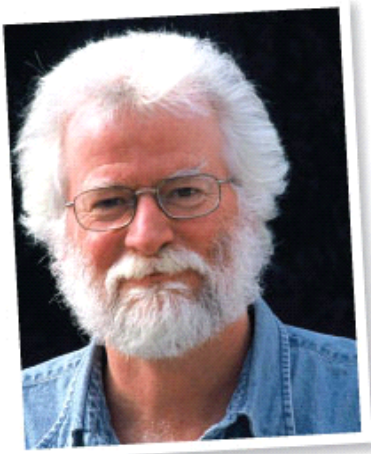


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Why, I Oughta ...

John Friel



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As I type, I oughta be in Baltimore, eating crabcakes.

I oughta be on lunch break at the alehouse across Pratt Street from the convention center, tag-teaming with colleagues at our trade show booth.

Alas, I'm in PA, keeping tabs remotely on the virtual version of MANTS. The convention center has been repurposed as a field hospital for you-know-what. The beat goes on.

I'm certainly not the only marketing guy, and ours is not the only industry, feeling the lack of trade shows like an unscratched itch. Exhibitor Magazine, which obviously has skin in the game, recently ran a survey and got over 1,000 responses from a broad swath of businesses. Some unsurprising conclusions about how face-to-face beats the crap out of virtual:

- Actual contact is a much more effective way to develop trust.
- In-person events are superior at building and maintaining relationships.
- Hands-on demos help customers and prospective customers forge a personal connection with a brand.
- With trade shows canceled or postponed, 70% of respondents reported fewer business leads and sales opportunities.
- 55% haven't had success in increasing brand awareness.

A less-intuitive epiphany: The absence of trade shows made the hearts of upper management fonder of f2f marketing. Respondents said fallout from cancellations and postponements changed the minds of former skeptics about the value of exhibiting at trade shows. It's not just about the crabcakes.

It's useful to put numbers on intangibles, but anyone who's manned a booth knows you can't quantify everything. Most have had an experience like mine on a tour bus at a Midwest show, talking to a large customer who complained about boxing and shipping charges, and didn't know we could send a truck to his door.

That's a happy ending, one you could put a number to. But many thousands of starter sales later, I'm haunted by the question, What else haven't we told our customers about us? We all oughta know that.

Exhibitor summed up, "It's evident that a vast amount of exhibitors will be more than ready to take whatever

precautions they need to get back on the show floor.” It remains to be seen whether our audience will feel the same, but there’s only one way to find out.

Last month, This Space opined, “virtual works very well for the education side, not well at all for the marketing/networking component” of trade shows. Virtual MANTS proved it again. Among the informative sessions I took in was one by native plant champion Dr. Doug Tallamy, whose presentation would serve as an interesting point/counterpoint to some recent topics in this magazine.

One of last month’s themes was “reducing the American lawn.” Tallamy and others are proposing a “Homegrown National Park.” Replacing half of every lawn (sorry, turf guys!) in the U.S. with native woody and herbaceous plants would yield 20,000,000 acres of pollinator-friendly, bird-friendly habitat. That’s bigger than any 10 National Parks in the lower 48.

On the flipside from where you’re reading is *GrowerTalks*’ Pest Management issue, i.e., how best to kill insects. Tallamy doesn’t want to kill bugs, he wants to grow plants just for them, especially caterpillars. His talk was presented by American Beauties Native Plants, a partnership of nurseries who grow ... well, guess.

Back to Baltimore, sort of: I got my crabcake fix via takeout from a local restaurant. It wasn’t as good as the Baltimore version any more than Zoom meetings are as good as walking a trade show floor. But it supported a local business and I’m thinking it’ll just make the real thing taste that much better. We oughta find out. **GP**

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