

4/1/2018

Prompting the Plant Apathetic

Ellen C. Wells



Ellen C. Wells

The premise of my March Buzz Worthy column was that people do, in fact, love plants. To appeal to them we just need to find the “tribe” they belong to and address those needs. The nature lovers, the urban farmers and the plant geeks, for instance—they are turning to us for both supplies and support.

But what if folks don’t love plants? Heck, what if folks don’t even like plants? I know, they must be some crazed individuals, for sure. Like the people who vehemently don’t like chocolate. Inhuman, I say! But those people are out there, chocolate haters and the plant apathetic alike.

Folks who don’t like flora aren’t our customers so we don’t have to put them on our radar screens at all. Right? Wrong. We need them, if not to share our love of plants with them for the cash they can potentially bring to our coffers.

I’d hazard a guess that the percentage of folks who don’t like plants is greater than the percentage who dislike chocolate. The chocolate industry is sitting pretty, if you ask me. Garden retail, on the other hand, could use some converts. Or, how about this: Maybe we investigate ways we can appeal to non-plant lovers. Like what? Well, how do other retail establishments bring in customers for products that aren’t their mainstays?

Propane. When I had a gas grill I’d get it refilled at the U-Haul location. I know some garden centers that have been in the propane business and it’s worked out well for them.

Snacks. Who hasn’t stopped at a gas station, bypassed the pumps and gone straight in for a Little Debbie snack cake (or whatever your pleasure may be)? Okay, the pit stop usually also includes a visit to the little girls room, too.

Lottery tickets, cigarettes and booze. Also popular items at gas stations and convenience stores, but I wouldn’t recommend garden centers go that route.

As you can see my list of alternative reasons to stop at your garden center is unraveling pretty quickly. Not because people don’t want to buy a hold-me-over snack from you, but because the Quick Stop down the street already has a corner on that market (quite literally, on the corner).

Revisiting the chocolate shop, let’s say I don’t like chocolate. What could possibly pull me into the Godiva store? To grab a gift, more than likely. Maybe I pick up a chocolate Easter bunny for a niece, or find a dessert cookbook for my chocoholic friend. And there is always the gift card option so my friend can pick out the exact cacao percentage they

prefer. The store visit becomes not about me but about someone else.

I'm thinking we could do well by doubling down on the concept of the garden shop as an option for gifts, don't you? The garden center visit wouldn't be completely about outfitting oneself with fertilizer, seed and plants for spring, but rather about finding a way to celebrate someone else. And I'm not talking about non-plant gifts like a scarf or sun hat. I'm talking about horticultural products as gift-giving purchases. You may have a gift plant area set up, but can the plant-aphetic passersby see the plant and floral gifts beyond the flats of petunias and baskets of begonias. How do we get them back there? Or, should we pull the gifts forward and make the gardeners walk to the back for what they are inevitably coming in for anyway?

Some stores hit the mark in this regard with everything from air plants and succulents in little pots to themed mixed containers in deco pots. And for the truly plant pathetic, gift cards rule the day. The question is, do these non-customers even know you exist? After all, you're a much better option than sticking a lottery ticket into a birthday card. **GP**