

Features

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Attracting (and Keeping) the Male Customer

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If you stop someone on the street and ask, “Who shops at garden centers?” the answers will vary, but odds are they will all contain one common descriptor: female. Though women may make up a larger percentage of shoppers looking to add some color to their yard and home, the number of men walking into greenhouses and garden centers is on the rise. According to the Garden Media Group, “men 18 to 34 are spending \$100 more than the average gardener,” spending \$441

annually. With these men already looking to spend, half the job is done, but there are still ways to increase sales and bring in the male buyer.

Luckily, embracing this changing demographic is as simple as learning your audience and avoiding hasty assumptions. Think about these new shoppers in two ways: practical and detailed. Within each of those categories you’ll need to consider what these men are buying and how you need to sell to them.

Position the Practical

Male shoppers are largely utilitarian. If you explore the world of the male brain, you’ll see that many researchers show men as systematic and practical. They (your author included) like to understand what they’re walking into and how the system works. This isn’t a universal truth, but the shopping man often has a set purpose and will only walk in the door if he knows exactly what he (thinks) he needs.

“Men come into the store because they’re looking for ways to save themselves time,” says Joe Abken, General Manager of Sky Nursery in Shoreline, Washington, just north of Seattle. “They’re looking for Easy solutions or good long-term solutions to problems that they’re having.”

Sky Nursery recognizes this difference and merchandises accordingly, almost dividing their store so that half of it caters to the practically minded—a large tool wall, yard maintenance materials and other do-it-yourself (DIY) supplies including pond equipment—while the other half is setup for impulse buys with live-good vignettes and decoratives. The DIY area of Sky Nursery, explains Joe, displays “everything in aisles, on shelves, with numbers.” And it’s in this organization that you’ll likely find the most success (with room to grow

and make it your own).

The tool wall, with its endless DIY potential, is ripe for the male shopper because it's already systematic and that's key. Many gardeners are spending the most money at large, national home improvement centers and the 18 to 34-year-old men are hitting local hardware stores before venturing into a garden center because that's a familiar world with a familiar order to it, according to the Garden Trends Report. Though these men are spending more than their female counterparts, that doesn't mean they're necessarily comfortable in the garden center environment, and giving them an area they can relate to is a great way to draw them in. Hardware stores and national home improvement centers may have systems and order down to a science, but garden centers can as well.

After you've readied your retail space for the male mind with shelves and labels, you can flex the beauty aspect and add the garden center flare that a hardware store can't. Create vignettes, but keep it organized to strike a balance between practical and beautiful. Pair shrubs with hedge trimmers and accessories or display pond supplies with plants to accent, all while keeping hard goods the focus.

"Men are more apt to be involved with their shopping," says Julie Baughman, Annuals Buyer at Meyer's Turf and Landscape Nursery in West Palm Beach, Florida. If you can capture this involvement by selling in a way they're comfortable with, the sale will go even further. But practical items aren't the only comfort zone for male shoppers as they seek detailed, process-oriented purchases as well.

Dollars for Details

Historically, a man's role in the yard may have been lawn care and shrub maintenance, but we're beyond that now. "A lot of these men," says Julie, "are into really technical, detailed stuff."

For many of her customers, that means bonsai. For Joe, it's food and drink: "[Men are] definitely more into the foodie aspect ... very much so into things that have to do with brewing." From hops to grapes to fruit trees, male gardeners are looking to take control of what they eat and drink.

In fact, according to the American Homebrewers Association, an estimated 1.2 million home brewers in the United States produce 1% of the total beer produced in a year (that's more than 2 million barrels!). These numbers mean there's money to be had from a retail space with a homebrewing focus. Food and drink features are easy enough to set up and great for add-ons. From peppers to tomatoes, hops to apples, these features will generate conversation and sales. A customer may know they need hops, but are they set on a variety? Do they have a spot in mind for rapid vertical growth? These features attract the male buyer; start the conversation and let your garden center show off a wealth of information (and details!).

If you host workshops or classes, partnering with a local homebrew retailer would also be an excellent way to attract these new customers, as 95% of them shop in homebrew shops eight to nine times a year, says the American Homebrewers Association. If you'd rather not venture into alcoholic beverages, take this same spin with fruit trees and vegetables for juicing with a focus on pruning and fertilization.

Keep it practical, systematic and detailed, and the male mind will feel at home. You can't prevent these green-thumbed men from hitting the local hardware store, but you can provide a similar feel with the added bonus of

live goods expertise and that's huge. Remember, the male shopper is practical and nothing is more practical than only visiting one store. When male shoppers learn they can get the best of both worlds in one place, you'll find yourself with a loyal customer base and a voluntary outside sales team. But all of this is not to say that the male shopper wants anything different than the female shopper because, as Meyer's simply states on their website, "beauty is in the yard of the beholder." But it's your job to find your way into that yard, one well-organized vignette at a time. **GP**

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