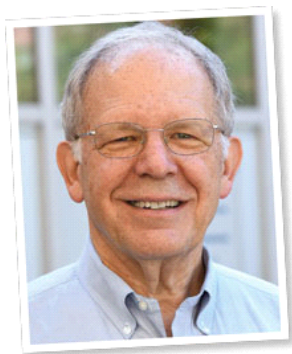


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Do You Know What You're Really Selling?

Bill McCurry



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"I could sit here forever, listening to the birds and the fountains." That's the most common comment from Type A personalities who sit in our yard. We provide for a wide variety of birds, with two fountains bubbling near the feeding stations. What slows down our visitors' heart rates are the sounds. We've never had anyone say, "I like the shape of that fountain."

Many garden centers display fountains, but don't merchandise them. A non-operating fountain, holding only leaves and candy wrappers, is a sale-abatement project.

Every garden center ensures their plants are watered, deadheaded and otherwise cared for. Yet the same garden centers will complain, "We can't keep the fountains clean." What they mean is, "We don't have the discipline to ensure our fountains are

operational." What the customer hears is, "A fountain is too much work to maintain, do not buy it." Do us all a favor. If you aren't going to keep your fountains operational for customers to see and hear, delete the department. You're likely scaring customers away.

Some garden centers complain that, once they operate a fountain, they have to sell it for less because it's used. Great. Let your customer know that the first lucky customer who puts their money down will own this fountain at the end of summer at XX% off.

A similar situation exists with wind chimes. There are multiple chimes on display inside, unbothered by wind and totally silent. In regular weather, having chimes spread around the garden center can only help your shopping ambiance. They encourage customers to listen—and buy.

Supporting pollinators is huge. Buyers aspire to the results a butterfly bush will give them, not necessarily owning a new bush. Customers say, "I want this plant. It's the one the butterfly was on." A product endorsement from a live butterfly will beat all the signage in the world.

What do yard maintenance companies really sell? In most cases, they're selling time. Almost anyone can maneuver a lawn mower around the yard. By hiring a lawn company you're delegating the job to someone else, giving you more time for other things. Why did my neighbor change companies? He said he had to come home and sweep up all the clippings they left on the driveway and sidewalk. The place looked worse after the crew left. Plus, it cost my neighbor time and money. Some people want their home to look better than the homes next door. That's not

possible if their yards look trashy and their sidewalks need sweeping, having been told why the first guy lost the contract and the new gardener has made sure the place looks 100% before he leaves.

Do you sell porch packages of pumpkins, corn stalks, mini-hay bales, mums and other fall items for customers to decorate their front porch? Years ago, we let the customer come and pick out individual items. Then, as an industry, we learned if we displayed them as a set, ideally in front of a door frame, our average sales rose. Those retailers who listened to their customers created new “add-on” services: delivery and “installation.”

While no major installation is needed, what these customers bought was time, along with a guarantee it will look good because an expert “installed” it. Most of us in the industry wouldn’t dream of having such a simple project outsourced for the \$50 to \$100 delivery fee. The customer, however, delegated the task to the garden center, knowing it would be done on time and correctly. It was one more thing the homeowner could cross off their to-do list. Remember the adage, “Sell what your customers want to buy, not what you would personally buy.”

Consider your customers’ purchase motivation. Market and sell to their ultimate goals, not to their stated desires. With just a few tweaks, your sales and your customers’ satisfaction will both increase for a very Happy New Year.

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) 731-8389.