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Features

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Flowers and Fashion Go Pop

Ellen C. Wells

One of the most innovative retail concepts to “pop up” in the horticulture industry started with a simple solution to a single problem. Faced with a line of mixed greens that was seeing slow sales for her in-laws’ greenhouse operation last fall, Carmen Johnston thought, “If we could merchandise it in a fun and creative way, then we could sell that plant.” The answer? Pop-up retail. “We were reading that companies such as Nike and Target were doing pop-up retail locations to show off their brands, and I thought, ‘Why can’t we do that?’” says the owner of Nectar and Company, a plant rental business specializing in events and commercial properties in Macon, Georgia.

“Must-Have” Immediacy

Nectar and Company doesn’t do retail selling. But Carmen and her team saw an opportunity to create excitement—a “limited time only” type of excitement—that would energize customers and change their attitudes about purchasing plants. A three-day pop-up retailing event would create that sense of urgency to propel purchasing. And Nectar and Company’s distinctive stylings would generate the “must have” feeling among the pop-up’s shoppers.

Garden retail traditionally focuses on selling the plant. Carmen and her team instead wanted to show the personality behind every plant, so they put the emphasis on creative merchandising to make the plant experience too good to pass up. “We offered a sensory experience for the eyes by creating levels, incorporating textures, and adding non-traditional items to enhance each space,” Carmen says. “Anyone can transform what they currently have into something magical for the consumer.”

The Pop-Up Process

Pop-ups might “appear” overnight, but there are layers of planning and procedure in place to make sure everything flows smoothly. Carmen and her team went about it this way:

Step 1 | They handpicked plants their customers would be successful with. The team chose a few standard varieties but also emphasized some fun varieties and the hottest new intros for 2011, such as Black Velvet and Senorita Rosalita.

Step 2 | Starting by addressing their original mixed greens issue, the team pinpointed other themes

appropriate to pop-up retail and developed different and creatively varied concept shops to set up within their available 3,000 sq. ft. of space. In about five hours, they had five themes and a list of materials to make it happen.

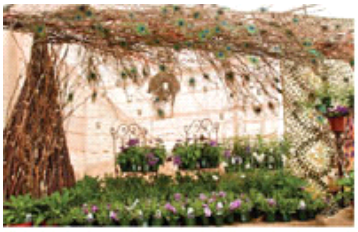
Step 3 | With the materials list in hand, the team had a budget of just $500 to work with. They shopped at Goodwill and discount stores to find used and cheap items such as spoons, old jeans, sheets, burlap, chalkboard paint and so on. They also used items on hand such as urns, curly willow, paint cans, old pallets and chicken feeders. Photos for POP materials were enlarged at a local print shop.

Step 4 | Marketing and promotion were a combination of old and new methods. They started a “buzz” with the garden club ladies about three weeks in advance of the mid-April event and put up about 100 posters in town and in their friends’ shops. Radio advertisements announced the event one week before the event. On the “social” side of marketing, Nectar and Company created a Facebook campaign that tracked the “Nectar Fairies” as they planted and preened for the upcoming event.

Step 5 | An invitation-only preview party was held for local celebrities, journalists, radio hosts and members of the area’s interior design community to generate press for the event and to encourage extra visits over the next three days.

Step 6 | During the event, they ensured top-notch customer service from the moment a person arrived. Shoppers were presented with a Nectar and Company brochure explaining their services and including a map showing the location of the concept shops, activities and restrooms, and the stories behind each concept shop. A representative carried their trays; and a Master Gardener volunteer was stationed at each concept shop to answer and advise. Empty spots in the displays were quickly filled so each customer saw the same display and had the same experience. Customers were walked to the checkouts and their plants “valeted” to their cars.

Step 7 | They used partnerships to create a bigger, interactive experience. A local restaurateur sold lunches and snacks. A photographer took family photos for the upcoming Easter holiday. Children could plant veggies to take home.





Creative Concepts

Nectar and Company’s five concept shops within the 3,000 sq. ft. space were:

The Boho Chic Backyard

The bohemian sophistication associated with the Boho Chic lifestyle combines the manicured with mayhem. Here, the team applied that to plants with unexpected colors, peacock feathers, burlap, batik-type artistry, rusty wrought iron and plants to match.

Pretty in Pantone
Shoppers could find all the hottest colors to paint their garden for the season. “The brighter, the bolder, the better!” they encouraged. White sheets sewn together created a backdrop on which the team painted Pantone’s three hot colors for the summer.

Cocktails in the Courtyard
The team presented ideas of what plants and flowers you might use to entertain within the courtyard. “A twist of citronella, a splash of white linen torenia, shake and stir, and now you have the perfect cocktail for your garden.” Or, why not succulents on the rocks?





The Debutante Digs 101
The new gardener has to be careful not to bite off more than she can chew. This area was set up with plants selected for the rookie gardener. The 200-plus spoons suspended from the ceiling were to “spoon feed” shoppers with the information they’ll need to get started in the garden.

The Results

Carmen says she knew if they put creativity first, they would have a space so surprising and unpredictable for their customers that they would not resist what was presented to them. “The whole idea was to make the space irresistible and contagious so that shoppers wanted to take their time and figure out how they could weave these plants into their everyday lives at home,” Carmen says.

And that they did. Stories such as this repeated themselves throughout the three-day event: One customer visited on Friday, came back on Saturday with her mother, and came again on Sunday with her two best friends. “We had so many repeat customers bringing people back that we knew something was working,” Carmen says. Said one customer to her plant valet: “I don’t even like plants, but I had to buy them!”

They sold out of those mixed greens and a whole lot more. Four hundred customers visited during those three days. During that time the displays were continually stocked and restocked, and they had to order more plants from nearby growers to make sure they had enough on hand. The event also introduced Nectar and Company to a whole new set of customers, many of whom have already begun using their services.

Maybe most importantly, customers left asking, “When are you going to do this again?” Oh, just you wait—it’s going to be fabulous. **GP**