

YOUR SECRET SAUCE...

These intangibles will create the secret sauce that will set you apart from the pack.



By Stan Pohmer

As you are about to embark on the most challenging months of your spring selling season, I tried to come up with something motivating and inspiring that could help cheer you on and I stumbled upon a random quote in a newsletter published by Pam Danziger: “The trends toward localism, connections to nature, well-being and the natural resilience and strength of humanity will all resonate at this time. The luxury industry will prosper by finding routes to solving the issues that we all have and offering solutions along with more reasons to purchase. This will engage the customer.”

This quote speaks to your strengths and your opportunities, and also serves as a challenge.

Your Strengths

Analyzing this quote, let's first review the strengths as your customer sees you.

- Local ... think climatized products grown by you or from growers in your community, the right products for your zone offered at the right time. Think sustainability and reduced carbon footprint. Think about community involvement, like sponsoring the town Little League team. And think about the economic benefits of keeping the sales dollars within your community.
- Connections to nature ... when people are under stress or dealing with the unknown, as they have been for the past year with the COVID pandemic, they tend to seek simplicity and getting back to their roots, and nothing speaks to this like the activity of gardening.
- Connections to well-being ... as an industry, we've always known that plants and flowers add to one's quality of life and lifestyle, and an estimated 16 million new customers figured that out for themselves last year.

Just being around our products can deliver emotional and physiological benefits. And with more staycations, customers are using our products to enhance both their indoor and outdoor home décor.

- Natural resilience and strength of humanity ... taking a small plant, tending to it, nurturing it with water, fertilizer and weeding, and watching it grow is a microcosm of the story of life itself. It takes some commitment and dedication, providing a sense of purpose and accomplishment. And plants, flowers and the activity of gardening are one of the few things that are 100% non-partisan — things that can be shared and equally enjoyed with people of any age or culture.

And I agree with the author of the quote that our industry is considered a luxury by most consumers. Though we all know the power of plants and flowers, most customers don't perceive our products are essential to their well-being and, as a result, we are still considered a deferrable purchase.

The primary reason for this misperception is that we, as an industry and individual retailers, haven't communicated this power to them. Now, that said, a lot of new customers figured this out on their own last year, when they had the time and money available during the height of the pandemic and were looking for activities to invest in, and they found us. Ideally, these new customers had a great experience with you and our products, discovered the benefits, enjoyed success, and will be back again this year!

Your Opportunities

The last part of the quote deals with “offering solutions along with more reasons to purchase” — this, to me, is one of our industry's greatest opportunities. It's relatively easy to advertise a low retail price on a product to get folks to visit your store once. But the challenge (and opportunity for repeat sales and developing a lifetime value mentality) is to provide the solutions — whether product, knowledge, education, service, etc. — that satisfies their needs, wants and desires, making them successful and eager to return.

Even having just a little insight into how your customer thinks and understanding what motivates their decisions

and behaviors can provide you with a tremendous advantage in planning to provide and address their needs. What's important to them needs to be important to you!!

Your Advantage

So, what's your competitive advantage — those things that make you unique and compelling to your customer, enticing them to come to you rather than one of your competitors? What gets those 'newbies,' those 16 million new pandemic-era customers that found us last year back into your store on a regular basis this year? Many of your big-box competitors have really amped up their game, especially with their growers taking over the responsibilities for product selection, inventory management flow and timing, display and product maintenance.

As a rule, you and most of your competitors have all focused and executed well on the traditional four P's of marketing — product, place, price and promotion. So, what can set you apart from the rest of the pack?

I believe that your advantage comes from these intangibles:

- **People.** Today's consumer wants to be treated as an individual; personalization is a key driver to building loyalty. Everyone on your team that interfaces with your customers can have more of an impact on your brand image with the consumer than your products can. Your employees can truly make a major difference!
- **Pride.** People like to shop where employees feel good

about where they work and the company they work for, who believe in the products they sell, and the value of the customers they serve.

- **Passion.** Of all the industries I've been involved with over the years, the people in our industry exemplify the love and passion they have for the products they deal with and the industry they're involved in; they realize that they are blessed to work in one with nature and understanding that our products can truly make a positive difference in people's lives and lifestyles. Our challenge and opportunity is to share with and convey our passion to our customers. What a differentiator this could be for you!

It's possible that your competitors might be able to be in the game with you on the traditional four P's. But it's doubtful that they'll be able to match your success if you put your focus on the other three P's of people, pride, and passion, which all directly deliver on your customer needs and expectations, and enhance their overall experience.

So, what's your recipe for success? In addition to your unique capabilities of agility, responsiveness, and adaptability, add people, pride, and passion to create the secret sauce that will set you apart from the pack and truly make a difference for your customers! 🌱

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