

the local resource

There's momentum behind the local market scene. Are you tapping into it?

By Gerry Giorgio

Locally grown. You're all aware of the trend. If you've been to a farmers market lately, you certainly have encountered some locally grown produce and maybe even have seen some promotion around it, telling everyone that they are a local producer. Other small businesses are offering products made by local companies, too. Even larger grocery stores are getting in on it. Although they have a long way to go, they seem to want to inform their customers that some of their produce or other products were produced locally.

The trend of locally produced products in a world of globalization seems counterintuitive. But actually, it could be a good move for your business to promote yourselves as a local producer. There is momentum behind a local market. Have you looked into it?

Consider yourselves lucky. Some industries are nothing but global. It takes great effort to turn the momentum of ever-expanding markets into one that serves a very specific and local customer base. But you are lucky because horticulture in general has remained by and large a local network of growers and retailers. So, the good news is that you are already a local producer! You just need to remind your customers and promote it to your prospects.

Remember to Remind

First, it's important to know that buying local means something different, depending on opinion. Some say it's buying from sources within 100 miles. Others say 500 miles. Still others might reference whether the product came from the same state in which they reside. But you can get an idea of the range. Define your local area and promote it.

People respond to and buy from local producers for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it's a combination of things that make people want to buy local. So, what does it mean to offer a "locally grown" product? Let's look at some reasons people buy local and see how that fits for your business.

Sustainability — Feeling like you are helping the environment and being sustainable is one reason. If products don't have to travel far, that saves energy that would otherwise be used to bring it to market. Garden centers typically buy from growers that are within the same state or are at least regional, traveling only one or two states to their final destination.

Local Economy — When you buy locally, you are putting your neighbors to work. Given the option, many people will consider their purchase a contribution to the economy of the community.

Family and Independent Businesses — Quite a few people like the idea of giving their money to a family business as opposed to a large corporation. When you tell people about your family, company history, products and services, they feel good about doing business with you.

Less Packaging — Many times, an attractive feature of buying local is that less packaging is needed. Products don't have to travel far and can be brought to market without it. If you are a grower-retailer, how you offer your plants and in what packaging (container) possibly can be reconsidered.

Finally, having a competitive edge can be a byproduct of a local product offering. If one ever wanted a differentiator or alternate choice to the mass merchant, local products are the one! Large retailers desperately want to offer local products. But this is difficult for them and easy for you. You're already there. Take advantage of it while you have an open door.

Make Sure to Market

Once you decide to offer your product on a local level, you will need to market it as such. You might already promote your



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Use posters to show inspiring imagery and display cards to offer more detail about your product to help shoppers in the decision-making process.

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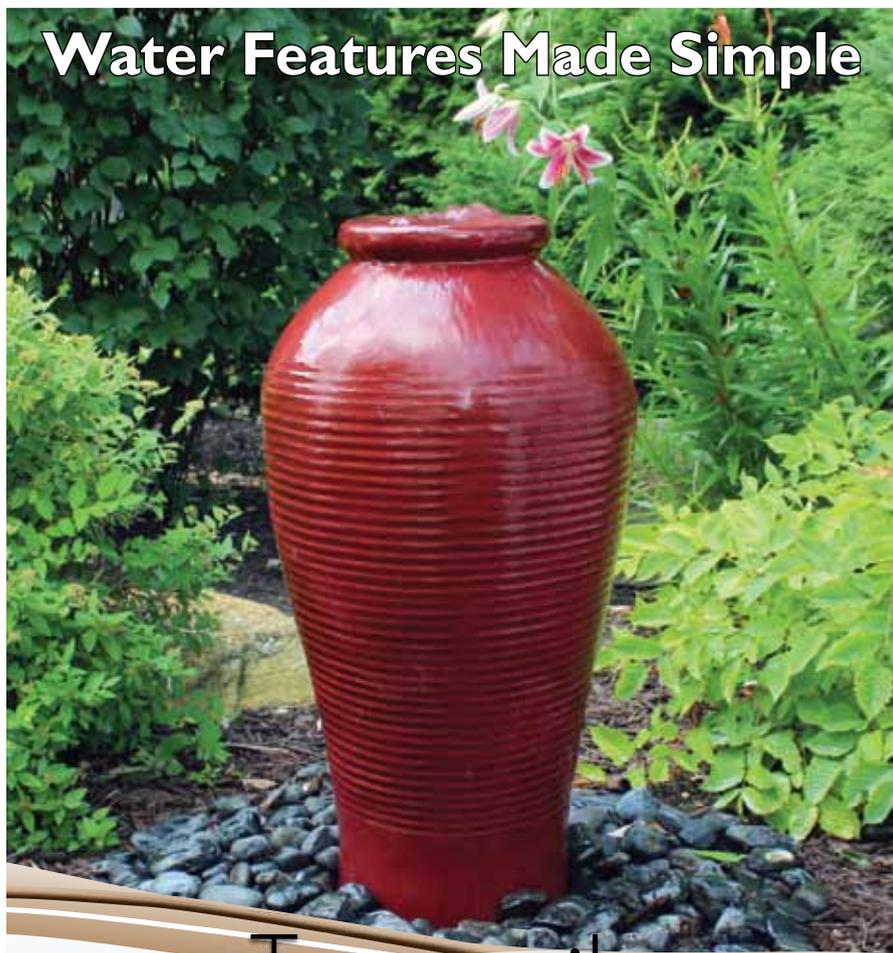
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MERCHANDISING



Establish a locally grown brand or identity and promote it through well placed logos.

company through print, your website and social media. This is good and your grown local message should be added here. However, did you know that 50 percent of all consumer products are marketed at the retail store? They are promoted in the displays and on the labels of the products you pick up. In other words, the message is given at the point of purchase (POP). That's quite a bit. And there is a good reason for it. Advertising is expensive. To make a real impact, you have to have a large budget for it. Working social media is a great plan to bring people into your store. But ultimately, the best place to give any promotional message is right there at the retail display, when the customer is there and ready to make a decision.

The time the shopper spends in front of a retail display is the moment of truth for any product. So, why not put some effort into creating signage that promotes you as a local source along with your other unique features you wish to promote? By using digital printing resources, it's actually easy to create customized, hyper-local messaging on signs and posters.

Each element in a retail display can have a different purpose. It is important to match your message with the right sign and location. Here are some guidelines to creating customized POP for a local market.

Banners — These are large elements that can be seen from a distance. They should be simple, contrasting color and highly visible from at least 20 feet away. Just letting people know you are a local producer is enough here.

Posters — Posters are typically placed in the immediate vicinity of the display. They should be easily read from a distance of 10 feet. They offer a great opportunity for inspirational imagery, graphics, colors and an expanded message around your company as a local resource. Keep your messages simple. Use bullet points, not sentences.

Display Cards — Display Cards can be a very important merchandising element, as they are seen up close. Make them visible from a distance of 3 feet. Here you can be more product specific, or at least talk about a category of products. Tell your locally produced story in more detail. Talk about your company or family and why your locally produced products are beneficial. Be informative so shoppers can make a good decision. Again, present in bullet points, not sentences.

In the recent past, a customized banner or poster in low volumes was not easily, efficiently or affordably done. But with advancements in large-format digital printing, it is now possible to buy a single customized banner, poster or sign. This fits well with a local or even hyper-local market where regional nuances of your products or company can be conveyed.

Locally produced products by family businesses and promoted right at the point-of-sale can be a good approach to consider. Combine and coordinate your website, print promotion, social media and point-of-sale messaging to tell the valuable story of your locally produced products and their benefits to your customers, as well as their contribution to a local and personal economy. **LGR**



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