greenPROFIT

Guest Column

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The Easiest Way to Increase Repeat Visit Frequency

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"I'll get to that," I said as I watched a squirrel eat all of the bird seed. Again.

"I'd better get to that," I thought, looking at my reblooming azaleas not reblooming because I hadn't fertilized them in a while.

"I never got to that," I said, standing in my sweltering kitchen talking to my husband about our heat pump that hadn't been serviced in the spring.

Tech Connection

Welcome to our new column in *Green Profit!* I'll be here every other month explaining something about tech and your retail business. If you know me, you know that I don't like to talk purely in theoretical terms. Sure, I could tell you all about a piece of software or a type of configuration and explain it well enough that you could probably do it, but you wouldn't know why you should take the time to do it, so you won't. Therefore, I solemnly swear to always share the potential benefits of paying attention to the topic at hand and the pitfalls of ignoring it. I also solemnly swear that I have learned what I share by having lived it—through my own or my clients' businesses.

I've found, over the years, that tending to one's tech stack (the group of programs you use to run your business) is not unlike caring for plants. The operative word there is "care." Almost nothing in tech is "set it and forget it," although some tools and configurations come close.

Just like with plants, conditions surrounding the stack influence its performance. Maybe your email service provider gets acquired by another company and suddenly it's incompatible with your website. Maybe you get sued for accessibility compliance—not because of your building, but because of your website. Most of us got into this field because we were interested in plants, not proxy servers. In Tech Connection, we'll hit on only the most important tech topics connected to move your retail business forward.

That way, you'll get around to it.

Increase Return Visits: Connect Your Tech

How might I have remembered to fertilize my azaleas? By getting an email.

And that pre-season service for my heat pump? Again, an email or two or three.

What about the squirrel? You guessed it! A follow up email asking me how the birds were enjoying their new feeder

and, “Oh by the way, if I’m having squirrel problems, I might want to consider this, this or this.” (That’s called a “recommendation engine” and these days many email service providers come with those built in.)

When you connect your point-of-sale (POS) and email marketing system, you can connect customer email addresses to customer purchase history, which will allow you to set and almost forget the “DON’T FORGET THE FERTILIZER” follow-up emails. And the “Baby come back” emails to customers you haven’t seen in a while. Or the “We just got these in and we know you’ll love them” emails.

Those are the secrets to killer e-commerce marketing (read: easy $$$) that can absolutely be applied to brick-and-mortar retail with the right tech configuration. And it’s not too difficult to do if you know what to do.

Easier Said AND Done

Plenty of POS systems seamlessly integrate with email service providers. Shopify and Klaviyo. BigCommerce and Constant Contact. Square and Mailchimp. Square and … Square. That’s right: some POS systems offer their own email solutions so you don’t have to connect tech. VMX is an industry-specific POS that comes with email built in. Lightspeed is another favorite of garden centers that has built-in email marketing capabilities.

Before going further, investigate your current setup. I’m always 100% in favor of starting with what you have before investing in something new. It could be that your stack is poised for creating automatic email flows that send when a customer meets certain requirements. If so, go for it!

This is for the rest of you: What happens if your POS doesn’t have email built in or the built-in solution is … a POS? What if your POS doesn’t seamlessly integrate with Constant Contact or Klaviyo or one of the other big ones? There are standard work-arounds that actually work, if implemented correctly. Here’s what you need to know to do it yourself or ask your tech provider for help.

Find a Tornado Tube

When I was a kid we had these plastic tubes that allowed us to connect two 2-liter bottles together. (One partway full, one empty.) The tube would allow the water to flow from one bottle to the other. The name comes from the tornado created in the bottle with water.

There are tornado tubes for tech, too! Here are a few, from most hands-on to most “plug and play”:

API Connection: API stands for Application Programming Interface. If you connect your POS (such as Counterpoint) to an email provider (such as Klaviyo via API), you’ll probably need to have a web developer set it up because it will require custom coding.

Zapier: This is a program that allows someone to connect two pieces of software together to perform tasks without knowing how to code. Zapier works with thousands of types of software and has thousands of pre-built task workflows. It’s easy to use and has a limited free version so you can see if you like it. You don’t need to know code, but it’s helpful if you have a decent understanding of how the two bits of software work that you’re connecting so that you can choose the correct workflows and triggers.

OrderEase and Modern Retail: These are programs specifically designed to connect commerce-related software such as inventory systems to POS systems or POS to email, etc. They’re more expensive than Zapier, but more powerful and come with customer support. For larger garden centers, these are worthy solutions to investigate. The OrderEase technology is also integrated with Your Garden Center Space, a garden retail intranet solution from Boomer Wrangle.

Create Automated Workflows

Now that your tech is connected, you can use it to make more money and provide better customer service! (No,

those aren't mutually exclusive.)

Here's what I want you to do this winter: Get your email and your POS connected and choose two products to create automated workflows. I'd probably do hanging baskets and vegetables if you sell those.

Set up those workflows or journeys so that 30 days after the customer buys the item, they get an email inviting them to come back for essentials to keep the item looking great. Give them a little bit of care info, too, and maybe a sneak peek at what's coming later in the year.

Then tell me how it went! **GP**

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Video Corner

GO HERE for a visual walk-through of the topics in this column.