

Features

8/27/2015

Easy Changes for a Modern Look

Katie Elzer-Peters

Now is the time to start planning for next year. Yep, you heard that right.

It's fall. Some of you will have hayrides and holiday sales, and then, BAM, it's right into spring. "The absolute most important first thing for garden center staff is to remember they've got six months to make choices," says Judy Sharpton, *Green Profit* contributor and greenhouse and garden center brand development and renovation consultant. "Often I go see people and the first thing that comes out of their mouths is 'Oh, we meant to do that,' if I suggest something." None of this will help if you don't take action. "If you are serious about this, sit down right now in September and make some choices," Judy says.

Judy, along with Chuck Sierke, National Sales Manager for Deforche Construct, a greenhouse design-build company, and Rich Francis, East Coast District Sales Manager for Arett Sales, a distributor of lawn, garden, and holiday supplies, have shared their top tips, gleaned during decades of experience in the industry, for giving your garden center a facelift without, as Judy says, "A bulldozer or a bank note."

Start at the Street

All three started their conversations talking about the front entrance experience. Listen up, because there are some specific points that garden centers aren't hitting. Sure, your storefront might look nice, but is it working for you? "If you can't get people in the door, you can't make a sale," says Chuck.

He continues, "Take a look at the signage. People say to me 'Well our name's up there— isn't that what we're supposed to have?' and it is, but the sign can work for you. It's your free advertising for the thousands of cars driving by each day." Judy encourages garden centers to have the words "Garden Center" on the sign. "Don't have a sign that says 'Hopewell Gardens;' the sign needs to say what you are—be clear."

Chuck says, "A good sign is noticeable, informative, eye-catching. Put your hours on it. If you don't have a large format digital sign, incorporate a scrolling sign that says what's on sale or advertises classes. 'This week—Gallon Roses \$15. Saturday container planting class.'"



Once your sign is sorted, you have to get people to look at it, which means a solid line of color leading up to it. “Quit trying to create a garden at the front. You need a planted sign that gets the customer to turn his or her head and say ‘Look at that!’” and then, hopefully, turn in, she says.

Rich concurs with the color blocking idea. “Put your trees and shrubs in the back. Lead with the color. If you use multiple colors, plant in big blocks.” He recommends changing out the colors for the seasons, as well. “Pottery Barn changes their windows seasonally and so should you.”

Control the Flow

Garden centers can have multiple entrances and exits, which makes it difficult to capture the sale or stage merchandise for an organized flow. When possible, all three recommend limiting access through a single entry/exit to the main building and one through the plant area. Rich says, “I’ve worked with garden centers that removed all cash registers from the plant yard to ensure people go inside to pay—opening up the opportunity for add-on sales.”

PHOTO: Registers

When it comes to aisles inside, Rich says, “You want to work with sightlines, so there’s always something interesting to see just beyond where someone is standing. Use vertical space, but don’t block the view entirely with displays. I tell people to build vignettes throughout the store—centerpieces that incorporate sight, sound, color and scent.” Chuck agrees, saying, “Every 25 ft. there should be something new.”

You can direct traffic by incorporating vertical displays that aren’t solid walls, but still carve up the space, creating a natural flow. Judy tells all of her clients to install a three-level hanging basket display with drip irrigation to get the baskets within easy arm’s reach and line of sight of shoppers. “People come to me all of the time and say ‘We want you to know that we installed our three-tier display and our hanging basket sales doubled.’” Not only do you get more sales, but you get more visual interest in your store from something you can sell.

Rich emphasizes keeping shelving units on the short side, not only to avoid creating big walls, but also to create more end cap space. “It’s important for a retailer to sit down with a calendar and plan those end cap spaces. Note which product categories work the best and highlight key items on end caps during key selling periods. I like to create a billboard effect and merchandise one item with one price point on the end cap. Hardgoods and supplies these days have attractive packaging, so it looks nice and makes a decision easy for the customer.”

Part of controlling flow is creating a comfortable shopping experience. “Provide covered shopping!” says Chuck. “A retractable awning over the trees and shrubs can mean the difference between capturing 60% to 70% of your usual revenue on a rainy day or losing most of it to the guy down the street with covered shopping.” If you have outbuildings, he recommends covered walkways in a minimum width of 12 ft. “That provides room for two passing shopping buggies and a center merchandise display.” Putting in a walkway will “create the yellow brick road from point A to B to C, leading your customers through the store.”



Put Some Lipstick on the Pig

Chuck compared store upfitting to using the right fishing lure to catch a largemouth bass and putting lipstick on a pig. Rich said the floors, ceiling, lighting and shelving is like the picture frame—if it's ugly, people notice it. If it's clean and simple, they notice the picture.

Do not underestimate the power of a clean floor, freshly painted shelves, bright lighting and an attractive ceiling. A coat of paint and a dust rag can do a lot. There's a reason people make a killing on refinished shabby chic furniture. That chipped end

table becomes a masterpiece with paint and some sandpaper.

If you want to do more, perform an actual facelift for the store. Cover metal columns with distressed wood, add colored flashing to the outside of the building or replace front windows and doors. Chuck recommends building a porch to the front or side for more covered shopping and opportunities for merchandising.

Ready to plan? Decide where you're going to start—head to the home improvement center to pick out some paint and get out your planogram and get to work. The clock is ticking. Seven months 'til spring! **GP**

Katie Elzer-Peters is a garden writer and owner of The Garden of Words, LLC, a marketing and PR firm handling mostly green-industry clients. Contact her at Katie@thegardenofwords.com or at www.thegardenofwords.com.