

**“Home is no longer a place to retreat, retire and nest. In the new connecting lifestage, home becomes a hub for connecting with the outside world...reaching out and doing things”**

**D**ifferentiation from the mass marketers is the path to financial success for the independent garden center (IGC) — something we all know intuitively, but it is sometimes difficult to articulate to the consumer. Annuals, the mainstay of our business, have become commoditized, and the only perceived differential is based on price value...and IGC's won't win that battle with the boxes.

### **CUSTOMER COMMUNICATION**

In past columns in *Lawn & Garden Retailer*, I've discussed the concept of “up trading,” (see the January 2004 issue of *Lawn & Garden Retailer*) appealing to those consumers who are passionate about an activity or product that provides high personal satisfaction and enjoyment to them. Those consumers are willing to pay premium prices to attain and sate their passions. This small but growing group of consumers spends the most on an annual basis and are extremely loyal, though difficult to attract unless you are truly dedicated to focusing your assortments, merchandising and marketing to them. It's an approach that has huge potential, but few IGCs are willing to or capable of either devoting all of their attention to this consumer or adequately being able to operate dual programs — up-trending and their “regular” businesses — simultaneously. To successfully execute an up-trend strategy

requires that we truly understand consumer behaviors and motivations and then develop programs and services that meet and exceed these expectations, something that we should be doing routinely no matter what consumer segment you choose to address.

At the Seeley Conference last year, the discussions were centered on the relevancy of floriculture products to today's consumers. At the end of the symposium, the overall consensus was that our floriculture products are, in fact, very relevant, but we as an industry and as individual companies have not effectively communicated our message and demonstrated how our products are relevant and beneficial. Our industry growth has become sluggish because we've let other industries more effectively explain and promote their relevancy far more effectively than we have. These other industries have realized something that we haven't. They are not selling products, but rather solutions to consumer needs and expectations. They are satisfying the consumer's emotional and psychological needs, their lifestyle and wellness/well-being desires. The applications of their products, not just the products themselves are what consumers want. If we can ever change our own approach and somewhat provincial mindsets to encompass a new way of communicating with the consumer, a way that gets beyond just product and price, the potential for growth...profitable growth...is huge. And this potential is greatest not for the mass marketers, but for the IGCs.

this consumer is looking for that could impact what they purchase and where they purchase it?

**Behavior.** They want a sense of pride and accomplishment, whether they do it themselves or have someone provide the services for them.

**Interpretation.** They want new, unique, simple, easy mainte-

**Interpretation.** The yard and garden becomes more "social" than ever before. As people start entertaining more, the garden plays a much more significant role as both an integral part of the entertaining experience itself and as an enhancement of the experience

**Behavior.** They are buying the end-result, not just components.

ual components, but you have the opportunity to package the program and help the consumer achieve their vision; they don't.

If you agree that this is an emerging trend you want to take advantage of, start looking at your facilities, assortments and marketing through a consumer's eyes and mind. What can you do to develop

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