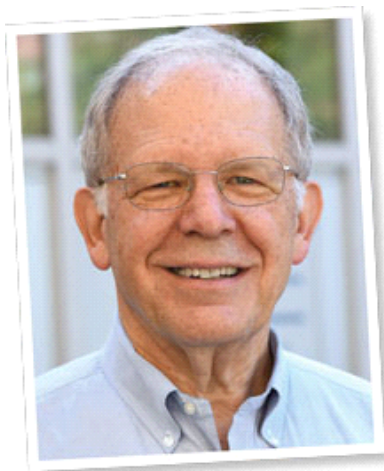


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Conventional Wisdom: A Modern Day Oxymoron

Bill McCurry



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When times are good you should advertise.

When times are bad you must advertise.

We continually hear about market growth for those who continued to advertise or courageously increased their advertising investment in tough economic times.

But is this conventional wisdom relevant to garden centers in 2020? If you look at the list of “winning companies” you’ll see they were in a strong financial position with the cash or borrowing ability to advertise. Real wisdom shows it was financial strength plus advertising that brought success.

You don’t need much cash to advertise. Unfortunately, you need more enthusiasm, creativity and focused personnel to accomplish the success

your predecessors achieved with money. Now you’re marketing your store and its personality as much as the products you sell.

COVID-19 has indelibly imprinted all of us. Our priorities shifted. Millions visited Chicago’s Shedd Aquarium penguins as they were turned loose to wander the empty halls. Sydney’s Taronga Zoo live cam visitors exceeded the population of Australia. Visitors sought peace, tranquility and some entertainment. When will your live cam or videos of hummingbirds and other feathery friends be posted? What about customers’ videos of their successful gardens?

Videos are an excellent choice because they relay more emotion in less time than other media. Your customers don’t expect you to be George Lucas. Don’t try for Hollywood extravaganzas. Just be the authentic you!

Sound is vitally important to video. Even a dark or fuzzy picture may be watched if the audio is easily understood. The sharpest picture will lose its audience if there’s garbled audio. Camera stores sell relatively inexpensive, high-quality microphones to use with your phone or camera. The built-in microphones won’t provide the sound you need; many customers will watch your videos on their phone, possibly in noisy surroundings. Your audio must be crystal clear.

Increasingly, people are aware of community and the role disappearing small businesses play within that

community. Garden centers should nurture and reinforce that attitude.

Conventional wisdom says we should advertise. “Sale!” “Buy now!” “Today only!” Social media allows you to tell a variety of stories and make long-lasting impressions. Social media must be social. Use yours to promote other local small businesses and organizations as well as your own. This emotional connection can build stronger customer ties than any average weekend sale event.

COVID-19 has also caused many people to reassess their priorities. Gardens and flowers have had great press. People understand the benefits and joy of growth, whether in a window box, backyard or farm. Positive PR has created new awareness of green life in a time of illness and death.

Your social media should leverage these stories and embrace your new normal. Show your team interacting with members of your community. Illustrate how your employees and customers are active in your area in ways beyond the garden center. As applicable to your locale, show how you’re adapting to the new normal with safe shopping.

“Social” in social media means it’s more than just sales messages. Garden centers only promoting new products are being annoying, not “social.” Give your customers ideas to make their lives more meaningful and enjoyable. These might include your grandmother’s corn bread recipe, humorous cartoons, distinctive plants, animal pictures, unique landscaping, and staff or customer photos. Become a forum where customers can share their horticultural success with others. Encourage your employees to post their favs on your social media.

Your social media messaging should be unique to you, your store, your team, your community and your products. Focus on one medium at a time. Own one marketplace at a time (i.e., Pinterest, Instagram or Facebook). Until you’re well established in one, don’t use another venue.

Your marketing for the balance of this unusual year should consider it’s not money thrown at advertising that pays dividends; it’s consistent messaging of your store’s place in your customers’ community that builds repeat and referral customer traffic. **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.