



A Checkup On Checkouts

Garden center retailers and consultants tell *Lawn & Garden Retailer* what works and what doesn't at a customer's last stop in your store.

By Katie Hagen

The last part of a shopping trip to the garden center is often the most memorable for customers. What happens or doesn't happen at checkout can make or break a customer's experience. If things grind to a halt in the checkout line, a retailer can be sure the customer's impression of the store plummets every minute he or she waits. The customer will finally stalk out of the store muttering ruinous phrases like, "I'll never come back here again." To keep your customers from uttering anything of the sort, *Lawn & Garden Retailer* spoke to several garden center consultants and the retailers they've helped about the best ways to set up or redesign a garden center checkout.

Redesign Dos

Garden center retailers unanimously agree that speeding (not rushing) customers through the checkout process is the top reason to revamp a checkout.

Consultants Judy Sharpton of Growing Places Marketing; Ernest Wertheim of Wertheim, van der Ploeg and Klemeyer; and Robert Hendrickson of The Garden Center Group recommend certain design elements that will keep a checkout running smoothly.

Location is everything. Sharpton recommends locating checkouts in one place in the store. In the past, many garden centers preferred to scatter checkouts all over. This setup compromises security, and it inadvertently causes customers to shop in just one or two areas. Customers also should approach the checkout from one direction, Sharpton said. Beginning in the middle of the store, generous aisles should guide customers toward the register.

Although smaller garden centers have resisted the checkout setup of supermarkets and big box stores, saying it is unfriendly, larger chains have adopted it, Wertheim said. In this type of layout, which features a single line of registers, the checkout is the customer's final stop in the store.

Above: Streamlining the checkout process helps prevent customers from waiting in line. (Photo: Petitti Garden Center)



Selecting the right location for your cash registers helps customers move efficiently through the checkout process. (Photo: Martin Viette Nurseries)

It not only makes it easy for customers to find a checkout but also eliminates the opportunity for them to pick up more merchandise after they have paid. Sharpton agreed that there should never be any product beyond the checkout.

Wertheim emphasized sticking to the basics, citing a garden center in Seattle that housed all of its registers at one circular counter. "It looked pretty," he said, "but customers didn't know where to line up."

For years, Malmborg's Garden Center resisted grouping all of its registers together. But the Brooklyn Center, Minn., store came around three years ago. It converted its old

Checkout Dos And Don'ts

When building a new checkout area, do...

- Designate one area in the store for all checkouts.
- Arrange checkouts in a line, grocery-store style.
- Let two registers share one checkout station.
- Locate checkouts to the left of the entrance.
- Leave enough room between counters for two lines of large carts.
- Make sure all product gets placed on the counter.
- Create drawers and recessed wells for packing materials.

Don't...

- Place product beyond the checkout.
- Use checkouts for returns, exchanges, wrapping, deliveries or gardening questions.

setup — three checkout stations at three different exits — into a consolidated bank of four checkout stations with two registers apiece.

Within a couple weeks of the change, retail manager Van Cooley realized the redesign had improved security. Clerks stopped an exiting

customer who claimed she had already paid for her cart full of merchandise. Because the store now has just one exit where customers can leave with product, clerks knew that she couldn't have paid. "They saw what had been happening to them all along," Sharpton said. ▶

www.garden-works.net • 1-888-660-8511 • info@garden-works.net

Weeders

Soil Scoop

Garden Gear for Passionate Gardeners

Contact us today for a 2007 wholesale catalog.

Tubtrugs

Burgon & Ball
Tool Line

Mud Buddies

Tool Spot

Watering Cans

Outdoor Cast Iron Products

Deluxe Rose Pro's

**Supplying independent
garden centers since 1992.**

Write in 823

JANUARY 2007 LAWN & GARDEN RETAILER 87

Two are better than one: That's why Wertheim suggests double checkout stations rather than singles. Two registers sharing one counter is a more efficient use of space. Cashiers can share radios, phones and credit card machines.

Cashiers can also help each other when needed.

What's Left?

Observe the rules of the road in your garden center. Design a clean entrance with checkouts located to

the left and shopping carts on the right, Wertheim said. Guiding entering customers to drive on the right prevents them from crossing paths with exiting customers.

This design also prevents arriving customers from seeing lines ▶



Be sure to select the right products to put on display near the checkout stand to help boost impulse sales. (Photo: Martin Vette Nurseries)



**your source for
TREE CARE
PRODUCTS**



TREE STAKE KIT Newly packaged for 2006! Kit contains everything needed to protect a young tree from wind and storm damage. Kit contains 3 notched, pointed hardwood stakes, 3 - 10" poly straps and 30' of galvanized wire. Packed in its own shelf display. Components are also available separately.



TREE WRAP Also repackaged for 2006. Available in woven polypropylene or coated creped paper. Both provide superior protection for young trees.

STYLE	CONTENTS	PACK	WEIGHT	CUBE
2610	4" x 50' Poly	24	15	1.8
2613	3" x 50' Paper	24	10	1.8



STYLE	CONTENTS	PACK	WEIGHT	CUBE
2621	Kit	12	25	2.8
2608	Straps -150/ctn.	1	5	.3
2605	Hose -100/ctn.	1	10	.3
2617	AGLOK 150'/Box	1	1.75	.10

Continuous "chain" tie

For a Catalog and prices contact
EATON
Call 1-888-322-3530
Fax 716-649-9466

Write in 809

Punxsutawney Glass & Tile Co.

Gazing Globes

Available
12" 10" 6"



Our Gazing Globes are made of handblown glass & manufactured in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Quantity discounts are available.

Call 814.938.4200
for ordering and pricing information.

MADE IN THE USA

Write in 890

Magic Faucet!

Are you looking to increase traffic in your store? Amaze your customers with this adorable fountain. Enjoy the sound of continually flowing water from a faucet seemingly floating in mid air.

- Safe for indoor or outdoor use
- Durable, no rust finish
- Multiple designer colors
- One year UL pump warranty

**Call toll free today
for our expanded
'07 catalog.**

US Patent 6053422

Fantasy Fountains®

Fantasy Fountains & Gardens
888-313-2629 • www.fantasyfountain.com
17 Middland Avenue Extension, Building 7A, Middletown, NY 10940

Write in 813

28 SHOWS A YEAR

1 Controlled Marketing Conference

112 DAYS AWAY FROM HOME

3 Day Trip

162 TIMES STANDING IN CONCESSION LINES

8 Sitdown Meals

\$42,000 TRAVEL BUDGET

\$1,500 Travel Budget

50,400 MINUTES TALKING

10 Minute Meetings With 150 Key Buyers

IT'S BLACK & WHITE



National Lawn & Garden Show

June 12-14, 2007
Grand Sierra Resort • Reno, NV
For Details and Information Call 888.316.0226
www.nlgshow.com



bigger space to write checks. The setup also allows employees to keep a better watch on the doors for theft. "Merchandising and nice displays are important in a store, but the most important thing is when people are ready to check out, they

need to move," Woodley said.

For a checkout that accommodates two registers, Wertheim suggests installing counters measuring 8-9 ft. wide and 8-10 ft. long. Wertheim suggests an 18-inch niche that allows cashier to stand

next to the aisle and scan big items without leaning over the counter.

Clear The Clutter

Multi-use counters that try to offer too many services at once create bottlenecks, Hendrickson said.



"A cashier's job is not to answer questions about gardening," he said. "The fewer responsibilities a cashier has, the faster things will flow. The most efficient counters are ones that do nothing but check out customers." Hendrickson suggests designating a separate counter for returns, exchanges, wrapping, deliveries and gardening questions.

Hide the tangle of cables running from the back of a register with a vertical wall at the front end of a checkout, Wertheim said. Recessing a tall cash register into the counter also saves space. Make sure to allow space for the cash drawer to open.

Use similar camouflaging to hide bags and boxes in accessible cubby slots or drawers beneath the counter. For example, create a 28-inch-wide drawer for a 24-inch roll of colored foil, Wertheim said.

When Pasquesi Home and Garden designed its new Lake Bluff, Ill., store and retooled its Barrington, Ill., store, owner Ed Pasquesi paid special attention to integrating wrapping into the checkout process. Because the store sells a lot of home accents that require special handling, Pasquesi installed 24x60-inch recessed tissue wells at the end of each counter. Also, there are two designated wrapping stations available for heavy times. Pasquesi said it is a seamless process. A separate clerk picks up and wraps the item while the customer pays. "A customer can have a great experience in the store, but if they have got to wait in the checkout line, you've blown the whole thing," Pasquesi said.

Tech Update

In addition to all the layout changes that make checkouts more efficient, Sharpton said garden centers can speed things up even more with improved technology.

Write in 900



A slot in the checkout counter makes it easier for cashiers to ring up large items. (Photo: Pasquesi Home and Garden)

Sharpton recommended setting up a checkout so all product is placed on the counter. Without taking every item out of the cart, cashiers can't get an accurate count of what's going through the register.

Martin Viette Nurseries, East Norwich, N.Y., added scanning technology to its checkouts nearly a decade ago. "Everything in the store has to be scannable; that's the key," said general manager Doug Akerley. "Otherwise, there's a major potential for errors." Instead of making the customer remove all of the cart's contents, however, cashiers take all the green goods out and count them.

Four years ago, Bern's Garden Center, Middletown, Ohio, traded in its plain-Jane registers for a point-of-sale (POS) computer system. The POS system sped up checkout times and integrated the store's general ledger with sales and deliveries, said retail manager Barry Christian. Six months later, Bern's learned that credit card approvals were taking 30-40 seconds with a dial-up connection. By upgrading to a high-speed Internet connection, Bern's cut approval times to two seconds, Christian said.

Other Considerations

It is also important to keep cashiers happy. "Once cashiers become uncomfortable, they become unfriendly," Wertheim said. Be mindful of the location of the exit door, making sure to shield cashiers from the wind and cold.

Make sure the restrooms aren't located too far from the checkout, otherwise cashiers will be away from their registers for too long. Consider installing a restroom designated specifically for cashiers.

Hendrickson said the first step in

your analysis should be to pinpoint any bottlenecks occurring in the checkout process. Consider hiring a consultant to address the placement, size and use of checkouts. He also suggests setting up a benchmark to measure checkout efficiency. For example, on your

busiest day each register should be able to handle \$15,000 in sales. ☑

Katie Hagen is a freelance writer based in Evanston, Ill. She can be reached at katherine.hagen@gmail.com.

Learn More!

For more information related to this article, go to www.lgrmag.com/lm.cfm/lg010711

ANLA MANAGEMENT CLINIC
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

3 intense days
75 business changing sessions
1000 green industry professionals
A WORLD OF IDEAS
THE BEST NETWORKING EXPERIENCE
JANUARY 31 THRU FEBRUARY 3, 2007
www.ManagementClinic.org
202-789-2900

Write in 899