



# ENCOURAGING NEW LOYALTY

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Discover ways to ensure customer success and get them coming back.

By John Johnston

**O**ur industry has changed so rapidly over the past 10 years — it's hard to keep up with what's important to the retailer. Is it simply sales that keep the bills paid and the business afloat?

Does the in-store experience contribute to building loyalty and repeat customer traffic?

Are we thinking about long-term customer value when we sell our plants, our products and even our service?

Are we creating excitement?

Does success after the initial sale draw that customer back to your store?

## The Learning Experience

Our industry has evolved from a generation of hobbyists who would spend hours in their yards, refining their look and priding themselves on a glorious, weed-free lawn that was the envy of the neighborhood.

Many homeowners planted a family garden to enjoy the freshest vegetables and herbs for their dinner tables.

Not every project produced results; failures were certainly part of the experience. It wasn't a deterrent, though, to strive to be better next time.

Generations since, the Baby Boomers have been instilled with the "you have to be the best" or "you can't fail" messages from parents in order to get ahead in the competitive scholastic, athletic and business worlds. Failure is unacceptable.

The fear factor of novices repeatedly killing plants breeds their discontent and discourages them from spending money in our greenhouses and nurseries.

Time and convenience really do matter, and it shows in the ways consumers have taken shortcuts in just about everything they do.

If they can't be successful with plants or afford to have someone do it for them, they'll often just go without.

## Awareness and Education

Many gardening articles identify industry issues that have been uncovered by research and abnormal weather conditions.

Recently, beehive collapse and neonicotinoids along with drought and water conservation are common topics in the national news.

The heightened awareness prompts most of us to be better communicators in our stores, to embrace change and address concerns among consumers.

We react to counteract the negativity that speeds its way throughout the news.

Many retailers take a proactive approach to creating new stewards of our environment by providing seminars, unique products and good signage to their shoppers.

The independent garden center always answers the call and has long validated products one to two years before any box store.

We know how to explain products and how to get results.

We've all seen customers ask questions from us and walk away without making a purchase, thinking it must cost less at the box store.

Where's our reward for awareness and education?

## Teaching Enjoyment ... and Success

Does your store employ a staff that's passionate about flowers and plants, and embraces a work

culture to educate their customers effectively?

Are we willing to invest in teaching our customers how to be successful?

Renewing and reviewing our product (and plant) knowledge can make a difference toward consumer success with their purchases.

Times (and plant genetics) have changed, which challenges us to teach new paths to gardening success to an unsuspecting public.

Just as the Knock Out rose has redefined carefree enjoyment of our national flower, the Wave petunia contributed to a different type of plant habit that now corners the market for size, color, bloom production and ease of care.

These cascading plants love nitrogen to produce the elongated trusses for massive bloom production.

For years, we were taught that unique phrase to pass on an easy way to understand the fertilizer analysis numbers of nitrogen (up), phosphorous (down) and potash (all around).

We sold Super Bloom, Mor-Bloom and Bloom Booster, and the best-known Miracle-Gro plant food 15-30-15 for everything that flowered.

More phosphorous was the battle cry for years!

Are we still making the same recommendations for anything in bloom?

Are we recommending the correct products for success?

Think about your possibilities: Plants need food, water, protection and accessories.

## Uncover Hidden Profits

There are ways to drive extra sales — what I call the hidden 10 percent — in everything we sell through tie-in recommendations.



Electronics stores do it every day by selling us an extended warranty — the guarantee of enjoyment or success for the consumer.

I'm not suggesting we warranty plants, but that we recommend an add-on product (or products) that help consumers achieve the best results.

Women buying a dress will look to accessorize with additional purchases; any major retailer keeps these support products closeby.

It should be part of your business plan to suggest through communication skills both verbal (your staff) and non-verbal (your signage and displays) to provide complementary or support products that promote success.

All team members need to understand your store's message and how to convey a successful path to enjoyment.

Every department manager has one or two "must-have" products for planting success.

We are the professionals of this industry that can teach through experience and by sharing our knowledge.

Teach enjoyment and success to your customers and they won't give up, even if they fail once in awhile.

Only by proactively sharing this knowledge and teaching success can we create new customers loyal to our stores.

Our new battle cry should be, "We love our plants and you will too! Let us show you how." **LGR**

*John Johnston is the retail education manager for Griffin Greenhouse Supplies. He can be reached at [jjohnston@griffinmail.com](mailto:jjohnston@griffinmail.com).*



▲ Nonverbal suggestions of add-on products to help your customers succeed can drive extra sales, the hidden 10 percent as some people call it.

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