

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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We're Listening

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We're just finishing poinsettia season up as I write this article. We always finish off the season with a few consumer focus groups here in the greenhouse to assure what we're putting out in the stores matches up with what the consumer wants. This gives us a starting point to then take questions to our 2,000-person Home Garden Panel Internet survey group to assure what we hear in a focus group is validated with quantitative data. As we roll into 2015, our team is focused on three big insights we've learned over the last year.

Time—We never have enough time to get everything done that's facing us in our greenhouses, but the issue of time is even more true for our consumer. Our consumer consistently tells us they have NO TIME to do anything anymore. Our data says that consumers are spending LESS TIME in the garden center per trip and LESS TIME in their garden per occasion. They're going to the store and into

their gardens as often, but just for not as long of a time duration per event. For example, the majority of garden center visits are now 30 minutes or less and the average time people spend in the garden at a time is less than one hour.

Doom and gloom? The world is ending? Shut the greenhouse down now? No, this is a great opportunity. While 50+ year olds will spend three to five hours or even a whole Saturday working a project, younger consumers just won't do that. But we can manage to that with better container gardening programs and building our project plans based on knowing it needs to be completed within 30 minutes to one hour. Four projects that take one to two hours apiece can turn into a really cool garden experience that we used to all talk about in terms of one Saturday work day.

On the storefront piece, we need make it easy for them to find it and buy it. For example, if you have a display that shows a front door decorated for the fall, you need to have all of the "ingredients" there for ease of buying.

Simplicity—We've seen in past surveys that our consumer has a very low "gardening confidence" driven by their lack of understanding of how to care for plants. They're happy to do the project and they enjoy the results, but they struggle with simple care and maintenance of their plants. Solution: stop complicating the

process. We need to show consumers the simple steps of proper feeding and deadheading, and even the simple exercise of watering. We want consumers talking about our product, not talking about how hard it is. Our industry is notorious for trying to get consumers to understand more about us; we take pride in our knowledge. But, in reality, rather than trying to get consumers to understand us, we need to understand more about them.

Consumers tell us they want two things: First, they want to know what goes (grows) well together. We need to make simple suggestions of what goes together. If we're right, they'll have a better experience with the product. If they have a better experience, they'll buy more.

Second, consumers want to know how to keep it alive (that's exactly how they say it). We need to make simple suggestions on how to keep plants alive longer. Again, if we're right, they'll have a better experience with the product. And then they'll buy more.

Quality matters—In an improving economy, quality is even more important for 2015. Consumers will have more disposable income in 2015 due to lower gas prices and they say they'll spend it. But even among our most novice garden consumers, quality is still the No. 1 factor for them in deciding what to buy at the garden center. It's a universal attribute that's been the core of our industry for years and it's good to see consumers still value this more than any other attribute. So you can still focus on producing a quality product no matter who you're selling it to and who you think may buy it. We serve the big box retailers and, contrary to some opinions out there, all of our data says the No. 1 reason people buy a plant at a big box retailer is quality.

Wishing everyone business success in 2015. When we all grow, the industry grows. Let's continue to work together in 2015 to make that happen. **GT**

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