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Marketing Munchies from Dr. Bridget Behe

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It certainly is a challenging and dynamic time for us all. First, we need to do what is legal and that changes daily. Second, we need do what is ethical, which also may change depending on how a business is classified by the owners (if there is no legal edict). Ethics will take into account how owners, employees, and customers “feel” about interactions and how do we keep people safe now and as our world evolves. Third, we need to do what is helpful. Food will continue to be in demand, but we need help to reassure ourselves as humans that connecting with each other and nature (plants) will restore parts of us that are essential.

When communicating with your customers, utilize the following steps:

Communicate Safety Procedures:

- Reassure how you are keeping your employees, your customers, and you safe (just as many other businesses have done and are doing). This won't disappear fast. What we do now matters as well as how we will carry these new protocols into the future. It may take a long time for some people to feel “safe” interacting with us when we are in a position to have sales. Think about what is working for your company and how that might look weeks/months into the future.

Share the Benefits of your Business

- Benefit information has never been more important. We understand the essence of food, but no one lived by food alone. Parts of our industry nurture and refresh the soul, exercise the body, and challenge the mind as positives we need to convey.
- Online and phone orders can be one mechanism to connect as can Facebook. How you communicate can be examined and evaluated. Are newsletters working for you? If yes, maybe increase their frequency with messages about your steps and (if you are in a position to sell) your offerings (perhaps pared down). How is your FB following? Can you post some information (again, safety first sales second) about how your customers can support you through sales? Can people telephone orders? Fax? Do you have delivery or curbside pick-up?
- Next, get a “take out” menu together. Focus on 3 choices for each of the following categories:
 - Food: tomatoes, peppers, herbs, and other popular items. Can you make a “bundle” for salsa, pasta sauce, etc. that contains 3-5 plants?

- Pretty containers for sunny locations, shady locations. What are some of your more popular baskets or containers that are centered on a specific color (e.g. yellow, pink, white, etc.).
 - What do you have for them to plant or help grow? Sunflowers come quickly to mind.
 - The keys to success would be to integrate material (use the bundle approach to encourage multiple unit sales) and come up with just 3 price points. Think “good” “better” and “best” so customers don’t face choice overload.
- Anyone with a camera phone can take a picture and plan the post. Got a solid color (white?) sheet for a background (so as to remove any confusing or confounding plants that might appear in the background). Price and post (and be sure to add some plant benefits as headlines!).
 - Can you safely offer curbside pick-up when you are able to be open? How might that look in the parking lot? How could you direct traffic (or a line) to orderly fill those pick-up orders?
 - Can you offer delivery and how much is that (waived if purchases > \$xx?). Do you have someone who can deliver as well as a vehicle? Can the recipient be sent a text, so plants aren't out in hot/stormy weather?
 - How can you get paid? Square, Shopify, others?
 - Plant concierge service: Can you have a personal shopper walk through with a phone on Facetime and shop (if the order is over \$xxx?) and then focus on some delivery mechanisms like curbside or home delivery.

Take Advantage of Your Community:

- Now is a great time to connect with other IGCs. If you are an independent garden center, consider joining the group IGC Talk.
- Created by the National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture, the [Plants Do That initiative](#) was crafted to cultivate healthy, connected and engaged communities.
- [Free infographics, memes and more are available](#) for you to share with your customers.

Additional Resources

- [Free access](#) to all of the consumer research I've done and published
- [Marketing Munchies](#)
 - Weekly podcast that highlights the latest in horticulture marketing and consumer research
 - The next two weeks will be focused upon helping retailers during these dynamic and challenging time
- AmericanHort Resources
 - [COVID-19 Resource Center](#)
 - Shopping from the [Consumers Perspective Webinar](#)