

Features

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A SHIFT in the Zeitgeist

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Here's what you need to know about AmericanHort's new research on the garden retail industry and how it impacts your business (and it does).

AmericanHort just unveiled research at Cultivate'15 that delves into the science and the art of garden retail and came up with key findings about the gardening consumer, the state of garden retail today and where we go from here.

WHO: AmericanHort and the Horticulture Research Institute (HRI) tapped the Columbus College of Art & Design's MindMarket program to conduct the research. The MindMarket team consisted of four student researchers and two faculty business experts (all of whom have little to no experience with our industry and provide an "outsiders" view of the topic). MindMarket conducts research from a qualitative standpoint and has a focus on design.

WHAT: A multi-year research project that affects all facets of the industry, from the breeders and growers on to retailers and the end consumer.

WHY: The way consumers interact with retail is changing. According to AmericanHort, the goal is to discover "the industry's true potential and to capitalize on the opportunities based on changing consumer demographics and behavior."

WHEN: Spring 2015 began the hands-on research portion; the conclusions will be released in an ongoing series of webinars, white papers, podcasts, training seminars, signage templates and through other forms of communication from AmericanHort.

WHERE: 40 garden retail stores in eight states, many that were recommended by AmericanHort members, but others that were found in Google searches and Yelp reviews. Examples of the retailers visited include Flora Grubb Gardens (San Francisco) and Portland Nursery (Portland, Oregon).

HOW: The MindMarket team interviewed owners, managers, employees and customers at each location. They observed how customers interacted with the products for sale, watched employee/customer interactions

and gained insights into how each retailer worked. The MindMarket team also conducted a plant study, providing plants to people 18 to 35 years old and asking them questions over two weeks about how they interacted with the plants.

CONCLUSIONS: MindMarket gave AmericanHort 30 insights into consumer behavior with regard to garden retail that impact all facets of the industry. We can't outline all the insights here, but a few major ones include:

- One way retailers can connect with consumers is to understand the motivation for plant ownership. Is it a gift? An edible to grow their own food? Is it for a pop of color? Understanding the motivation helps you make better recommendations.
- Look at your hours you're open. The research found many retailers weren't open hours that were convenient to the customer, but rather convenient to the owner. Have your store open when customers are available to shop.
- The language we use as an industry can be intimidating. Instead, we need to figure out what language our customers speak. To go along with this, we need to speak the benefits of our products clearly—what plants do for us.
- Refund and return policies are important to customers and they impact the customer experience. MindMarket recommends offering guarantees on plants to promote buying.
- Retailers must be active and engaged on social media to meet consumers where they're communicating.
- Capitalize on opportunities for impulse sales strategically incorporated throughout the retail space.
- Customers enjoy interacting with plants and products through touch and smell. Encourage this behavior.
- Visual merchandising increases purchases by drawing customers into displays—a greater emphasis on merchandising can create more interest.

To find out more about this project and to see more of the insights, visit americanhort.org/AmericanHort/Events___Programs/SHIFT/shift.aspx. **GP**