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Front Lines

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E-commerce to Enhance Brick-and-Mortar Retail

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“Getting an e-commerce site up quickly in Spring 2020 saved our business,” said Jeff Beattie of Winona Gardens in Winona, Ontario, Canada. Many of you have similar stories. Now that we can be open for browsing and for e-commerce at the same time, it takes some care and adjustment to ensure that e-commerce isn’t a profit-sucking distraction. Here’s how panelists and attendees at the Canadian Greenhouse Conference do it:

• Shipping? Focus on putting niche products, not everything, online. Terry Colasanti of Colasanti’s Tropical Gardens in Ruthven, Ontario, Canada, said that for their online store, they put carnivorous plants and other specialty items up for sale for shipping and leave out the rest.

• Shopping? As in, encouraging customers to come in and shop? Jeff and Amanda Thomsen of Aster Gardens in Lemont, Illinois, both said that customers absolutely browse online availability before coming into the store to buy in person. A good example of a non- e-commerce e-commerce strategy is what Fairview Garden Center in North Carolina does. They put plants up online like shoppable products, but where the “shop now” button would be normally, the page says, “Find at Fairview Garden Center” and links to the page with directions to the garden center.

• Click and collect: Terry stressed that e-commerce is great for surge times when you might have a full parking lot. People can check to see what you have or order online for pickup. For example, mulch, bagged soil, fertilizer and orders for bigger plantings, such as 10 flats of mixed-color pansies.

• Event registration: This is a no-brainer.

• Enhance cashflow and engage customers: Deb Foisey of Deb’s Greenhouse in Morinville, Alberta, Canada, has been honing her
e-commerce pre-order process for the last decade. Not only do pre-orders help with planning, they also generate cashflow during the time she’s closed AND provide a way for her customers to stay engaged and connected, even when there’s snow on the ground. **GP**