

Consumer messaging, no-contact options and basket blueberries



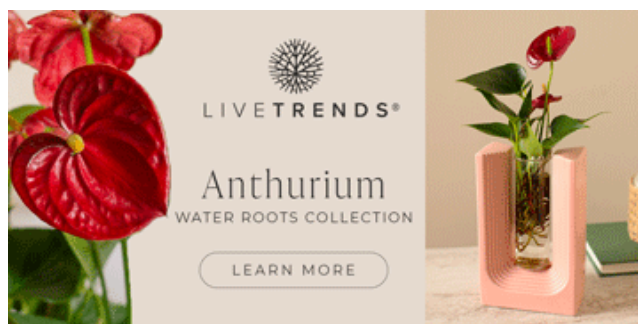
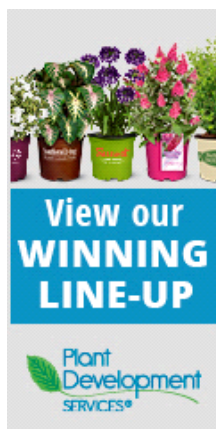
THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2020

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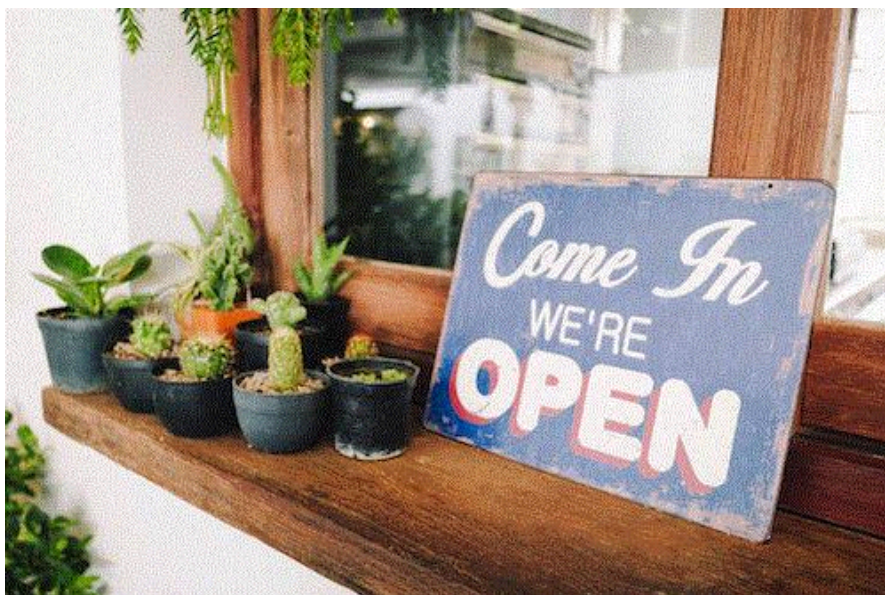
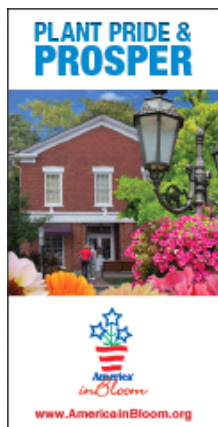
What's Your Message?

In times like these it's hard to give everything the focused attention it deserves—employee safety, online ordering options, delivery and pick-up logistics, not to mention paying the bills and learning about SBA loans. It's a lot to handle. But this industry is known for being friendly and cooperative and we're always willing to pitch in how we can. We're pulling together like never before to help each other tackle the hard parts.

One of those "hard parts" that is getting a much-needed assist is the messaging your store is sharing with your customers. Industry consultant Sid Raisch and other leaders in the garden retailing sector are on it. They've put together a draft letter, a FAQ list and marketing and communications ideas you can use to promote your business and the industry overall to everyone—from customers and wary neighbors to officials at all levels of government.

It's in the form of a Google Doc and can be accessed by all [HERE](#).





Give it a read. It's a developing document, so check back in with it now and then and see what's been added or changed. It may be good for you the way it is, or use it as a jumping off point to develop your own messaging strategy. Whichever way you go with it, give a big thank you and virtual pat on the back to Sid et al. for working for your benefit on this onerous "hard part."



No-Contact Sales Options and Updates

There is a lot developing in this stream—and quickly. Here is what I am sure is an incomplete list of what's available:

Smart Plant: Jen Polanz wrote about this option way back in the [March 27th Buzz](#). A few things have been updated and they've partnered with a few companies, such as Proven Winners, whose top-selling plants have been pre-populated into the Smart Plant tool (see a video on that [HERE](#)). Read about how Smart Plant works [HERE](#).

No-Contact Plant Pickup: From the folks at hort software company SBI. We wrote a little something about that option in the [April 9th Buzz](#). Go to www.nocontactplantpickup.com/why for the latest enhancements to the app that's free to retailers. Most interesting? Consumer ordering triggers a drop ship of product using just-in-time shipping.

Garden Center 911: Again, we previously mentioned this option from Little Prince of Oregon in the [March 27th Buzz](#). You don't even need to stock the plants or have customers come to your

store. You get a percentage of the sales to customers who were directed to their site from your website/social media sites. Here's some messaging you can share with them: "We want you to get your plants, even if you don't want to or cannot leave your house. Order direct from our grower, and we'll benefit! Here's the link: [SHARE AFFILIATE LINK]." Questions? Contact Mark@littleprinceoforegon.com.

Stay tuned next week when I tell you about a new service that's rolling out soon that will help you upload products to set up online stores ready for payment processing and curbside pick-up. Any others I should know about? Tell me about them at ewells@ballpublishing.com.



Behe's No-Contact Webinar

Bridge Behe teamed up with AmericanHort and a few garden retailers this past Monday to present some tips on how to conduct no-contact sales in a safe and smart way. The webinar—and ALL COVID-19-related AmericanHort webinars—are available for your viewing [HERE](#). If you'd like a sample of what the webinar offers, here are a few of the tips Bridget and the retail panelists shared:

- Create a designated area in your parking lot for pick-up and number the slots.
- Stay extremely active on social and showcase your best plants for that day—especially if you don't currently have online sales set up. Facebook Live works great!
- To be more efficient, have your employees pick all online/phone orders in a designated pick-time instead of as they come in throughout the day.
- Mark your aisles with tape to create "one-way" traffic to help with social distancing.
- Parents are looking for kid-friendly activities—put together Kids Gardening Kits!
- If you have an e-commerce platform, focus on posting plants/products that are in high demand or that have a high profit margin.

AmericanHort's Coronavirus Resource Center is replete with archived webinars, such as topics on SBA PPP processes, tax and labor issues, legislative and economic updates and a whole lot more. Plus they have a lot of other coronavirus-related resources there, too. Find it at www.americanhort.org/page/Coronavirus.



A Brief Interlude: Houseplants

I'll get back to COVID-19 crisis-related topics in a moment, but first I want to use houseplants as a segue into that other information.

First: What are your top-selling houseplants? Inquiring minds want to know. Actually, someone working on a tag project asked if any official list exists. I didn't think so, so I assured her I'd ask you, since you're the folks selling them. So, your top-selling houseplants? Drop me a list [HERE](#).

Second: Recent reports about the sales of houseplants are all over the board. Flat out on the West Coast, high and steady north and south. What are your houseplant sales like since the

coronavirus crisis? Do call-in/online orders include houseplants? Trying to get the pulse of what's going on, if anything. Drop me a note about your recent houseplant sales [HERE](#).



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Report from the Field: North

One of the folks I was in touch with about houseplants was Will Heeman up in Ontario. I'd asked him for a photo or two of the Heeman Greenhouses houseplant displays but he said sorry, can't do.

"We've torn [most of] them down now to make it more like an 'Amazon warehouse' in here. Here's our system right now though."



Like many garden retailers, Heeman's is open only for curbside pick-up. They are doing what they have to do to make pulling orders and pick-ups as efficient as possible. "We're selling out our pick-up slots as fast as the local grocery stores!" Will added. "We hope to safely ramp it up (when more staff start) for May to do seven times the current orders we do an hour."

I'm betting curbside pick-up won't be going anywhere once stores do open back up again. Can't beat the convenience—for the shopper, anyway.

And we've heard of some good news out of Alberta. Their province government has deemed garden centers and greenhouse operations as essential, so they can open when ready. However, according to Deb Foisy of Deb's Greenhouse, many of the growers are stuck with product meant for projects that just aren't going to happen this spring, and many retailers don't have a web store set up.

Rather than see that product get tossed (like those tulips in Holland—so sad!) or sales not happen, Deb will be taking orders through her own online store for those other growers' and retailers' products, who'll be receiving 100% of the proceeds. [HERE'S](#) her announcement about that—and a [VIDEO](#) about it, too. "We want to see everyone make it to next year," Deb says in the video. That really is what this whole industry is about.

Report from the Field: South

I then emailed with a retailer in South Florida. What's doing well down there? Perennial sales had their best March ever and April is looking strong. With that Victory Gardening trend, you'd think edibles would be stronger, but he said not as strong as they expected, likely due to the fact that their main vegetable season is winding down. Another winner? They are selling more than 800 units of milkweed per week! And soil is selling well, too.

It helps that the store is open to walk-in traffic and isn't confined to curbside pick-up—but some customers do call for pick-up and delivery. Here's how the mostly outdoor store is pulling off an open store in the time of social distancing:

- Remote registers so people can distance even further.
- Plexiglass separating cashiers from customers.
- Signage telling customers to stand at 6-ft. spaced red lines.
- Customers wait until called by cashiers.
- An employee stands in the area directing traffic.
- The cafe is indoors and only open for takeout.
- Signs indicate only 10 customers may be in the building at any time. An employee at the entrance acts as gate keeper.
- A full-time employee disinfects and cleans throughout the day.

"It has been a challenge, but our customers have been great and really appreciative that we are open," said the store manager, who wished to remain anonymous. "I have seen people actually cry being surrounded by flowers and being outside."

Blueberries In Baskets?

You know that whole "grow your own" trend that has picked up in the last month? I got word from [Bushel and Berry](#), the homegrown berry collection from Star Roses and Plants, that they have three new introductions that slot into that trend easy peasy. Blueberries!

Two of the new introductions are pretty extraordinary, I'd say. Those would be the blueberries with a hanging basket habit. While Midnight Cascade's height is about 18-24 in., its cascading habit makes it appropriate for baskets. The foliage has a bit of red that darkens once fall comes. It fruits summer through fall and is best for zones 5-9.



Sapphire Cascade, another basket blueberry, has a similar habit and structure with the leaves slightly light in season and becoming a deep red and green in winter.



Their last new blueberry is Silver Dollar, which has foliage that looks quite like a eucalyptus. Its leaves are a tad bit rounded with hints of silver in spring and early summer. In fall they turn emerald green. This is a mounding plant that grows 2-3 ft. tall. Oh, and interestingly, the berries have a bit of a pineapple flavor. Mmmmm. Zones 5-10.



About those blueberries in baskets—it's a good way to get the plants off the ground and away from rabbits and groundhogs. There's your signage right there.

And If New Plants Interest You ...

We have a whole mess o' new plant varieties featured in our 2020 Virtual CAST coverage that wrapped up this week. You can catch every single newsletter (including a bonus Day 7 featuring Proven Winners) and video about what we "saw" and what's new from breeders for 20-21—just visit <http://www.springtrials.com/> for all of it. Plus all that good social media coverage, too:

- Spring Trials from *GrowerTalks/Green Profit* on [Facebook](#).
- *GrowerTalks/Green Profit* on [Instagram](#).

Find What's Made In America

With overseas manufacturing slowed and work at ports and distribution centers sluggish, finding products for your store might be hard if not impossible. You may have some luck obtaining products via the [Made In America Store](#). They have over 9,000 (!) home and garden products such as:

- All-American Grill
- Gutter wedges & gutter scoops

- Leaf scoops
- Paul's Perch
- Bird houses
- Big Shot Hose Nozzles
- Bully Tools
- Buffalo Lawn Ornaments
- Whitehall birdfeeders, garden hose holders, nature hooks, weathervanes and suet feeders
- American flags, military branch flags and patriotic windsocks

And you'll feel good twice—not only are these products made in the U.S.A., many are made by the disabled and/or veterans.



Now, here's a question for you: What's your favorite Made In America product or source for American-made products? Jen Polanz is hunting down all the places you can go to get American-made goods and get them quickly. Drop her a line at jpolanz@ballpublishing.com.

Don't forget about Ball Publishing's constantly updated [COVID-19 Resources Page](#). Lots of good stuff uploaded daily. Meanwhile, comments, questions, suggestions? Send 'em to ewells@ballpublishing.com.

Ellen Wells
Editor-at-Large
Green Profit

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