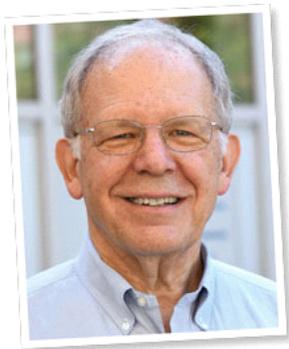


3/1/2024

Telling the Story Sells You and the Product

Bill McCurry



Bill McCurry

“Marketing is no longer about the stuff that you make, but about the stories you tell.”—Seth Godin

Carsten Johansen was 12 when his family relocated from Denmark to Sweden. At 19, he was selling his first pots. Today, almost 40 years later, he's CEO of the successful Swedish company, 2M2. With factories in Vietnam, Malaysia, China, India, Thailand and numerous EU countries, it designs and distributes pots, outdoor garden furniture and glass railings.

A global leader in horticultural pots, Carsten knows the pain of them freezing and breaking, especially when unexpected freezes shock both customers and their plants. He's also witnessed pot damage when customers drop one or shippers drop

a full pallet.

During Carsten's global travels, he became painfully aware of corporate decisions impacting ecological conditions with economic necessity rising above ecological concerns. The saying goes, “It's better to light a single candle than curse the darkness,” so Carsten started looking for a partner with similar focus.

It's critical India, which needs job opportunities, grows its manufacturing capabilities to counter China, while also feeding the rapidly growing young population. Under his Upcycle brand, Carsten partnered with an Indian factory that takes old cars and other steel, upcycling it into garden accessories, most notably pots. They also make bird baths and watering cans.

Carsten asked, “How do we make each pot somewhat unique, but consistent within a color group?” The answer was to hand-spray individual pots. This not only provided gainful employment to the local population, it also created a unique consumer product—a plant display that isn't monotonous.

With greenwashing appearing consistently in industries, Carsten strives to make Upcycle sustainable.

“Our reality is we sell to some of the largest companies in Europe. The EU has very strict standards and outside inspectors visit our factories to ensure we're actually operating sustainably, while also providing a safe place of employment,” he said.

SGS, an international sustainability firm, handles their certification. Carsten handles the manufacturing and design;

Foliera, an Ontario distributor, handles North American marketing and distribution.

Their first USA trade show was January's TPIE. The Garden Center Group retailers evaluated TPIE's Cool Products. The judges who visited the Foliera/Upcycle booth understood the customer benefit of steel pots. Those who hadn't seen the booth were astonished when a large Upcycle pot was dropped. The "bong" sound it made caused a vocal reaction from the retailers. Now there would be no more broken/chipped pots. When passed around to the judges, they recognized that lightweight pots with unique coloring had obvious selling points.

Over 50 products were nominated. No contest. Upcycle was a Cool Product winner. Carsten heard the need for smaller orchid pots. They're now in the works.

Additionally, the pots are so much lighter the shipping costs and storage needs are dramatically different. Any customer can carry even huge pots to the car.

One week earlier, at a MANTS event co-sponsored by The Garden Center Group, Master Nursery Garden Centers and Prides Corner Farms, Dr. Allan Armitage shared that he'd found customers embracing stories about what they're buying. "Dr A" has written two interesting collections of plant stories and their history: "Legends in the Garden—Who in the World is Nellie Stevens?" and "Of Naked Ladies and Forget-Me-Nots." He encouraged audience members to share these stories with their customers.

At TPIE's general session, the keynoter, professional storyteller Harris III, said, "Humans are naturally inclined to listen to stories and relate to the storytellers. Stories are the most effective way to communicate values, principles and knowledge about who you are and what you're selling."

When you sell, do your customers hear a story? Educate your team to be storytellers. It'll make them better salespeople who'll thrill your customers. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 731-8389.