

## Features

5/1/2018

## Every Second Counts

*Mark Williamson*

What can you do in half a minute?

You can send a tweet. Order take-out. Micro-meditate. The list goes on.

In the grand scheme of things, 30 seconds isn't a long time, but when you think of all the things you can do, a lot can be achieved in such a small window.

Half a minute is also enough time for garden centers to lose customers. Perhaps an employee was unhelpful or there was no one was at the checkout. Regardless, it's important for customers to be met with high levels of customer service from the get-go.

Yet it isn't just limited to in-store encounters.

### **Make a Positive Impression**

Research by PHMG has found U.S. businesses keep customers on hold for an average of 29.83 seconds per telephone call, so considering what callers hear during that time is imperative for a positive user experience.

When a customer picks up the phone to call a business, their first impression of the company is formed on how well their call is handled. In fact, a study of 2,234 American consumers discovered 59% wouldn't give repeat business to a company if their initial phone call wasn't up to scratch.

Many companies believe playing a popular music track will keep listeners engaged and entertained while on hold. However, when businesses want to convey certain brand values, using a pre-existing song is like making a square peg fit into a round hole.

Generic sounds and repetitive "please hold" messages won't work either. Callers don't want to feel like what they hear on hold is designed to placate and pacify them, so instead see it as an irritation, ultimately reflecting badly on the brand. Rather, garden centers should look to incorporate audio branding into their marketing to help create a long-lasting positive impression in the minds of the customers.

### **Provide Unparalleled Service**

When garden centers put callers on hold, it's through necessity rather than want. In an ideal world, businesses would deal with queries straight away, putting the customer through to the relevant staff member or department immediately.

Unfortunately, this can't always happen. In these instances, on-hold marketing—customized voice and music messages—can be used to help negate a negative caller experience.

It taps into the psychological power of sound to help mold perceptions of a business and its brand, boosting customer loyalty by subtly reassuring customers that they're dealing with a professional organization. Brand-congruent sound also helps a business stand out in a competitive market, with research by PHMG discovering 67% of Americans deeming music more memorable than visuals in marketing.

What's more, on-hold marketing can actually boost customer service levels. By engaging callers, it not only helps decrease the perceived amount of time on hold, but also has been found to reduce caller hang-ups by 79%.

Highly-targeted voice and music messages speak directly to an attentive audience, providing garden centers with a golden opportunity to communicate key information in a more personal way. They also provide a chance to upsell and cross-sell products and services.

For example, a customer may have been planning a trip to a florist to purchase flowers for a gift, only to be made aware by the messages that there's a florist in store, saving them a trip while boosting revenue for the garden center.

For many garden centers, profit fluctuations are likely with higher demand in the spring and summer months when the weather allows for more gardening. By having the ability to update your on-hold messaging on a regular basis, you can help boost revenue by promoting seasonal products, like decking or snow shovels, while making sure your content stays relevant and up-to-date.

Messages can also give listeners advice on how best to look after their garden, promoting the garden center as an industry leader that knows everything there is to know about gardening. This can help prompt a customer to choose your business over another.

## Sounding Top-Class

While there's an argument that many garden centers have embraced the digital revolution and now have an online presence, a study found half of Americans still prefer to pick up the phone to get hold of company information.

As such, it's important for garden centers not to neglect traditional methods of communication between the business and a customer. A large amount of a budget is often devoted to ensuring a garden center's website provides a positive user experience and call handling practices must meet the same standards.

Yet many businesses are still lacking on this front. Visual branding is already well-established and many business owners understand the importance of making their organization look as good as possible.

Audio branding is equally as vital, yet a large misconception is that it's only for large corporations with vast advertising budgets, when in fact the largest application is on the telephone—something which concerns businesses of all sizes.



Ignoring how your business sounds can prove detrimental for garden centers. Given it's been recognized that customers feel more valued if they hear customized messages while on hold, it's proof that audio forms a powerful element of a marketing mix and should be used to help win and retain customers. **GP**

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*Mark Williamson is CEO of PHMG Worldwide, a global company specializing in audio branding consultancy, with a U.S. headquarters in Chicago. More information can be found at [phmg.com](http://phmg.com) or by emailing [info@phmg.com](mailto:info@phmg.com).*