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Features

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Staying Safe Through Winter

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Our industry is fortunate to have a significant amount of outdoor shopping area, but as the weather turns colder, the products our customers want tend to be indoors. And therein lies the issue during a global pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has recently updated some of the information on its website about how COVID-19 is transmitted, including the following:

The principal mode by which people are infected with SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) is through exposure to respiratory droplets carrying infectious virus.

Respiratory droplets are produced during exhalation (e.g., breathing, speaking, singing, coughing, sneezing) and span a wide spectrum of sizes that may be divided into two basic categories based on how long they can remain suspended in the air:

• Larger droplets, some of which are visible and that fall out of the air rapidly within seconds to minutes, while close to the source.

• Smaller droplets and particles (formed when small droplets dry very quickly in the airstream) that can remain suspended for many minutes to hours and travel far from the source on air currents.

That means the recommendations continue to be keeping customers and employees at least 6 ft. apart, which many retailers have now marked on the floor with guides, and to install Plexiglass barriers at places like cash wrap stations. The CDC also recommends moving payment stations farther away from the employees checking out customers and shifting primary stocking hours to after-store hours.

The CDC also continues to recommend face coverings in all settings where social distancing may not be possible.

Let's talk about that face covering for a moment. According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, here's how to wear a mask properly: "Your mask should cover your face from the bridge of your nose to under your chin. It should be loose fitting but still secure enough to stay in place," according to details on the website. Just to reiterate, that's means completely covering the nose as well as the mouth. "Make sure you can talk with your mask on and that it doesn't irritate you, so you are not tempted to touch it or pull it out of place, which could put you at risk from touching your face or limit its effectiveness."

Reusable masks should be washed after use, so employees might want to have a steady rotation of masks. They likely aren't going away any time soon, so it might benefit a retailer to offer branded masks.

Cleaning & Sanitizing

When the pandemic first began there was an intense run on cleaning supplies. That's starting to get better, but now there are more options for sanitizing against coronavirus, specifically SARS-CoV-2.

One product is SaniDate All Purpose Disinfectant from BioSafe Systems. The company announced in September it received EPA labelling specifically for human coronavirus.

"This three-in-one solution saves time and money by cleaning, disinfecting and deodorizing hard surfaces in one step with one product," the company says on its website. "In addition to human coronavirus, SaniDate All Purpose Disinfectant works against *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Salmonella enterica*."

FloraLife, a division of Smithers-Oasis Company, also announced earlier this year that two of its products meet the criteria for disinfecting against coronavirus. The products, FloraLife D.C.D. and FloraLife MicroBLOC, both kill and prevent bacterial, microbial and viruses on hard, non-porous surfaces.

"In areas where there is no contact with food, the cleaners can be sprayed or wiped onto the surface that needs to be disinfected and air dried," the FloraLife website states. "For areas in contact with food, surfaces can instead be rinsed after application. To determine which surfaces need to be rinsed off, users should follow label instructions."

Whatever products you use to clean, stay vigilant on your cleaning regimen, and show customers you're consistently disinfecting high traffic areas and touch points. They'll appreciate your efforts.

In the spring, a few visionary thinkers banded together quickly to write a document that highlights why growers and retailers in the green industry were "essential businesses." This document circulated through local and state decision-makers at a time where municipalities and state governments were closing businesses and services. One of the most important segments talked about allowing people to grow their own food during times of uncertainty and emphasizing the importance of allowing growers and retailers to stay open to provide these materials. Here's a small section of the document:

"Americans are resilient and resourceful in the face of adversity provided the opportunity to produce their own food and manage any shortage in the supply chain. Millions of Americans engage in food production at home and more are sure to follow as the COVID-19 crisis unfolds.

With thousands of garden retailers serving communities across North America, these stores provide much-needed services. Whether helping Americans produce home-grown fruits and vegetables, as Americans did during WWII as Victory Gardens, as a mental and physical health relief or providing wholesome activities for children, garden centers offer products and support that individuals and communities can utilize during these stressful times.

Many of the products carried by garden retailers are agricultural, like seeds and edible plants. Others are necessary tools and supplies. Together, they're essential to maintaining a healthy living environment. In many communities, the garden retailer may be the only outlet where consumers have access to essential supplies for growing, gardening, maintaining or repairing their residences."

While winter is often a time for gardeners to regroup, they're still buying seed starting kits, seeds, tools and other materials for next spring. Consider ways to help customers find what they need easily, whether it's tutorials online that provide a way for customers to build a shopping list of all the items they need (complete with recommendations for items they may not think about, like fertilizer, rooting hormones, etc.), or online order and curbside pickup/delivery options.

In the past, our industry has focused on browsing and keeping customers meandering through stores. However, this holiday and winter, focus on getting customers the products they need quickly and process them through quickly. Setting up stores for fast shopping can help everyone stay safe. **GP**

For More Information:

- CDC.gov has updated information for businesses about stopping coronavirus spread, as well as updated posters that can be printed for breakrooms.
- Johns Hopkins Medicine has a robust website that includes a self-checker, research updates and more: www.hopkinsmedicine.org/coronavirus
- At www.EPA.gov/coronavirus, you can find specifics on disinfecting and cleaning, as well as the latest information on indoor air circulation and coronavirus.