

GROWERTALKS

Columns

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The Young Retailer's Wish List

Tiger Palafox



As younger generations enter into management roles at garden centers, it will pay off for vendors to find out just how they can improve the partnerships with their retail customers. Here are a few ways I think vendors can become even better partners.

Online merchandise availabilities and ordering

Viewing and ordering online allows me to see what merchandise is available in the most current way. I can tally up the order total so I know the dollar amount before it arrives. It saves time because I can add to it throughout the week and send it on Friday. I also know what's out of stock before it arrives on my doorstep. Images of the products or plants help me remember what sells best and shows me new items

with little effort.

Shipping sheets with scannable UPC codes

UPC codes allow my employees and POS system to work more efficiently. We receive product and check out customers while maintaining an ongoing inventory.

Sales reps who work the shelves

If vendors are going to provide sales reps, they should not just sell you product but should also be partners in your business plan. Simply cleaning their products, writing credits for old or faded product isn't enough; we demand more from our sales reps. They should produce new displays and help you encourage new sales. The biggest problem I have with sales reps is that if they can do their job over the phone than I don't want to pay their commission. I would like to see them volunteer to help on a busy spring day or put the product away when it arrives. An example of a good rep and company is a pottery business I buy from. They're slightly higher priced than others, but they put away the merchandise, stick on labels and provide a receiving sheet with scannable UPCs. I feel they're working with me, not against me.

Product companies should budget for community support

Vendors should support the communities their retailers are in. A small amount can go a long way. Pay a business association fee for a retailer or help them get placed in a local business directory. This doesn't have to be an expensive gesture, but can be a profitable one. For a retailer, the majority of its business comes

from a customer within 15 minutes of them. Being a part of the community is vital to its success.

End-of-year reports

Give the retailer the information needed to grow and expand their business. Show us how to increase margins or sales. Maybe my business was \$500 shy of getting a 2% discount, but without a report showing my purchases I won't know if I'm growing or shrinking. Sure, I should be able to track my numbers myself, but I don't always have the time or energy to do so. If a vendor volunteers this information, it shows me they're proud of what we've done and have created a partnership, not just a sales relationship.

A new form of co-op

Not many retailers use print media anymore. Smaller companies cannot afford radio or television. Allow every retailer to use co-op money in a way that works for them. They earned it, they should get it. If the retailer creates a successful advertisement no matter what it is, it will benefit the vendor with more purchases. I use Facebook and Internet blogs to help get the information out. It's very effective, so give me my money to focus on things I'm doing well. It costs me time to keep the information coming, so pay me versus a huge media company to advertise.

Most of all, I look forward to a very profitable and fun year ahead. Let's all grow together and build our industry. **GP**

Tiger Palafox is the manager at the family-owned Mission Hills Nursery in San Diego, California, a landmark for Southern California gardeners. Tiger's daughter Tassia and his wife Janene keep him going with his passion and drive to create a greener and better world. He can be reached at tigerpalafox@gmail.com.