my apartment-dwelling friends.



These friends are living on Instagram too, searching for and posting about #plantparents, #sansevieriasunday, #monsteramonday, #fiddleleaffig, #urbanjungle, #crazyplantlady and so much more.

Be the garden center that knows how to reach customers in this way or at least the one that keeps up with the trends, so you know what you should be carrying in your store.

Houseplant shoppers may or may not be the ones who get upset about not having a phone number to call, like me, but they could be the ones who don't search you out if you don't advertise yourself as part of the #houseplantclub.

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