

Sensory Selling

These simple strategies can help you sell more plants in the garden center.



By Christina Salwitz

It feels like 100 years ago now, but in another lifetime, I thought for sure I was going to go into a career in fashion. I was studying design, fashion history, merchandising and marketing so that I could someday go to New York and make my mark. I began working my first job in a men's clothing store with a small staff and a manager whom I admired for his sales skills. I wanted to learn everything I could from him because he made it seem incredibly effortless.

So, I studied his deceptively simple sales style, listened carefully, and learned his tips and tricks. But the most interesting part about what I now understand so much more in depth is that what he taught me had nothing to do with selling clothing, to men or anyone else. He taught me how to make things irresistible to our senses, setting things up so that sales resistance just isn't a factor.

Keep It Simple

Selling anything is really like learning to dance, right? You don't watch professionals dance once, then head out onto that dance floor and "automagically" assume that you're going to nail it on the first try. It takes practice to get the footwork to look smooth and effortless. You might stumble over your words a bit, your intonation might need some refining, your open-ended questions could be a bit clunky, but eventually it comes along if you practice.

However, here's one magic bullet tip that rarely fails. It's so seemingly simple and yet like certain dance steps it takes a bit of finesse to pull off, but if you've ever seen it in action, you know it works. Have I got your attention now?

My clothing store manager told me one thing on my first day that I've never forgotten: "Walk quickly with purpose, even if you aren't going anywhere and ALWAYS be carrying the hot sales item of the day."

This accomplishes two things: even when the store might be slow and there's not a ton to do, you will always look like you are busy and accomplishing things. Customers sense a lull in the action and buying triggers

MAKES MORE SALES

automatically slow down when the energy in the store slows. But, more importantly, subconsciously the thing you're carrying SEEMS to have a lot of importance. After all, why would you be carrying it somewhere with such resolve and determination, right?

Move It

I often tell audiences when I'm giving talks that I'm a big believer in the energy that changes with a "thing" that's not selling well enough when you move it, re-merchandise it, or simply carry it around. This theory has NEVER failed me yet.

Have you ever experienced plants in the sold area being sneakily taken and purchased when you weren't looking? It happens all the time. The one remaining flat of purple petunias on Mother's Day week with a big SOLD tag on it is utterly irresistible.

If you want to try a fun experiment, take that flat of plants that are just too cool NOT to be selling, put them on a cart with big ribbons of hot pink stretch tape across

the whole cart, and put a big SOLD tag on them — and leave them in the middle of the nursery. Within a short time, you will start to see people looking at them, picking a tag out of the flat to read it, maybe even stopping a salesperson to ask questions about them, like "Are there more of these somewhere? What can you tell me about these? Can you order me some, too?"

I've seen this working in action so many times it's quite entertaining to test it out with all kinds of plants and products. It's in our nature to want what someone else is interested in. If they thought it was a cool plant, maybe it's something I'd want, too.

Hand It Over

The next trick I learned and continue to use to this day is this — when you are bent over a table of plants deadheading, watering or merchandising and a customer is within range of you to greet them, grab a plant off the table and hand it to them.

"Did you know that this plant's name is Wilma? Isn't she lovely? She actually has a first AND a last name, it's Wilma

Goldcrest. She's a lemon cypress. Do you know how to greet her properly to get the BEST lemon fragrance ever? No? Oh, let me show you!" Then you proceed to explain how rubbing the foliage releases those amazingly fragrant lemon oils and that this plant requires regular petting to be at her happiest.

This technique works with any age, male or female, and the more fun you have with it, the better! Hand a child a little lambs ear plant and teach them all about how soft and fuzzy it is while also explaining to the parent how tough and drought tolerant it is in the landscape.

"Does this one have a name, too?" "Of course, let's call it stachys, but what would YOU name it?"

Now we have our customers involved in an experiential sale; they're having fun, they're learning and, even if they don't buy either of those plants they were fondling with such love and care, you've now created a safe, relational space where they might be comfortable with you to ask questions about their real mission in the garden center.

"Can you show me some easy plants to grow from seed?"

"Certainly, let's go over here where I can show you the seed racks...."

(Walking past the herb table...)

"Oh! We have to stop here on our way to the seeds quickly, you MUST smell this new black basil we just got in. Have you ever used this in your cooking? Rub those leaves and tell me what you think."

See what we did there? 🌿

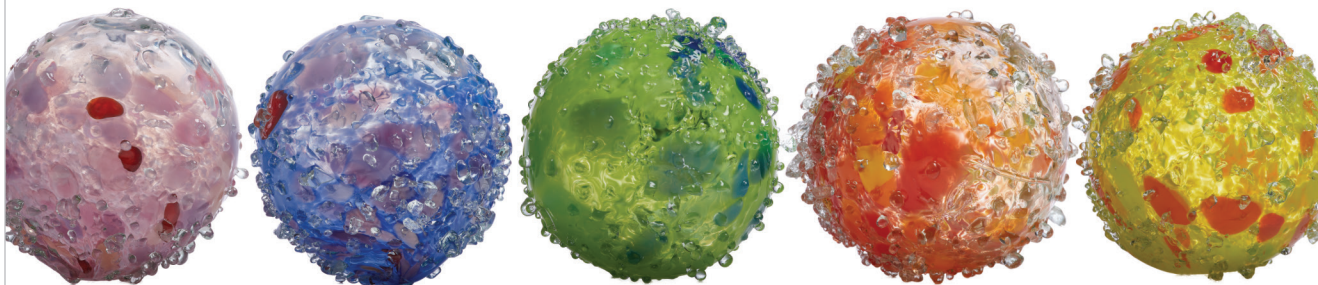


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