



Facebook: The 'X' Files

Get in touch with your younger potential customer base — and show your existing customers how with the times you are — by hopping on Facebook.

By Leslie Finical Halleck

As an independent retailer, two of the most important things you can do to be successful are to stay creative and stay current. We're all looking for ways to stretch our advertising dollars or, better yet, get good promotion for free. Social media outlets such as Facebook offer up opportunities to be both creative and current without spending much of your hard earned cash.

Connect with North Haven Gardens!

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/northhavengardens

Web:

www.nhg.com

Leslie's blog:

growlively.typepad.com

At North Haven Gardens, my marketing/advertising manager, Nikki Crain, and I brainstorm on how we can attract and keep new customers with the lowest cost input. We're also keenly aware that we need to focus on getting younger customers into the store. You have to brainwash them early, right? Get them hooked in their 20s or early 30s, and they're more likely to be loyal to you as they buy homes and get more interested in gardening. Nikki and I are both firmly lodged in Gen X, and we need our friends to become gardening customers. What better way to reach

those people than Facebook? They are not taking the local paper, buying gardening magazines or listening to local gardening radio shows. If they have exposure to any of our traditional means of print advertising, they are probably ignoring it. But they're on Facebook all the time.

Expand Your Base

As Facebook gets more popular, it's not just the younger crowd that's using it. Even my mother is on Facebook now, which shocked me. She forces me to "garden virtually" with her on FarmVille, one of the many ever-present and annoying games on the site. But she loves it. She checks on my farm and tells me when I've neglected things — and what I should plant. She said that she doesn't really feel up to getting out and doing actual garden labor anymore and this is the next best thing. All the satisfaction, none of the work!

It was only back in late summer of 2009 that I decided we needed to give in and start our own

Facebook page for the garden center. Admittedly, I wasn't sure at first whether it would really pay off for us. Nikki and I took on joint ownership of the page, and we each posted items as we had time. We posted events going on at the garden center, photos of new arrivals and timely gardening tips. After just a few months, we had more than 300 friends, and as of today we're up to almost 500. About 90 percent of them are local to the Dallas/Fort Worth area, and the rest come from around the country. Not bad for the time invested.

Offer Incentives

In October 2009, after watching our number of friends increase, I thought I'd like to generate a little more buzz on our page and find a good way to relate our Facebook presence to actual store traffic. I came up with our "Facebook Friend of the Day" promotion. Each day, we randomly pick a person from our friend list and award them the friend of the day designation. We try to pick



the panelists



Kimberly Bird

Calloway's Nursery
Dallas/Forth Worth
and Houston, Texas
mytexasgarden.com



Leslie Finical Halleck

North Haven Gardens
Dallas, Texas
nhg.com



Mark Saidnaway

Pemberton Farms
& Garden Center
Cambridge, Mass.
pembertonfarms.com

friends who are having a birthday. We post the notification on our page and tag the winner to make sure they see it. When they win, they get a \$15 gift certificate that they must pick up in the store by the end of the next business day. If they can't pick it up themselves, they are allowed to bequeath it to a friend who can.

cost much of anything until they are redeemed. I'm happy to pay \$15 to gain a new customer or rekindle the interest of a current one.

Facebook is *free*, folks, but for the labor you or your staff will commit to maintaining the page. It's an easy way to reach people in an "intimate" social space. It also gives you the opportunity to

"Facebook is free but for the labor you or your staff will commit to maintaining the page. ... It also gives you the opportunity to be spontaneous and change content daily."

At first we didn't have many people coming to pick up their certificates. But once folks began to figure out what we were doing, they started posting on our page in hopes of getting picked as the friend of the day. This drives new traffic to our page. Currently, about 75 percent of winners pick up their certificates, and we're still gaining momentum. We're getting brand new customers into the store that either shop when they pick up their certificate or come back later. We also benefit from great word-of-mouth marketing as a result of the promotion. We print the certificates on regular old paper, so they don't really

be spontaneous and change content daily, which you don't have with traditional advertising outlets. It sends the message that you're creative and current — and that's a message customers are looking for these days.

Leslie Finical Halleck is general manager at North Haven Gardens. She can be reached at lhalleck@nhg.com.

LearnMore!

For more information related to this article, go to www.lgrmag.com/lm.cfm/lg031001

Customers WEIGH IN

One cold day in January, GardenHood, a new urban garden center in Atlanta, asked its Facebook fans to name some reasons gardening is better than playing FarmVille. (Don't know FarmVille? Just Google it, and be horrified.)



Fifteen people responded that day, with comments ranging from "FarmVille is just a waste of time" to "Because you can actually smell the roses!"

Melodie McDanal, one of GardenHood's owners, says she then used those customers' responses in her e-newsletter's "Top 10 Reasons to Garden Instead of Playing FarmVille" — and included their names.

Everyone loves to feel more involved in their community, and Facebook just makes it easier!



Lavender Falls Wisteria PP19655



Snow Flurries™ Black Gum PPAF



The Rising Sun™ Redbud PPAF



Burgundy Hearts® Redbud PP19654



Kokomo Sunset™ Daylily PPAF

Outdoor spaces can be *Magical!*
with the right illusions

For more information call 1-877-663-5053 or visit us at gardendebut.com



When Performance Counts.