

Features

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Educating the Customer

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One of the most powerful tools in the independent retailer's arsenal is knowledge. Many times customers who walk through the doors know they have a problem, but often don't know the cause of the problem or the solution. So when we talk about sales strategies for disease and pest controls, one of the biggest issues is educating the consumer on the right product for the right plant at the right time. Once the customer understands how they can solve their problem, the retailer is in a much better position to sell him or her a product.

"As intimidating as the category and products are, there is still no substitute for well-trained floor help," says Jim Wurz, president of Bonide, a manufacturer of disease and pest controls that supplies independent retailers, hardware stores and co-ops. "We've seen dealers be very successful with lunch and learns: 15- to 20-minute modules."

These can be before the store opens, during breaks or at lunch. In essence, whenever staff is free, give them a short refresher on the pests and diseases that are presenting themselves and which products to apply and how.

"All the problems the dealers are helping the consumers with are repetitive," Jim adds. "Get to know the 20% of those pests and pathogens that cause 80% of the problems. It helps to segment it down and dilute it so it's not so intimidating."

Another great way to get staff familiar with the timing of these problems is to subscribe to local extension e-newsletters or newsletters. They'll have valuable information about what's happening throughout the gardening season and what treatments are needed.

Being The Authority

The folks at K&W Greenery have spent decades establishing themselves as the authority on pest and disease controls (among other things) in Janesville, Wisconsin. And co-owner Phyliss Williams has spent the past 14 years reaffirming it on her AM radio show "The Flower Hour" every Saturday morning.

"In a community our size, it does build consistency with a voice," Phyliss says, adding that she invites her Bayer Advanced sales rep Randy Ryder on to the show a couple of times a year. Then he spends the

afternoon at the garden center answering questions for customers and having seminars on Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), a major pest that can kill ash trees.

In fact, the partnership between K&W Greenery and Bayer Advanced is a great example of a retailer working with a vendor to establish authority in a particular area—in this case, EAB. Bayer Advanced has a product called 12 Month Tree & Shrub Protect & Feed II, which protects against EAB, and the staff at K&W have used the research provided by the manufacturer to show their knowledge on the topic.

“It goes beyond selling them a product,” Phyliss adds. “We don’t want to lose the trees here. This is our world and we don’t want to lose them.”

The partnership grew even more when K&W realized homeowners with larger ash trees could not use the simple spray system. Instead, they required a more sophisticated injection system, which K&W now offers and even secured a contract with the city of Janesville to protect their ash trees, as well.

“It raised our credibility and our expertise in the field,” she says. “We didn’t even remotely see that on the horizon when we started this partnership with Bayer.”

Working With Your Vendor

Most controls vendors offer a wealth of options to retailers, including rebates, co-op advertising dollars (whose parameters may not be as rigid as you think), early order discounts and point-of-purchase materials depending on the size of the order. These are things retailers can take advantage of to create promotions throughout the spring and summer, offering sales to consumers and driving traffic.

Some companies offer warranties with their products, as well. Such is the case with Premier Tech Home & Garden, which markets the product Myke, an all-natural product containing mycorrhizal fungi. Premier Tech offers a 5-year warranty to customers who buy trees and shrubs and their product at the same time. If the tree or shrub dies, they simply bring it back with the receipt and the retailer provides a replacement or a credit. These types of warranties give customers peace of mind and encourages them to take the leap with a big purchase.

There are other products vendors offer to make retailers the experts, like in-store digital displays that allow consumers to search their problems and find solutions. Several retailers offer digital solutions at the point-of-purchase site. For example, Bonide offers its Bonified Dealers a touch-screen display that consumers can search by pest or disease and find solutions. Ask vendors, too, about any apps they offer to help educate customers and employees about pest and disease control issues. Many have invested time and money to create these apps, including Bonide and Scotts’ Ortho brand.

In-Store & Out

Bonide recognizes the importance of keeping retailers at the forefront of pest and disease knowledge, and is launching a new program in 2015 to provide diagnostic equipment to its Bonified Retailers. The equipment includes a microscope, video screen and enhanced database to allow staffers to search based on plant, insect, disease or symptom. Jim says this program can help retailers to establish themselves as the authority and drive consumers who are looking for solutions. The program will debut at the Hardware Show in May and

will be demonstrated at the IGC Shows and distributor shows in the fall. Bonide also will be offering “significant” co-op dollars for dealers who participate in the program so they can promote the new offerings to their customers, Jim says.

“The equipment is free and comes with the program, and we’ll send in people to set it up,” he adds. “The more people to participate the better off we are—we’ll have more informed people.”

There are a few retailers who already have this type of setup, including Chalet Nursery in Wilmette, Illinois, just outside of Chicago. They call it the Plant Health Care Center and someone staffs the station during set hours every day. It’s a big part of the controls sales strategy there to make sure the customer understands the problem before staff members help find the solution.

Once a customer has left the store, though, the sales opportunities do not end. That’s where digital resources come into play for retailers, such as e-newsletter blasts talking about pest and disease issues, along with social media posts on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and YouTube. There’s a variety of ways to reach customers to ensure they know when pests and diseases happen (and they will happen), your retail operation is the go-to for solutions. GP

4 Quick Sales Tips for Controls

Reduce redundant products in the controls aisles—more products lead to confusion from customers.

Make a never out-of-stock list of the top-selling SKUs with all sources of replenishment on the list. Keep a calendar of what sells when in an average year and make sure it’s in stock when it’s time to sell.

Tie in sales of the correct tools for the right job. For example, make sure the customer has the right kind of sprayer for the type of control purchased.

Have product your customers need now prominently displayed in the store. For example, customers may be in buying flowers in May, but also see signage saying “Prevent Brown Patch Now.” **GP**

—*Courtesy of Bonide Territory Managers Paul Morley and Jason Holt*