

# THE RIGHT ANGLES

Manufacturers and retailers must act as a united front and offer the customer multiple touch points to build brand loyalty, raise awareness and complete the purchase.

By Lynn Switanowski-Barrett

**W**hat is the newest shape in garden center retail for 2014? It's the triangle. While simple in shape, this three-sided symbol actually holds the key to both retail and wholesale success in the business of every garden industry participant — this season and beyond. In fact, as you will see, the wholesaler/retailer/consumer triangle (Collaboration Triangle) is a critical new piece of the retail landscape in 2014 and will continue to grow in the years to come.

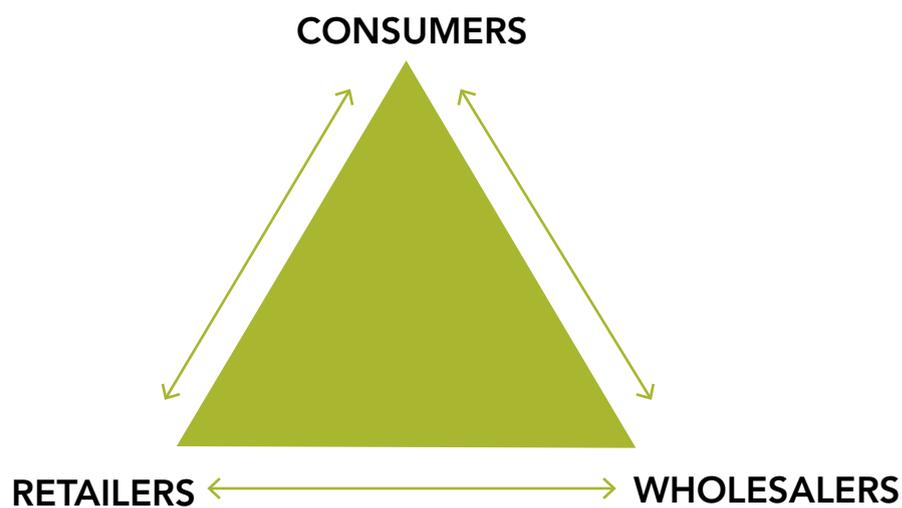
Why is the Collaboration Triangle so important? In the past, manufacturers, distributors and growers have focused on, what they felt, was their only customer — retailers.

Today it's critical to address both retailers and consumers as manufacturers prepare products and services to come to market. In fact, the best-in-class manufacturers, distributors, growers and suppliers understand that working with retailers and creating marketing programs that engage end-user consumers on the road to garner brand loyalty are the new paths to long-term business success.

As you can see (Diagram 1) the triangle offers two-way communication between all sides and offers consumers a chance to learn more about products and brands directly from the origin as well as from the retailer. This creates a chance for all to engage more frequently with more

robust information and to deepen the brand loyalty among all sides of the triangle on a continual basis among multiple communication points.

The critical question is how can both wholesalers and retailers identify the opportunities created thru collaboration to deliver products, services and marketing messages to consumers that will help determine their long-term success? Here are a few steps throughout the product development and brand building phase that will help build the triangle and build long-term brand success for all involved.



Conversations about products, services and marketing programs are all part of these ongoing two-way dialogues.

**1** Manufacturers should develop integrated product programs with retail partners. Retailers should share consumer insights, shopper behaviors and shifts on a regular basis with manufacturing partners to help invigorate and inspire the innovation cycle with appropriate next-generation products. Where appropriate (seasonally, geographically) retailers should also participate on customization of products that will help maximize the customer experience. Manufacturers should also develop product education programs that retailers can easily share with consumers via multiple media channels.

**2** Manufacturers should create direct-to-consumer marketing programs that support and showcase retailer marketing activity. These marketing programs should speak directly to consumers about products, features and benefits.

Diagram 1

# MANAGEMENT

Manufacturers can also create retail locators and event calendars on their own websites to help showcase retail partnerships (also using social media to spread the message about retailer events and activities). The key is to create product testimonial/suggestion programs that link retailer and consumers to a brand.

To take this collaboration even further, manufacturers should also consider offering retailers pre-developed marketing content and programs (especially social media content such as posts, pictures and videos of and about products) and customer engaging contests and giveaways.



Manufacturers should create merchandising programs that help retailers engage consumers (and track habits). In addition to marketing programs, manufacturers can help consumer interactions by creating interactive displays that help retailers connect with consumers at point of purchase. Using technology in these tools can help retailers showcase modern marketing approaches and form a closer bond with tech-savvy customers shopping today. They can also offer and support in-store sales programs that drive consumer loyalty (handheld devices, mobile processing, QR codes on products) to help retailers showcase products more effectively on shelves and displays.

## Time to Unite

Obviously the maximization of the retail triangle comes from all sides both creating and utilizing the programs created. If manufacturers create content as suggested above, but retailers do little to utilize the tools, the consumer will be forced to look elsewhere for information, and then, both manufacturers and retailers alike run the risk of losing these customers to another purchase channel.

The key for the collaboration triangle to work effectively is for it to be seamless in the connection between consumers. As more and more consumers do research online before shopping for products and services, manufacturers and retailers must act as a united front and offer the customer multiple touch points to build brand loyalty, raise awareness and lead to purchase occasion. **LGR**



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