

Kiss My Aster

7/1/2020

Interpretive Dance & Wizard Mix

Amanda Thomsen



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So at this point in our “new normal,” we’ve sold flats of cucumbers to brand new gardeners who want to grow them on their kitchen windowsills, we’ve explained how big a cubic yard is with interpretive dance countless times, we’ve run out of tomato seedlings—like REALLY out—and we’ve silently mouthed “don’t forget to plant the green side up!” to the back of the heads of more customers than we can count. Congratulations for keeping it going during the “new normal.”

You’ve kicked your website into gear, most of you are offering plants online (and you thought you’d NEVER get around to that), and you’ve dabbled in curbside pickup, delivery or all three. You’ve broken sales records three times over, you’ve bonded with salespeople and suppliers because you truly are in this together. You’ve adapted and pivoted more than you have in 15 years because you’re completely amazing (especially when there isn’t a lot

of choice in the matter and everyone is depending on you). I’m truly so glad to see you developing these other ways to sell and create connection with a growing audience. I’m proud of you!

But now I’m wondering, do you think the new gardeners are here to stay? Will they lose interest before too long? It’s too soon to say, but even if half of them stuck around that would be monumental to this industry. You haven’t had a moment to think since March, but it’s time to start thinking about which of these adaptations you’ll keep and which will end up on the pitch-out pile.

This harrowing spring can be chalked up to a learning experience to create a stronger company and staff ... or we can all go back to the way things were. Were things really that great before? Have you been stubborn about change and now, with being forced to change, realized there’s something to it all?

I think it’s worth thinking about if you want all these customers to come back, if you can serve them, if you have the product and staff necessary. Is that even feasible? Time to figure out some stable plans of attack just in case, for example, next spring is TWICE as brutal.

This spring I had people contacting me to ask what garden center they should shop at and if that garden center was open FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY. I mean, I wish I was that omnipotent in the garden center realm, but that’s just a bonkers request—no, I don’t know where to shop in Toledo and what their hours and state and local laws are, I just don’t. However, with each request I stated that THIS is why you pick a local garden center and develop a relationship with them. That way, you’re in the know of how things work, when things happen, and then I tell them to

follow some local IGCs on Facebook and Instagram for inspiration and see which ones you fit with best.

You can sell this relationship to customers all year around, especially now when they're hungry for information (and bagged soil, apparently). At this point it's like shooting fish in a barrel—we have them EXACTLY where we want them and we just have to ask for the relationship. That can be done through our harried salespeople, our stressed-out cashiers, OR our well-planned newsletters or our social media accounts (that are written and maintained in air-conditioning).

I don't even want to say it, but in the case of further shelter-in-place orders, these new customers (and existing ones) are going to want to be on your lists and accounts, so feel free to mention it. It's not cheesy to ask them to follow you on social media after you've sold them a flat of Wizard Mix. I swear they're looking for that relationship to teach them that there are cooler things than Wizard Mix out there. **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.