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How Millennials Attract Millennials

Bill McCurry



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If you haven't visited with the *Green Profit*/RBI Young Retailer Award finalists at Cultivate, you've missed a great opportunity for business improvement.

This year's three finalists, having grown up around horticulture, have phenomenal experiences and wisdom. While the winner will be announced at Cultivate '19, each shows maturity and business judgment beyond their years. I interviewed them in reverse alphabetical order.

Madison Williams (Boulevard Flower Gardens, or BFG, South Chesterfield, Virginia) attracts Millennials using culture and environment. BFG recently "right-sized" its operation with a new indoor/outdoor selling area offering yoga classes, weddings, field trips, a U-Pick pumpkin patch, numerous plant life cycle displays and products contributing to a memorable stroll through the property.

BFG focuses on fun and a "team" experience that Millennials relate to. Madison's teams are comprised of spouses, kids, community garden friends, neighbors—anyone who shares the passion. BFG employees aren't restricted by job descriptions; they help customers throughout the property, bonding with all generations. Madison believes Millennials are "very intentional with their money and space, so we set them up for success. That brings them back and generates a powerful social media buzz, which feeds our store traffic."

Tanner Jones (Helmi's Garden, Columbia, Missouri) echoes these sentiments, going out of his way to personalize things for Millennials. Tanner believes in "names with faces," including "my favorite plants," and bonding with customers and employees. Helmi's creates entire experiences around common plant affinities, constantly changing seasonal displays for customers to discover. Helmi's has tiny greenhouses within bigger greenhouses, as well as "plants as pets" customers won't see anywhere else. Lynx, Helmi's famous cat, adds to the experience.

"We're your happy space, especially in winter," Tanner boasts. "There's nothing 'cookie cutter' about our experience."

Their own customers are a good source of employee leads until they realize how much work weeding or watering can be. In their college town it can be difficult to attract people who know the fun of working in a garden center.

Morgan Huston (Birdsall & Co., Englewood, Colorado) chases down Millennial customers. Their original store features quality fountains, outdoor furniture and larger plants, but she observed Millennials buying smaller indoor

plants and did her research. Birdsall opened a small satellite store, The Urban Nursery, in the trendy “RiNo” Art District. It’s a welcoming place featuring house plants and other urban dwellers’ needs.

Morgan says their Urban Nursery store offers “little pleasures.” Millennials can spend time enjoying the store ambiance before selecting a gift for themselves—maybe jewelry, possibly a pot or a houseplant to enliven their urban home. Focused on the Millennial urban dweller, the Urban Nursery is designed for them to bond with the store and employees. “When we hit the correct product mix, the Millennial’s social media network takes over and we’re trending on Instagram!”

Morgan has found Millennials aren’t conversation-adverse if they relate to the store and team. “When it’s apparent we share their desires and dreams, we can help them with the right product or design. We play up the local, female family-owned angle.” [Morgan and her mom are the owners; her dad and brother are employees]

Customers and employees know we’ll work together to fix any problem. Their confidence in us builds trust.”

Morgan’s attitude toward being candid and honest includes recruitment. “Don’t overlook nepotism. We’ve got great employees we know through their families. For our culture, it’s perfect.” The employees enjoy their job so much that, based on his observations, a delivery person who wanted a job change decided to apply for work there.



If you’re looking for ideas to accelerate your company, be at the Unplugged party on July 15, where they’ll gather to hear the winner. They demonstrate, from another angle, how our industry continues to adjust and change.

Join our *Green Profit*/RBI Young Retailer Award Nominees and find out who wins at this year’s Unplugged Event. It kicks off at 8:00 p.m. Monday, July 15 at Callahan’s, 520 Park St., Columbus. Visit www.cultivate19.org for more details. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 688-1169.