

Kiss My Aster

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Magic Beans

Amanda Thomsen



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I'm checking out at Ace Hardware with \$40 worth of freshly made keys and the cashier asks me for my phone number so she can check for loyalty points. I tell her I only come in twice a year so let's just skip it so I could protect my peace. This was all I knew of loyalty programs. Well, that and that my husband has enough Starbucks Stars logged to get a free scone for everyone in Cook County.

I guess I think of myself as ... disloyal? I don't really shop a lot and I don't love the idea of being texted with deals and coupons because texting is strictly for hot gossip and how my kid is getting home from school each day.

When the idea of having a loyalty program at Aster Gardens came up, I thought that since I'd rather protect my peace when I'm out shopping, I bet my customers felt the same. I felt it didn't suit my business's core belief of being super cool and aloof about it.

Then I went to Katie Elzer-Peters' talk at Cultivate about SMS marketing and the fog began to burn off. In a later chat about it, she said, "What if you have one, even though you hate them, and let your CUSTOMERS decide if they want to participate or not? You don't have to make your mind up for them, you massive freakshow*. They can decide for themselves. Plus, obviously your marketing will be cooler than anything you've been roped into in the past that you're using as a frame of reference. Just try it!" And I was completely shooketh. So much so that I took one of those e-scooters back to my decidedly B Team hotel that was wayyyyy far away from the convention center.

One of the things I loved about Katie's presentation was the idea of segmenting your audience so the SMS messages could reflect what that customer was into. Did they want coupons and deals? Daily memes? Pertinent gardening tips? From my hotel room, I started to have a bit of a loyalty program "WHAT IF?" meltdown and ran to start a chat with Ben Futa from The Botany Shop in South Bend, Indiana. He totally talked me off the ledge by telling me they had a successful loyalty program and loved it and that he treated his customers like adults who could make their own choices, of course, and what the heck was wrong with me*?

And I sat there on the hotel bed and joined Square's loyalty program black hole. Square doesn't offer the segmenting capability Katie got me all excited about, but in exchange, they offer an ease of use I could really get on board with. I was excited. When I returned to the shop after Cultivate, I rolled out THE MAGIC BEANS PROGRAM!



For every dollar spent a customer earns ONE MAGIC BEAN! This gets people inexplicably giddy. I sometimes can't believe how easy they are! Since we rolled out the MBP, members come in almost twice as often as Peasants™ (that's non-MAGIC BEANS CLUB MEMBERS) and spend between \$27 and \$34 dollars more per transaction on average. For every 50 MAGIC BEANS, they get \$5 off their purchase. At a lowly 20 Magic Beans they get a free repotting service, which we usually offer for free anyways so the joke's on them! They feel like they've earned something, so

it's putting the MAGIC in the MAGIC BEANS CLUB!

Another Beans perk is that our loyalty members get to shop in our mystical vintage speakeasy in the basement. Basically, when the basement is clean enough to have people in it, we send out a text saying it's MAGIC BEANS CLUB WEEKEND and people rush to just see what we've down there. Also, the people in the store that are Peasants want to go down there so bad and I will NOT let them until they're enrolled in the MBP.

When customers say, "Oh! Magic Beans! What a cute thing to call it!" I boom "I'LL CRUSH YOUR BONES TO MAKE MY BREAD," and when they look scared/confused/threatened I say, "Oh, that's from "Jack and the Beanstalk," remember?" Then they spend a little more money because I have frightened them a little and now they want to regain their cool, but think it might be best to hedge their bets and just spend a little more so I don't act up again.

Katie and Ben were right—I can totally let adults make up their own minds about whether to participate or not. And I get to still be me. **GP**

**This is not verbatim, but it went something like this.*

Amanda Thomsen is a funky, punky garden writer and author now with her own store, Aster Gardens in Lemont, Illinois. Her blog is planted at KissMyAster.com and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter AND Instagram @KissMyAster.