

Features

6/30/2017

Using Your Data

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Have you ever noticed that when you search for something on Google, and then visit another website, there's an ad or the product you just searched for (or something very similar) in the sidebar? You search for a wheelbarrow and there are ads for carts or shovels or rakes. Sure, it can seem a little creepy at times, but every garden center out there wishes they knew exactly which plants people were searching for—and wishes they could be directing them in their store.

Companies like Google and Amazon invest millions into analyzing consumer data to make better decisions. While Google uses it to serve relevant ads to people (among other things), Amazon uses it to determine which products people are most likely to buy... even before they click the purchase button. It's time we start doing the same thing with our products. How do we go about gathering this data? And how do we put it to good use?

What Data is Best for You?

There are all sorts of data sources out there. Think of good consumer data like a fish. You can always buy fish at a store; depending on where you bought it, it could be really good or really bad. A really nice fish is going to cost more (and stink less). However, just like with fish, you can actually catch some pretty great data yourself. Think of your website as a giant net; it's a place where people interested in your business can always go to learn more about your company.

You should have separate pages built out for your key products or product classes—only then can you track where people go on your website for free. By setting up Google Analytics you can see exactly what people are viewing. Most websites, and especially those who're managing some form of e-commerce, should already have some form of Google Analytics up and running. However, if you dig deeper into the analytics, you can really segment down who's visiting your site, and what they're interested in, when it comes to your current assortment.

You can also segment by location. If you're a garden center in the suburbs of Chicago, does it really matter who's visiting your website from Texas? Probably not. Therefore, you would want to create a segment of visitors by your specific location. Once you figure out who's visiting online, you can use that information to craft in-store strategies. If most of your online hits are from women in the 25 to 34 age bracket, and they constantly visit the section of your website with information on hydrangeas, it would seem that you should

carry more hydrangeas this (or next) year and have strategies with communicating with first-time home buyers. It sounds easy because it is easy. Drive people to your website in your offseason to determine what products catch their eye. The key here is to have a diversified range of pages so you can distinctly see what people are checking out.

Insights In-Store

Harvesting data from your websites and social pages can help you figure out what products customers are potentially looking for; this is great for developing sales strategies in the off-peak season. It allows you to better plan inventory for next year (or next week if you're agile enough), but what about in-store today? What can you learn from shoppers today to guide you in the next week?

With new technology, you can actually track the same types of information in-store as you can online. There are all sorts of retail technologies being developed that allow you to create heatmaps for your stores. The technology uses video footage to assess which areas in your store(s) are seeing the most foot traffic and how long customers stayed in those areas. Prism Skylabs is one of the companies pioneering this field and already has the ability to link up with your existing security camera systems. This type of information is critical and allows you to optimize your store for the ultimate customer experience. It can allow you to make insights that you might not be able to make otherwise. If people spend a lot of time looking at a product, but don't buy, maybe it's a price or product-quality issue. If an area is getting a lot of foot traffic, but no one is investigating the product, maybe the product really isn't that intriguing.

Diving Down into the Details

Want to know better information about sell-through and consumer spending? It's time to revamp your point-of-sale (POS) and inventory systems. This may sound like a nightmare, but it's going to help your bottom line. If you don't have an accurate inventory of a product, and someone calls in to place an order, how can you give them an accurate answer? In that same way, if you don't know what products are selling out first (through your POS data), how are you going to know which products/colors to drop off of your next order? Ordering the same amount that you did last year of the same things is going to get you the same results. In order to grow and better understand the products your customers are most interested in you have to look at the numbers of specific colors/varieties that you're selling.

Additional Data Collection Options

Collecting your own data can be easy enough to set up, but it takes time to finesse. If that isn't really an option, there are other avenues to gain some insight into the year(s) ahead.

- **National Gardening Survey:** This comprehensive report takes a look at the habits of more than 2,000 households that are surveyed on garden purchases. 2017's report was 256 pages and is going for \$945.
- **Trade Conferences:** There are usually several "trend report" presentations at these. They often have great information, but aren't definitive! Remember trends and insights will vary by location, so it's always good to maintain perspective.

- National Garden Bureau: The NGB helps promote the industry and its products to consumers. Every year they determine plants to be “Plants of the Year.” It can be a good compass to see what products people might take notice in this year.
- Pantone: You might think the color of the year is a gimmick, but these people understand trends. For the past two years, we’ve seen the color of the year to be extremely popular with GrowIt! users, especially the younger demographics.
- GrowIt!: Once or twice a year we put out a trend report based on the activity we’re seeing on the app. It’s a way to see what people like and what people are searching for at a high level. **GP**

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