

DOES THE IN-STORE EXPERIENCE MATTER?

Garden centers should consider whether it's time to move beyond fulfillment and onto experience.



By Stan Pohmer

I recently celebrated my birthday (I defer on saying how old, but suffice it to say that if they actually had a lit candle for each year on the cake, our local fire department would have been called to extinguish the blaze!) with my family and somehow the conversation came around to shopping.

I think it all started when my wife said that she had just run to the local Target store to pick up some hors d'oeuvres for the party and my Gen X daughter-in-law seemed a little surprised by that, as she said she doesn't physically go to the store much anymore. She orders almost all of her grocery essentials (and much of everything else) online and has it delivered or ready for pick up (BOPIS).

She suggested that with two young kids and a full-time career, she can order almost everything the family needs online at her convenience while she's sitting at the kids' soccer practices, watching TV at home or during her lunch hour, and then have it delivered or ready for pickup at a time convenient for her. The whole process is about saving her time and making it most convenient for her life and lifestyle.

Keeping up with the Retailers

This response begged for my next question: How, without physically going into the mass marketer or supermarket, could she keep up to date about new items, flavors or impulse purchase opportunities the retailers introduced that might interest her? I guess I shouldn't have been shocked by her response that she kept up to speed on new stuff through emails she received from the retailers, Pinterest, and her social media contacts on Facebook and Instagram.

And occasionally, when her kids want to see a selection of toys to select from, for example, she'll physically head to the store with them and, while there, she'll do a run of the store to see what's new (so she can order it online!). So that's essentially the ordering and fulfillment process for life's essentials as she sees it. And I'd venture an educated guess that there are many other consumers out there with these same attitudes and outlook.

Specialty Stores Offer Specialty Experiences

That said, my son and my daughter-in-law are avid family campers, and my son is into 50- and 100-mile ultimate trail running (he's long past mere marathons). Do they ever order any of the equipment and supplies needed for camping or the specialty running shoes and water camel packs or energy foods required for extended trail running

What can your garden center do to stand out in a crowded marketplace to develop brand affinity with your customers?

online? Absolutely not! They'll spend hours browsing and shopping in specialty retail stores, like Patagonia and REI for camping items, and Gear West for running stuff.

So I asked them what the attraction was to these specialty stores, and again, I shouldn't have been surprised by their responses. First, they are passionate about these activities; they had personal and emotional ties to them, and they found extreme pleasure and enjoyment in these activities.

And there were a few other reasons that they favored these retailers over general merchandise stores (and some other specialty stores as well!). First and foremost is the fact that the sales team members at these stores

were experts in their respective activities; they personally participated in their fields of camping and trail running, so they had high credibility.

Second, they had the opportunity to "test" the product before they purchased it. For example, at Gear West, they had a treadmill set up with cameras to record your gait and movements, so they could offer guidance on selecting the opportune running shoes and even suggesting changes in stride, etc. ... all recommendations made by experts with extensive experience.

Third, my son and daughter-in-law bought into the image and corporate mission/purpose/core values of these retailers. For example, REI's core purpose is to "... inspire, educate and outfit for a lifetime of outdoor adventure and stewardship" and its core values are: "Authenticity — We are true to the outdoors. Quality — We provide trustworthy products and services. Service — We serve others with expertise and enthusiasm."

Their slogan, "We believe a life outdoors is a life well-lived. We believe that it's in the wild, untamed and natural places that we find our best selves, so our purpose is to awaken a lifelong love of the outdoors, for all" is embraced and lived by their associates (FYI, REI is a worker-owned cooperative) and it resonates with their customers, including my son and his family, making REI and Gear West their retailers of choice for the products they offer.

And my son and daughter-in-law are willing to pay dearly for the products, services, experiences and positive

YOUR NEW FAVORITE PLANTERS

MADE
IN THE
USA

LEAD
& BPA
FREE



Mixed Color Assortment Case

With our best sellers all in one case, you can offer your customer more options in a smaller space. Our Mixed Color Assortment Case features three colors: black, natural and forest green.



Milk Crate Liner™

This liner is perfect for the square space gardening method. It helps plants thrive and grow anywhere. It holds in soil and allows for maximum drainage.

New for 2020, the Smart Pot product you love in new sizes and colors. Show your customers how easy and clean hanging gardens can be with our NoCoco™ Liner, and inspire them to start their own square space garden with our sleek Milk Crate Liner™



NoCoco™ Liner

Our extremely durable, long-lasting wire basket liner helps plants thrive, deters bird damage, prevents soil from leaking, and it won't fray, split or crack.

smartpots.com 405-842-7700



emotional good vibes they get from shopping these stores and using their products!

One can buy a pair of running shoes or a pop-up tent virtually anywhere ... in any manner of retail store or online retailers/fulfillment centers ... and for almost any price you want to pay. Yet, Gear West and REI have made a conscious effort to carve out a brand identity that appeals to both the dedicated users of their products as well as those customers who want to be perceived as active participants/users of these products.

Applying the Concept to Garden Centers

Increasingly, floriculture and horticulture products are available in more retail spaces than ever before, and, sometime in the near future, will be available for online ordering and home delivery. What can your garden center do to stand out in a crowded marketplace to develop the kind of brand affinity that REI and Gear West have with their customers?

Christopher P. Ramey of Affluent Insights summarized this as: “Two transactions take place in a retail store: The first is between the consumer’s mind/feelings and the store environment (including experience, product, etc.). The question is, how easy and pleasurable it is to buy our product? Any pain point can and will punish profitability by killing the second monetary transaction. Customers take



home memories — and hopefully product. Any retailer interested only in the latter is doomed.”

Only you can determine and create your future. Will your path be fulfillment or experience? Your call... 🌱

Stan Pohmer is president of Pohmer Consulting Group in Minnetonka, Minnesota. He can be reached at spohmer@pohmer-consulting.com or 612.605.8799.

conant[®]
functional Home & Garden Décor

Visit Us At The National Hardware Show
Las Vegas • May 5-7 • Booth #12014



Jeffersonian Kinetic Wind Vane

the latest “MUST HAVE” item
coming to
our BEST SELLING Jeffersonian Series

- Timeless sophistication and purpose
- Industry leading lifetime warranty
- Free moving and durable
- Top quality brass

LEADING DECORATIVE WEATHER INSTRUMENT MANUFACTURER

www.conantcollections.com | 214 Eastern Ave, Annapolis, MD 21403 | 1-800-638-0428 | sales@conantcollections.com