

# I'M TALKIN' TECHIE

Sometime in the '80s, my parents bought a Disney learning game for our computer. From what I remember, it featured Mickey, Minnie and Goofy, and they were going to the town fair. There was pie involved. The software included a white plastic overlay covered in shapes and color blocks, which sat over the keyboard and controlled the game play. And I loved it. Which means I've been a computer nerd since before I could read. When the Internet first started gaining popularity among home users — I'm talking Prodigy and, later, AOL on tortoise-paced dial-up — it was all over for me. I officially became an addict.

When I was in college, Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook, completely changing the way we communicated on campus and beyond. When I moved to Chicago, I started Yelping all my favorite (and not-so-favorite) local restaurants, spas and city services, and through it I created a network of real-life friends (imagine that) with similar interests. And as I began my second year with *Lawn & Garden Retailer*, Twitter exploded in popularity and has captivated me ever since. Imagine my elation when I realized I could incorporate my addiction more and more into the workplace.

I'm sure this isn't the first you've heard about these technologies (I've dedicated at least one *Retail Report* to it!), and this month's "Tech Talk" feature (page 18) delves into social media options you have as a business, but I'd like to share some personal anecdotes about exploring the greener side of the web.

## Tweeting and Yelping And Generally Making a Racket

I originally started my Twitter as a way to update readers on things I saw around the Internet, but that's been slow to take. (Read: There are so few garden centers "tweeting"! So after a couple of months, I started bouncing from user page to user page, "following" business mavens, consumer gardening magazine editors and enthusiastic garden bloggers (with names like @kissmyaster and @MrBrownThumb) across the country. I think these people — "tweeps," as we're called — are going to be great resources in the future! A Chicago event just for garden bloggers in May? Heard about it on Twitter. Marketing poinsettias beyond the holidays? Twitter told me. I love it!

Out of curiosity, I stopped by Yelp before I started writing this column to see how many Chicagoland Yelpers have green thumbs — and I was pleasantly surprised. Not only did one establishment have 43 stellar reviews (very respectable, Gethsemane!), but every garden center on the first search page had at least four stars. If nothing else, it should give you a confidence boost that customers still love their independent garden centers. Give it a try! What are your customers saying?

## Start the Journey

I know, I know. Just last month I was writing about going back to the good old days. Old-fashioned customer service. That kind of thing. And after talking with industry professionals across all generations at the ANLA Management Clinic in early February, I know there are some skeptics out there about whether these technologies are worth the investment of time. But as I said in the March issue, there's a balance to be found.

Can this technology make your business more profitable? Only time will tell. Are there benefits to getting in on the ground floor of this technology? Certainly — at the very least, you're creating an Internet footprint, another entry point for people to hear about you. And on top of that, you can work to turn that footprint into a footpath that leads from the keyboard to the garden to your store. I'm not sure you can *sell* stepping stones that do things like that.



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