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Building Customer Loyalty

Jennifer Polanz



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Last spring, my son's elementary school had a plant fundraiser through Foertmeyer & Sons Greenhouse (incidentally, not a super close operation to us).

Of course, I ordered plants, and I volunteered to help the day the plants came in to get them loaded into parent vehicles. I thought I would see a smattering of orders—instead, what I saw was a good chunk of the parking lot covered in plant material. Beautiful-looking plant material, no less, and kids interested in helping to organize and marvel at the plants (that was a bonus, in my opinion).

The fundraiser was a success and we're doing the fall mum plant sale through them now, too. Parents were happy with their purchases in the spring, and I don't doubt they'll continue to have loyalty through the mum sale and next year's spring sale, as well, for two reasons. One, top-notch quality,

and two, it benefited the kids and our school. In fact, according to the information Foertmeyer provided at the initial sale (when someone from the greenhouse came to speak to the kids), they now partner with more than 400 schools across Ohio to provide three fundraisers a year (there's also a holiday sale) and they have a 90% customer retention rate.

There are lots of ways to build loyalty in customers, and we've talked a little more recently about corporate social responsibility and the importance of attracting the next generation. This month, we have a story from 2015 *Green Profit* Young Retailer Award Winner Valerie Nalls about promoting scouting events in the garden center. Why? Both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts promote activities learning about nature, gardening, and even birding, with merit and badge programs. By offering scout programming, retailers can not only help get kids excited about these topics, but also attract parents into the garden center with them.

After seeing a cannabis plant at the IGC Show in Chicago this year, I decided to contact a garden center retailer who created a Cannabis Corner (in Massachusetts, where recreational is legal). In talking with Scenic Roots co-owner Donna Kutil Ross, I learned their foray into providing supplies for legal cannabis growing has resulted in a stronger bond with customers, many of whom have been shopping there for years.

Of course, a more conventional approach to customer loyalty is continuing to offer a selection of the newest and best products on the market. In the end, those are what keeps customers coming through the doors. We've got you covered there with two stories: Ellen's compilation of new varieties and the selling points for each and the hits we

found at this year's IGC Show in Chicago.

However you choose to keep your customers coming back, I hope it's successful and that you finish out the year strong. If you'd like to tell me about something you do to keep customers loyal to your store, I'd love to hear it. Email me at jpolarz@ballpublishing.com. **GP**