

9/1/2018

Make It Easy to be Green

Amanda Thomsen



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I don't need to tell you that garden centers don't hyper-focus on selling only gardening supplies. I've seen all kinds of batty items (yes, this is a nod to last month's column) in garden centers, but we usually keep products centered around "outdoor living," which makes a ton of sense. How often are we selling a greener lifestyle, though? And why not?

Since I was a kid in the '80s, recycling and a growing emphasis on sustainability have been taught in schools. (I was asked in grade school what three things I wanted to do when I was an adult. My answer was 1. Wear red lipstick 2. Be a writer and 3. Recycle. Can I just say #NAILEDIT?) As a product of that, we have a generation (Millennials: pretty much most adults under 40) that's very willing to pay more for products that are sustainable (66% of Millennials are willing to pay more for eco-conscious goods). So how do we act, while marketing ourselves, as more sustainable?

1. Recycle and encourage your customers to recycle. This means running a plastics (trays, pots) recycling program with benefits for customers who bring their pots back. Recycle all shipping materials (cardboard, peanuts, burlap). Make a blurb about how many pots you've recycled to date on a newsletter, put a little sign up by the register for customers to read while they're getting checked out. Post a photo of the absolute MESS the pots and trays are, waiting to be sorted, with the caption "we're doing our part." Also: Sell cool home recycling centers, if you have space, because those exist, but you'd never know it. Sell reusable shopping bags at the cash/wrap.
2. Vehicles and parking. Switch as many company vehicles as possible to hybrids. Why not have customer parking spots up front that are clearly marked for fuel-efficient cars? Challenge employees to ride their bikes to work. (I cringed writing that—the last thing you want to do after slinging plants in the sun for eight hours is ride a bike home, but I'm sure it's applicable somewhere.)
3. Compost. Send all your clippings, pinched blooms and dead plants, as well as lunch leftovers, to an on-site compost heap. Talk about your awesome homemade compost every chance you get. If you have enough of it, sell that compost.
4. Wise water practices. We've all been guilty of some ugly watering when the chips are down. We're out there

watering like the Wham-O Willy Water Bug ... Recycle water, when possible. Use responsible watering practices and let customers know why you do what you do.

5. Sell composters and rain barrels. Aside from ordering online, where does one shop for and purchase a composting system or rain barrel? Why can't that be us? Yes, the backyard ones take a lot of room, but if we have the room ... it's all part of outdoor living, really. Send people out the door with the systems to be sustainable at home, then have a bulletin board of all the composters and rain barrels (in situ) that you've sold, just like the board of babies at the obstetricians.

6. Sell other green lifestyle items that can't be found outside of the Internet ...yet. Examples include compostable plates and flatware, bamboo toothbrushes, metal travel straws, solar mowers and little mesh, drawstring bags that get used for fresh produce at the local grocery store or farmers' market.

There are a million more things that can be done. Why not do a few of them, then talk about the how and why of doing them? Be more green, market being green, to make more green (wink, wink). **GP**

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