

Features

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How do you POP UP?

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Pop-Up As Seasonal Store

Stutzman's Greenhouse and Garden Centers has been a family-owned wholesale grower and retailer in Hutchinson, Kansas, for more than 50 years. In 2004 the company opened a 40,000 sq. ft. fully-stocked satellite store with a greenhouse facility not far away. In 2006, Stutzman's opened a smaller, temporary retail outlet in Pratt. Today they have a total of 10 temporary locations open from April through October.

"We grow our own merchandise, and with wholesaling being the way it is you don't always get the prime merchandise to the customer," says Jason French, Stutzman's greenhouse manager. "You get people ordering just what they need as opposed to what's ready. With a satellite location the nicest, freshest stuff can be put out to the customer immediately." The satellite stores are mostly within 100 miles of the production facility, giving them the ability to service them all each day if needed. The costs involved in wholesaling small quantities of peak product would be prohibitive.

Stutzman's temporary outlets are on leased property located in or near shopping centers, places with large parking lots, near traffic lights, and generally in high-traffic areas. Although temporary stores, the actual structures in some locations remain in place in the off-season. "It depends on city regulations," says Jason. "Some we do have to take down, quite a few we are able to leave up year-round... We do bring in the barns and check outs." The benches are gathered together in one spot on the property and left until next season. They bring back anything that might be damaged or vandalized during the winter.

These locations often don't have gas and electric utilities ready to go. Getting those ready can be one of the bigger start-up costs. Jason noted they've had to bore a water line under pavement to get the water flowing. Electricity has to be installed, as well, but two of their temporaries have been working on a solar-powered system with success.

The city or town can make the set-up process easy or hard. "We've had some [cities] that say, 'What can we do to make it easier for you to open here?'" and then others where we have to have this ordinance and that ordinance," says Jason.



Pop-Up as Special Event

Carmen Johnston and her Nectar & Company plant rental business have hosted two pop-up special events. Their second event was hosted on the property of the local museum in Macon, Georgia, on a Thursday-Sunday in April. Although held just four days, the event drew crowds and created buzz.

“The advantage when it’s a short-term event is [customers] know that on Monday it’s not going to be there,” says Carmen. “Part of the social media campaign is we’re bringing in new plants every day. What you see on Friday might not be there on Saturday because we’re bringing in something new.” While visitors may have shopped the event on Friday, the promise of something new each day encourages them to come back, bringing friends and family.

Carmen and her crew created excitement and anticipation among their social media followers by promoting giveaways, special sessions and reaching out to followers of the event’s partners. They generated PR by holding a media day for local press and bloggers on Thursday, making sure to provide the media with a one-page sheet about the event for distribution to their readers.

One of their goals was to attract multiple generations. On Friday they held a ticketed Lunch and Learn with an hour presentation by a horticulturist. This attracted an older, Master Gardener-type crowd who were then able to be the first to shop. That evening they had a ticketed event with a popular local band to attract a younger crowd. Portions of ticket sales from both Friday activities went to benefit the museum. The opportunity to have the event in the museum parking lot was a no-brainer for the museum, Carmen says, as it generated foot traffic and interest for themselves, too.

Workshops and demonstrations were held both Saturday and Sunday. They brought in local restaurants for cooking demos and gardeners for planting ideas. One of the big surprises for Carmen was the effectiveness of the how-to videos playing in the DIY 1-2-3 concept shop. The minute-long videos showed viewers how to use all the plants in that one area. Customers would watch the video and then shop for the plants they needed without assistance. The videos took the intimidation factor out of shopping.

Carmen says that by creating an experience, they were able to ask and receive a higher price for their products. “When you create engaging experiences, you’re able to increase the retail value,” Carmen adds. “When you reinvent the plants in a fun and creative way, it’s an ‘Oh my gosh!’ moment and makes it more fun and exciting for the customer.”



Pop-Up As Vendor

Sometimes that special pop-up event is another organization's event, such as a plant or garden festival. In this form, the pop-up is a vendor. Jessica Lenker, owner J Lynn Nursery in Blain, Pennsylvania, says this works well for them as their community is quite rural and a steady retail shop would not be profitable. Her nursery's sales are 90% from mail order and 10% from pop-up retail.

"These [festivals] are our opportunities to have a retail center, so to speak," says Jessica. "The pop-ups are a great place to sell plants that we can't sell via mail order because we have too few or because they are niche items or they don't ship well." These festivals also give Jessica a chance for some face-to-face interaction with gardeners. "Gardeners are in a different mindset when they are at these festivals," she says. "It's not so much that they are going to a retail garden center looking to find exactly what they need. They are just in a more open spirit."

Jessica sums up pop-up garden retail of all sizes perfectly: "Definitely try it at least once, and if it doesn't work out the first time, give it a couple more tries before you give up."

If you put a little bit in, you can get a lot out of it. **GP**