

TREND WATCHING

Consumers are changing. Are you? By staying on top of the latest trends, you can help ensure your garden center is relevant to today's consumer.

By Tim Hodson

Consumers are reacting very differently than they did just three or four years ago. And reaching new gardening customers can be a challenge. But by understanding the latest trends, you can gain some insight into how consumers are behaving.

Here are the trends that TrendWatching.com says retailers should be watching out for and capitalizing on: Business as unusual; Urbany; Real-time reviews; (F)Luxury; Mass mingling; Eco-easy; Tracking and alerting; Embedded generosity; Profile myning; and Maturalism.

Lawn & Garden Retailer recently sat down with Marshall Dirks, Proven Winners' director of marketing, to discuss a few of these trends and how they can possibly impact retailers and growers.

Business as Unusual

Instead of doing the "same old thing" year in and year out, retailers need to get involved with

their customers and do things differently. No matter what business you are in, do not assume that you know everything about your customers or your business. You don't. You need to move with the culture.

Ask questions. If you give consumers a voice or a forum, Dirks says, they are very willing to tell you what they think about your products — as well as what they expect from you. What you learn will be incredibly invaluable.

Urbany

Today's consumers are becoming increasingly more urbanized. Urban sprawl has taken over many rural areas and turned them into urban areas. This "urbany" is leading to a more sophisticated, demanding shopper. Garden centers need to deliver a "relevant message" to these urban shoppers.

Urbany has also led to changes in how people garden. People living in apartments and

condominiums don't have as much room to garden but they still want to enjoy the gardening experience.

That's why Dirks says small space gardening continues to climb in popularity. And it is also why plant breeders are looking for genetics that produce small, compact plants and shrubs.

Even if the gardener does have the room to garden, she may not have as much time to take care of a lot of large plants so they will look for smaller, easier-to-care-for varieties.

Real-Time Reviews

In today's wired world, people talk. You can be sure that whatever your garden center is selling, consumers will be posting it on their blogs, Facebook, Yelp and other websites. They will review, critique and talk about it en masse, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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CONSUMER TRENDS

before they make their purchases, they will look at these sites for information. These shoppers want to know what other people in their area think of you and your products, so you better know what is being said online.

(F)Luxury

Trendwatching.com says the definition of luxury is in a state of flux for consumers. "Luxury will be whatever consumers want," Dirks adds.

What one person thinks is luxury, another might think it is a necessity. Consumers want something that will make them feel special. Does the product/service provide exclusivity? Extravagance? Time savings? An escape? Or a combination of any of these? Dirks says garden centers can create a "special connection" with their customers by providing them this type of luxury.

Mass Mingling

Once again, it is an online world. Consumers are meeting up online in places like chat rooms and other social networking sites and then they are taking those connections to the real world.

Twitter, Facebook, Four Square, Yelp are just a few websites that are bringing consumers together in places they have never met up before. This means you need to know "where the action is" and be sure to take part in it.

Eco-Easy

Another thing Trendwatching.com says companies will need to do in order to reach meaningful sustainability goals is to "forcefully make it 'easy' for consumers to be more green." One way to do this is to limit the products/services that may be available to a consumer so they have to be mindful of their environmental impact.

Tracking and Alerting


Many people want to (and some need to) be connected at all times. Their smartphones are helping them do that. As more and more consumers purchase smartphones, the amount of information that is available to them (and to companies) continues to grow. These phones help consumers fulfill their "info lust" (the desire for detailed information) and influence their shopping behavior. Shopping habits can be tracked and consumers can be alerted to specials.

Embedded Generosity

Consumers also want to feel good about the companies they do business with. They want to know that their purchases will have an "embedded" effect

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and the company is contributing to causes that the consumer also believes in.

Garden centers can tap into this effect by sponsoring, promoting or participating in events or causes, such as breast cancer awareness, that mean something to their customers. By demonstrating this type

of relevance, you can nurture your existing customer base and cultivate new customers that support these causes.

Profile Myning

Currently there are more than 500 million active users on Facebook — half of them log on to Facebook on

any given day. The numbers are staggering. And so is the opportunity.

All of the different types of online profiles and social networking sites create a potential digital gold mine for marketers. By culling the right information from these online profiles, businesses can create customized products/services for consumers

that they say they need and want.

Dirks says smart companies will use this information to create websites that do some of the work for the consumer before they even get to that website and enhance their experience on that website (and with that company) — and be more relevant to that consumer.

Maturalism

Trendwatching.com says, in the “anything-goes online world,” consumers are much more outspoken, and even risqué, with many of their opinions and they are not bashful about sharing them.

Companies can successfully deal with this “maturalism” by taking risks and stepping outside their comfort zone to communicate with their customers and potential customers in ways that they have never tried previously.

Tim Hodson is editorial director of Lawn & Garden Retailer. He can be reached at thodson@sgcmail.com or at 847.391.1019. You can learn more about these types of trends and help your business stay more in tuned and relevant with today's consumers by going to www.trendwatching.com.

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