



FOR THE Birds

IGCs should offer a range of products and provide value to get birding customers to flock to their stores.

By Teresa McPherson

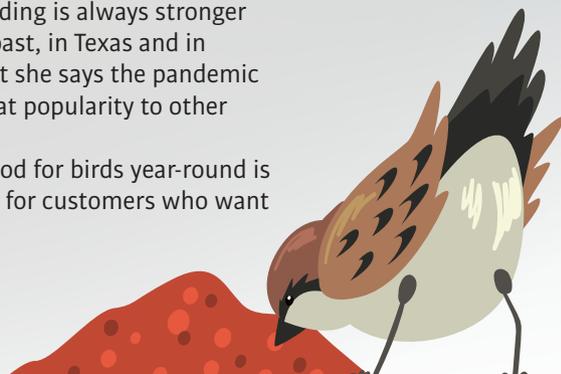
The pandemic has brought a flock of new birders; so how can you bring them into your store? Here are some ideas and suggestions from leading birding suppliers.

Future-Focused Selling

Tatsiana Thomson is in charge of digital marketing and sales at Brome Bird Care Inc. She says that pandemic

demand exceeded their expectations and their inventory. “Our best sellers, our not-so-best sellers — everything went! Bird feeding is always stronger on the East Coast, in Texas and in California,” but she says the pandemic has shifted that popularity to other areas as well.

Providing food for birds year-round is a win not only for customers who want





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to attract birds to their backyards in the winter, but for garden centers as well. “There are a lot of studies done showing that birds need our help more in the winter, when natural food is hard to come by,” she says. “The birds that have access to supplementary food before their breeding season have healthier babies and stay healthier themselves. When we attended the IGC show in Chicago in 2019 we talked to a number of garden centers that carried our products. They told us that they stayed open in the winter because of birds and bird feeding. Carrying our products year-round kept them in business year-round.”

She says the best way to get people into birding and bird feeding is to educate customers and offer them a squirrel-proof bird feeder from the very beginning. “We find that a lot of people who do not buy our feeders at first eventually come back to us because they are so frustrated with squirrels emptying and destroying their feeders. Plus whenever they do a bit of research on our products they see that Squirrel Buster bird feeders have over 15,000 five-star reviews and we have already sold over 5 million products. And those who do not come back or discover the magic of Squirrel Buster feeders simply get discouraged and abandon bird feeding altogether.”

So her advice to IGCs is: “Stock a great feeder that works and a bag of black oil sunflower seeds to go with the feeder and your customers will come back to do more business with you.”

Form and Function

“Our best sellers continue to be the items that can be placed anywhere,” says Erin Everhart, creative manager, CTW Home Collection. “For example, a birdhouse on a yard stake that could be placed next to your window, under a tree no matter the size of the user’s yard space. People that work from home want to have items in their line of sight, so any item that can be easily moved is a great idea.”

She says that, while functional items are great, IGCs should also offer attractive pieces. “Our most popular birdhouses and bird feeders are creative and fun to look at no matter if a bird is around or not,” she says. “Sometimes what is needed is a lovely garden space that makes us feel good when we use it.”

Everhart also suggests that IGCs take an indoor/outdoor approach. “Try offering products that can be decorative inside as well as outside. Where we have found success is having an assortment of versatile items. That way, people can use them as decorative elements when it is too cold to enjoy the outdoors or use them in their gardens when the warmer months come around.”

A Birding Destination

During the early COVID-19 lockdowns, most birding supply stores were able to remain open, and the entire birding category exploded and bird feeder supplies were quickly wiped out, says Bill Gleason, owner of Wildlife Sciences. “Consumable food items, being mostly domestically sourced, were able to turn and turn and turn. Consumable bird foods such as seed and suet are good category drivers anyway. During the pandemic, we’ve added perhaps 25-35% more birding customers. The key question now is how many of these new birders will stay for the long-term.”

Gardening and backyard bird feeding are naturally a great fit. “According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, over 56 million Americans fed wild birds around their homes as of 2016,” he says. “Garden centers can tap into this market with many of their same gardening customers. If already offering bird supplies, consider becoming a birding destination.”



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“Offer a nice range of bird feeders for seed, suet and hummingbirds from basic to decorative. If possible, display the feeders hanging across the aisle. Create a backyard feel in the bird aisle. Offer a range of bird foods. For example, bags of black oil sunflowers up to pricier no-waste mixes. Offer basic suet cakes up to suet balls and combo packs.”

To become a birding destination, he says that IGCs need to be competitively priced on certain basic items, such as sunflower seeds and suet cakes. “Birding consumers will know the value of these basics and if they see a store is priced high on the basics, they may assume everything is high. You don’t have to be the lowest price, just in the ballpark. Sales for other birding supplies will soon follow.”

He says that birding needs vary by region of the country. “For example, suet does best in the northern half of the country into the Southeast, while hummingbird does best out west. These items still sell across the whole country; you just need to adjust the offering.

Good resources abound to learn about birding and regional differences. Check out the ‘Birding’ tab on the Wildlife Sciences.net website or search ‘Bird Watching’ on the U.S. Fish & Wildlife website (www.fws.gov) to get started. We at Wildlife Sciences have ready-made plan-o-grams for suet and related offerings by region.”

He says that, ideally, retailers should participate in backyard birding themselves so they can relate their own experiences to their customers. “IGCs may need to make seasonal changes to their product lineup. Through personal experience, they will find what works in their region and demonstrate that birds will continue to visit feeders throughout the year.”




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