

BETTER WHEN BARTERED

Looking to give your garden center's layout a little extra oomph but don't have the extra cash to make renovations? Barter your space for some much needed improvements.

By Pete Mihalek

Look around your garden center. It's nothing but "prime real estate." It's a showroom in every sense of the word. From fertilizer spikes to marigold flats, everything is on display for your customers.

So it's only natural that you try and take advantage of that land in any way you can, which is why it's so important to cross merchandise. Consistent cross merchandising, every good manager knows, is key when it comes to maximizing product visibility and the full potential of a sale at the register. But have you ever considered taking this in-store cross promotion a step further and taking it to another local business?

The following garden centers have, and with the local partnerships they've

developed, the visibility of their businesses have grown and the look and feel of their stores have improved.

Easy on the Ears

It's hard to miss the crisp, clear music of Bob Marley welcoming you into Earthscapes Garden Room in Palm Harbor, Fla. On the contrary, it's relatively easy to miss where the music is actually coming from — that is until you take a closer look. Worked into borders or hidden beneath benches, rock speakers are positioned naturally throughout the grounds creating a full-bodied, surround sound for customers to enjoy.

Earthscapes' owner Mike Van Coulter got the idea for rock speakers while



The unassuming, yet robust rock speakers at Earthscapes Garden Room were installed free of charge by a local audio/visual company in exchange for signage and better product visibility.

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MANAGEMENT

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La Crosse Floral depends on prizes from area businesses to make its Boss' Day event succeed. Linda Zoerb, president at La Crosse Floral, says a good way to pay for services or gifts purchased at local businesses is by offering that operation a gift certificate to your garden center as opposed to dipping into your cash flow.

touring model homes. "You'd hear this great sound coming from the pool of a model home and the sound was actually coming from 32 rock speakers set up around it," he says.

It wasn't long before the inspired Van Coulter got in touch with acquaintance and Music & Cinema owner John Worth to set something up. Music & Cinema is an indoor and outdoor audio/visual company.

The agreement between the two companies is somewhat simple in nature: The installation, implementation and maintenance of the outdoor audio system is free of charge for Earthscapes. In exchange, whenever Earthscapes' landscape design team is working on a new project, they provide Music & Cinema business referrals.

Another highlight of the agreement for audio/visual company is the use of Earthscapes' property. "Catalogs are great, but not very hands-on," Van Coulter says. "Our rock speaker set up is a great showroom for their [Music & Cinema's] customers. They send their clients out to check out our store" and then in the process those clients get to see what Earthscapes is all about.

In addition to small Music & Cinema signage selectively placed on some of the more visible speakers, Earthscapes also hands out literature about the speakers for inquisitive customers.


This year, Van Coulter and Worth have plans to take Earthscapes' audio system into the next level. "We're revamping all of our original set up and increasing the number of speakers," Van Coulter says. "We're going to improve our range. We're also working with some pretty cool technology that will allow customers and employees to adjust stations, playlists and volume levels with their iPhones."

Just Down the Road

Not too far from Earthscapes Garden Room, Kerby's Nursery & Landscaping in Seffner, Fla., is making the most out of its relationship with a local water garden

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installation business — Tigerlilly Watergardens. Tony Nelson, owner of Tigerlilly Watergardens, explains that sometimes successful local business partnerships start off on a whim.

"A number of years ago, I was having lunch down the street from Kerby's and decided to stop in," Nelson recounts. "I spoke with the owner. I was hoping I could install one of my water gardens so they could be seen by more people. He said, 'Yeah, no problem, go ahead.'" Tigerlilly has been working with Kerby's ever since.

Maintenance and waning demand are two big reasons many U.S. garden centers are continuing to eliminate the water gardening category from their repertoires. Kerby's partnership with Tigerlilly turns those concerns into a non-issue. In addition to the water feature installations, Tigerlilly also maintains their installed ponds once a week at the nursery.

Kerby's co-owner Mark Kerby explains that in exchange for Nelson's services, the nursery allows a Tigerlilly representative to come in on spring weekends to set up a booth near one of the water features to play a video and share company information with Kerby's customers. Also Kerby's landscaping is proactive when it comes to referring its landscape clients to Tigerlilly.

Nelson's key installation at Kerby's is his most popular product

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— the 11x16-foot pond. He says, “When clients see it in action at Kerby’s, they want it. It’s been a real benefit.” Tigerlilly Watergardens works exclusively with Aquascape pond products. “We’re able to have signs near those installations that list prices and our contact information,” Nelson adds. Kerby’s also provides Tigerlilly Watergardens business cards and literature to those customers interested in having a water feature installed. Nelson says Kerby’s is now known in the community as a good source for ponding and it’s not even their product.

For the nursery, “The water features have really enhanced the feel of our place and the ponds have allowed us to sell water plants out of it,” Kerby says. “Our agreement is a lot of word of mouth. We’re not really trying to make anything off of

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it. That wasn't the point (for us)."

A more recent symbiotic venture between the two businesses is a new free-standing water basin that's sold at Kerby's. "It's good for both of us — they install the fountains into our pottery," he says.

Are there similar opportunities out there for

your garden center? Tigerlilly's Tony Nelson says it best: "It's the kind of thing where you won't know, unless you go out and ask." ☘

Pete Mihalek is managing editor of Lawn & Garden Retailer. He can be reached at pmihalek@sgcmail.com.

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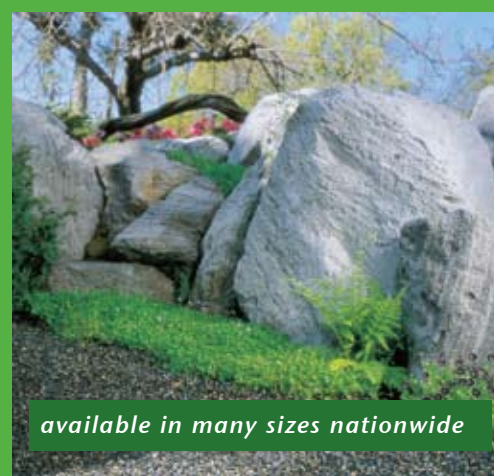
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