

"Consumer Talk" is a regular column appearing in each issue of Lawn & Garden Retailer that examines the issues facing today's garden center customers. Our panel of consumers will provide you with insight into their gardening and retail experiences to help you better understand today's customers' needs.

Promotional Learning

We asked some of our panelists to go to their local independent garden centers during a promotional event to see what it was all about. Here is what they had to say about the experience.

Donna, 45 Bethesda, Md.

Donna attended a "Lighting A Tree" and "Ornamenting A Tree" event. She attended the promotion because she went to pick up a Christmas tree and found there was an event when she got there. She only had to travel a half a mile to get there and stayed about 30 minutes.



On a scale from one to 10, Donna felt the event was an eight because it was pretty packed. Though there were no activities, she said people were just enjoying the ambience.

At the event, she learned a better way to put lights on her tree. One suggestion Donna had was that the garden center "should have served egg nog and cookies, since we were all outside picking out trees." Though there was no food served, she still walked away with a hardy purchase of several sets of lights and a tree. When asked whether she would attend another event in the future, she replied, "Yes, depending on what it was. I received a flyer for an event on orchids, but I have no desire to learn about orchids."

Kelley, 27 Chicago, Ill.

Kelley attended a garden center holiday event only a few miles from home; a friend suggested the event to her. Kelley only stayed about 30 minutes and seemed to enjoy some of her experience. There were no activities, but she did enjoy the live music and free (really good) food.



On the positive side, Kelley said the event was pretty busy. "I especially enjoyed the gift shop section, which was full of festive decorations," she said. One suggestion Kelley had about the event was that it would have been nice to have some activities like demonstrations or decorating tips.

She did leave on a negative note, however. She commented, "I didn't purchase anything, but I did see a lovely teapot — a lovely \$150 teapot," meaning she was not in love with the price points offered to her. Also, she said, "I don't see myself attending a garden center event in the future — at least not on my own. It's the kind of thing I wouldn't mind going to if invited by a friend, but I wouldn't seek it out. Part of my apprehension might stem from the fact that some [sales] ladies thought I was a little boy." Does she look like a little boy to you?

Paquita, 55 Redlands, Calif.

Paquita traveled about five miles to a Christmas open house she found out about on the nursery's Web site. During the event, the garden center had a quilt show and drawing (to which she bought a raffle ticket for a quilt), madrigal singers from the local high school, and cookies and cider. She and some friends looked around and stayed through the singing, about 40 minutes to an hour. She commented, "It was nice, not powerful, but nice in a community kind of way."



As far as how packed the event was, Paquita said it was a 5-6 on the busy scale. She did suggest that there should have been more groups performing, such as a Santa for the kids or a display on winter gardens for the region. As far as purchasing items and visiting the garden center again, Paquita said, "My friends were back during the next couple weeks to buy more. This nursery is big and has a good variety of plants. So it is fun to go even if there is nothing different going on. I'd definitely go if the activities were of interest to me. The staff is very knowledgeable and that is the selling point over a big box store." A pretty good review for the event!

Questions To Consider

- What does this consumer feedback about events mean to you? Are there improvements to be made to your promotions?
- What does it say about customer service? One panelist had a great experience with the staff while another did not.
- What can you do to get new customers to come back to your store in the future for more than just events?
- How can you get customers to spend more time and money at your events?