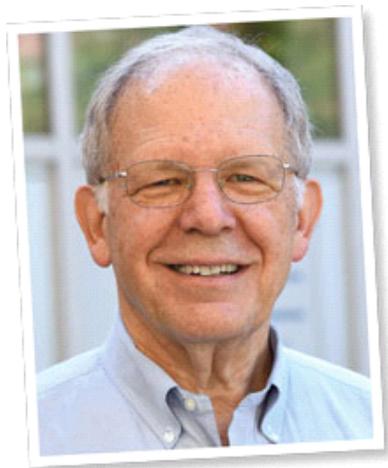


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Coming at it From Different Places

Bill McCurry



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“You need to care for your customers, not wait on them,” says Bob Phibbs, The Retail Doctor. “No matter where your store sits along the ‘Covid-19 Reopening Scale.’” It’s no longer 2019.

Politics aside, today it’s inaccurate to say everyone sees things the same way. Additionally, impartial news media are also something of the past, as this poll shows.

Wherever you and your team get your own news, those who get it elsewhere may have dramatically different perspectives from yours. Today, retailers often inadvertently send silent political signals by how their COVID-19 policies can be interpreted.

Regardless of which media are more factual and which are partial, it’s of critical importance to understand your customers reflect what their media

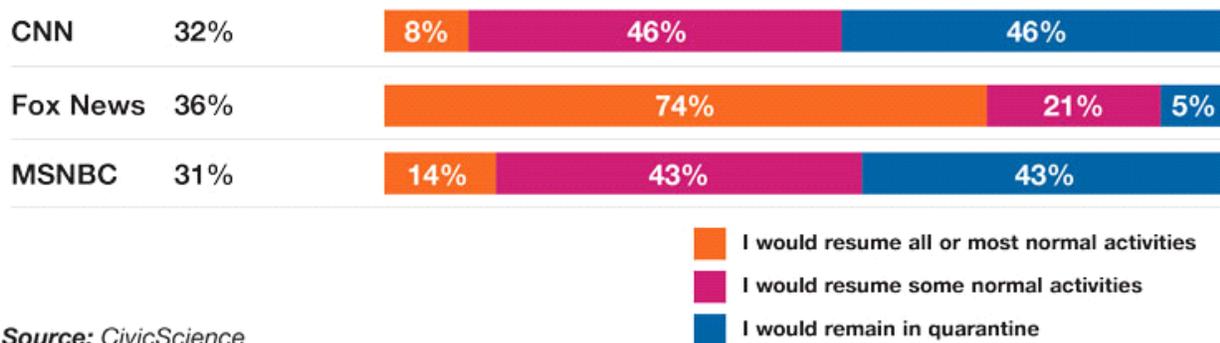
feeds them. Don’t argue. Make them comfortable. You want them to enjoy stress-free time in the garden center.

You must be aware of your local community’s attitudes and compliance regarding COVID-19 safety rules. California shoppers yell at people without masks, while in other locations masks are rarely seen.

The CivicScience survey also asked members of the 82% of the population supporting mask-use how quickly they would venture back into retail stores (groceries excluded). Only 19% said they would visit a retail store in the next 30 days, while two-thirds said it would be two to five months. Those who wouldn’t return to retail stores for at least six months translated to 14% of mask supporters. By contrast, 18% of the population weren’t fans of masks. Fifty-five percent of those said they would revisit stores within 30 days of stores reopening. Only 10% said they would delay two to five months. One-third said it would be six months or longer before they shopped in person again.

WHICH CABLE NEWS NETWORK DO YOU WATCH THE MOST FOR NATIONAL NEWS?

compared with, if your state/local government issued a notice to go back to normal day-to-day activities in order to prevent any further negative impact on the economy, how would you respond?



Source: CivicScience

Here's the tough part: You know what your local regulations about COVID-19 safety precautions were. (I say "were" because they're subject to frequently change—often without effective notice to retailers. If you have restrictions still in place, it is paramount to follow those.)

Your challenge is to determine how to approach customers who don't comply with your standards and your region's rules without triggering an unpleasant incident. Garden center shopping must be fun and recreational. Customers nervous about their safety because of your employees' or other customers' behaviors won't have a pleasant experience. Those not prone to wearing masks or participating in social distancing could be offended if asked to change their behavior.

Determine your employees' attitudes. Can they be caring for customers on both sides of these attitudes? Role-play how to talk to customers, either reassuring them or helping them understand the reasons for your safety policies. (Don't focus on any one position because they're subject to change.) We need flexibility in our store policies, our teams and our personal attitudes. Situations will change. What won't change is customers needing us to care for them, not wait on them. **GP**

Bob Phibbs, *The Retail Doctor*, has invited you to his webinar on these topics. Although designed for camera stores, the principles are 99% identical to garden centers: retaildoc.wistia.com/medias/tt6pv6tpfm.

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 688-1169.