

Kiss My Aster

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The Experiment

Amanda Thomsen



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I recently asked a group of garden center people if they would be up for some free, fun advice. We would video chat so that I could get a virtual store tour to see what they were working with and they'd send all their social media links and website info to me to check out beforehand. I'd hoped I would get three volunteers—I ended up with five, which was enough to turn this fun little experiment into actual work. Each of the businesses had very little in common, none were even in the same region, but they all ended up receiving much of the same advice.

Here's how it went:

- I reviewed each business' website beforehand, but none really stuck with me. None really expressed the identity of the garden center, was particularly memorable or set it apart.
- Also, 100% of the five garden centers used the line "we're working on our website so don't really look at that." I also use that sentence about my own website so I felt their pain. But I also know I have to do better (as do they).
- During the video tours, each garden center was SO ABSOLUTELY COOL and I wanted to get on a plane to go shop there ... but how would anyone know that without FaceTiming in for a tour? I think the answer is using videos, short ones, to give customers a glimpse into not only what you sell, but how it feels to be there. Photos alone can only convey so much of the experience, charm and feeling.
- I set them all up with challenges to make a little more video. The reluctant had a goal of 90 seconds of video a month. The more comfortable have the homework of doing 90 seconds a week. I recommended to everyone that they invest in a Gimbal or hand-held steadier for their phone.
- I explained that the videos can be used to explain or show something they wish customers knew or saw, but often didn't. The videos don't have to have amazing production value, they just have to be real.
- We also talked about creating editorial calendars for their social media and blogs. Keep a 12-month calendar on a clipboard and, this winter, write ideas for videos, as well as things you can blog or snap photos of for Facebook and Instagram. No you won't be able to stick to it 100% because compost happens, but it'll help you keep going in the right direction.
- Instagram hashtags are still a huge source of confusion and skepticism. Here's the deal: hashtags are real AND

ALSO kind of silly. They're allowed to be both, just like I'm allowed to be. Instagram allows 30 hashtags and if you really want to grow your following, I encourage you to use all 30. Use TEN that are super vague like: #gardens #flowers #gardening #shoplocal #houseplants #succulents, then the next TEN are more specific, #gardencenters #illinois #planters #annuals, then the last TEN are super specific and possibly even silly, #(insert the name of your town here) #sporobolusheterolepsis #(the name of your garden center) #isithotinhere #gardencenteremployeesrock.

- It's important that you ALWAYS use hashtags for the town you're in and also for the surrounding area.
- If 30 sounds absolutely impossible, can you do 15? (5 general, 5 more specific and 5 super specific?)

Thank you to my five anonymous guinea pigs. I'll continue to check in on you and scare you just a little bit! **GP**

Amanda Thomsen is a funky, punky garden writer and author. Her blog is planted at KissMyAster.com and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter AND Instagram @KissMyAster.