



MERCHANDISING

Not Your Typical Pop-Up

During a three-day sale, Nectar & Company's second annual Garden Market used concept shops to create an unforgettable experience.

By Pete Mihalek

For a floral design business that focuses heavily on the art of container gardening, Nectar & Company of Macon, Ga., sure has another art form down pat — the art of inspirational merchandising.

Need proof? Just look to the company's wildly successful second annual Garden Market (April 19-22) — a pop-up shop held under a 60' x 60' tent in the parking lot of Macon's Museum of Arts & Sciences that attracted more than 2,000 guests (not including children).

With five themed concept shops, live music, local food samples, how-to presentations, chef demonstrations and kids' activities, Nectar & Company's founder Carmen Johnston referred to this event as not just a plant sale, but an "all-out spring garden event."

In a press release promoting the Garden Market, Johnston adds, "I firmly believe if we are going to attract the next generation of consumers we can no longer merchandise our plants using traditional ways. We must flip convention as the fashion world does every season."

Have You Heard?

Leading up to the Garden Market, the Nectar & Company team was proactive in getting the word out about the market.

"Our media kit took the shape of a garden

goodie bag," says Betsy Jones, Nectar's director of public relations. "All of our local news stations never had an opportunity to cover an event as unique as this one; it was new and they loved that." The colorful setting also provided local press a chance to gather B-roll.

"Local news also took advantage of our offer to do a two-minute container garden segment," Jones adds. "While Carmen did that, she had a chance to work in info about the Garden Market and why it was unique from any other plant sale."

In addition to local radio and television appearances, Nectar & Company also ran 10 radio commercials and rented space on a billboard.

Somewhere to Park It

Nectar & Company's Garden Market found retail refuge in the parking lot of Macon's Museum of Arts & Sciences.

The museum recently opened a brand new planetarium and it was interested in generating foot traffic to show it off.

"We give back to our community, so we're fortunate enough to have a great relationship with many members within our community; this relationship with the museum was already established," Johnston says. "I approached the director of the museum and told her my idea and she immediately said 'yes.'"

After the event, the museum director told



All Photos: Jenny Evelyn Photography

Johnston she “completely underestimated” the crowd and that the museum “never had this many people in one weekend.”

Concepts Shopped

Leading up to the Friday-to-Sunday sale, the Garden Market kicked off with a “first digs”

Lunch & Learn with celebrity horticulturalist James Farmer on Thursday. Additionally, Lunch & Learn attendees were the first people allowed to shop the market — promoted as having “first digs.”

Later that night, created specifically with the younger crowd in mind, Nectar hosted a catered event called Rhythm & Bloom.

“We had a fun, young, hip band that we knew would attract Gen X and Gen Y — bluegrass and barbecue,” Johnston says. Money generated from the ticket sales of both events was donated to the museum.

“We were able to attract all demographics through these two events on day one — from master gardeners, boomers and seniors to generations X and Y, and some people who would never step into a garden center otherwise.”

On Friday, Saturday and Sunday, the Garden Market was open to the general public.

“The whole purpose of it was to really educate Gen X and Gen Y on how to decorate their homes inside and out with flowers,” Johnston explains.

Under the tent, guests were treated to five active concept shops:

DIY in 1-2-3. This plant-by-numbers shop clearly divided sun and shade plants and flatscreen televisions were up showing guests how to arrange the plants.

Ballroom in Bloom. Playing off of “Dancing With The Stars” and the season’s hottest color, Tangerine Tango, a ballroom dancer (and Nectar team member) brought this shop to life.

Grillin’ and Chillin’. The foodie-centric shop featured a local chef, samples, recipes and garden grown ingredients.

Spring Time in Outer Space. Inspired by the museum, this shop highlighted fun and funky plants like the black petunia, air plants, succulents and terrariums.

Taste of the Old Thymes. “Preserving Pros” were on hand at this shop to provide instruction on preserving and pickling and to share samples.

“If you just put a bunch of plants on a bench, you’re not showing that you care about your

plants, so why should your customers?” Johnston asks. “If you make an effort to create some excitement and show the personality behind each plant, your customers are going to get that.” **LGR**

See Her There

Carmen Johnston and her Nectar & Co. team will be at OFA Short Course (Columbus, Ohio, July 14-17) to speak about “Merchandising on a Budget” and “Pop-Up Retail Locations.” Visit www.ofashortcourse.org to learn more and register.

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