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Counting the Intangibles

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You're probably wondering why, for the May "Money-Making Issue" we have a cover story on a garden center's efforts to save the Monarch butterfly and, in the process, is donating 100% of their milkweed sales to charity.

No, dear reader, I haven't yet let the proverbial cheese slide off my cracker. Get ready—I'm about to drop some mad statistics on you. How about this: cause marketing spending has grown three-fold since 2000 to more than \$2 billion (with a B) in 2018. Here's another: two out of every three Millennials "feel obligated and excited" to do their part, according to a Viacom Marketing & Partnership Insight study. Here's my final one: 86% of Millennials say brand activism impacts their likelihood to buy from that brand, based on data from the same study.

Shoppers not only want their brands and stores to contribute to their community—they're getting to the point where they expect it. There are some caveats to this, though. Lots of brands have navigated difficult waters by either not being genuine in their support of the causes they say they donate to or by employing "charity" models that don't really help (see the "Adam Ruins Everything" episode about Tom's shoe company's buy-one/give-one model).

So how do you do it right? You believe in your cause, and you give honestly, as most of you already do. Joey Lenderman at Enchanted Gardens in Richmond, Texas, saw a need in the community and how he could help multiple causes at once. His model is something all garden centers can get behind. Who doesn't feel good about buying a milkweed plant for the Monarchs when all the proceeds go to charity? Read Monarch expert Kylee Baumle's story on the efforts at Enchanted Gardens and see how you can get behind the #MilkweedMovement.

Another great example is Petitti Garden Centers' Lend a Hand program—which is turning 10 this year—and through customer support has donated more than \$600,000 to Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital. It's a fundraiser that's been near and dear to their hearts for a long time and they make it easy for customers to help by asking them to round up their purchase to the next dollar. It's an effective method: a 2018 study showed customers are much more likely to respond favorably to a roundup donation vs. a flat dollar amount request, even if it was the same amount as the roundup number (odd how our consumer brains work).

Okay, so how else can we make you money this year? Bill McCurry has done the extensive legwork of interviewing dozens of people on what makes a good buyer and he's consolidated those answers into strategies for buying

better. You'll also find a buyer's guide of buying groups and co-ops, associations and distributors available to U.S. retailers (I couldn't fit Canada in this issue—I will try to get those in a future issue!).

One item I'd like to note here: I didn't run one regional buying group (and I'm sure there are more out there), but I wanted to call them out here as an example of how garden centers can work together to buy in volume. The Garden Centers of Colorado supports independents in that state and allows them access to exclusive products, business services, discounted shipping rates and more. The website has a member directory that feeds customers to their local independents. In today's competitive world where pricing discounts and business services can make or break a retailer, it seems like more garden centers should consider forming these types of state-wide or even regional alliances.

Obviously, the best way to set yourself apart from the boxes and Amazons of the world is to provide customers something they can't: service. Ellen takes a look at ways to outmaneuver the elephants in the room. To paraphrase "Field of Dreams," if you build it (for them), they will come. **GP**