

Features

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Fast, Safe and Friendly

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Pretty much the antithesis of how we hope consumers will engage with plants at retail. And yet, there's always something that draws people in. Some years, it's that new hydrangea that grabs their attention. Other years it's a rough winter that damaged someone's landscape. This past year, it's clearly been more than that.

People are nesting, focusing on projects and beautifying their surroundings at a pace that's unprecedented. The hobby of gardening, and the resulting payoff of the beauty and space it renders, has returned due to the need to stay at home. And garden centers must adapt their physical space to speak to these new gardeners, educating and inspiring to drive sales.

The push of younger people entering home ownership is happening. *The Wall Street Journal* says the "[Millennial] generation that was slow to enter the U.S. housing market now accounts for more than half of all new home loans." What's more, this generation is now the largest living adult generation in the United States. Combined with the increase in home ownership, this means there are more potential plant buyers today than ever before.

The role of the garden center continues to be fundamental in how consumers interact with our products. The demand for plants is evident. But what happens if the pandemic continues into late this year, or even more hopeful, what happens when it's over? How consumers shop in store mimics what they're accustomed to online. Fast and efficient.

It's easy to get stuck in planning large displays, but one area that many tend to forget and undervalue is well-merchandised endcaps. Not only are they more manageable spaces, but they focus a consumer's attention on must-have items to deliver that fast and efficient experience.

Pictured: In 2019, First Editions Shrubs & Trees rebranded with colorful, engaging and high-impact packaging.

Younger consumers, Gen X and Millennials, are immediately drawn to the colors and messaging that catches their eye and is relatable to what they're engaging with in other categories. In 2021, the brand is extending the packaging solution by offering retailers a targeted merchandising program to maximize endcaps through their high-color, fun displays.

Endcaps are the perfect focus to build a revolving merchandising strategy, especially in our busiest times of year where staff is stretched thin. Maximize that higher foot traffic by utilizing shopping experiences that your customer expects and encounters elsewhere.

Endcaps allow for easy rotation of product displays, perfect for live goods' crop cycles, keeping your returning customers engaged and treating new customers to the most beautiful seasonal items. It also allows you to merchandise your high-margin items, creating awareness and interest by featuring those products. When it comes to planning your retail for fast and efficient sales, the endcap is where it's at.

Let's think again about the younger consumers: what's being done to reach them differently than their mom and dad? Are the traditional methods working? Or better yet, before the pandemic, WERE they working? With 16 to 24 million new consumers shopping for plants in 2020, the numbers don't lie: these young consumers ARE shopping for plants. So now's the time to adapt.

Here are some quick ways to do just that with endcaps:

1. Show off your newest arrivals.
2. Group products together by color.
3. Use seasonal themes.
4. Feature promotional items.
5. Build a simple planning calendar for a general product rotation strategy (do this before spring hits and it will also help plan your purchasing in advance).
6. Assign someone on the sales floor to be responsible for maintenance; endcaps should always be clean, stocked and presented well, as they reflect on the entire area since they're the most visible.
7. Make sure they're adequately signed, no exceptions (again, planning).
8. Cross-merchandise the correct products (potting soil and pots for container gardening, gardening gloves and pruners with roses, etc.).
9. Utilize pre-built marketing/social media tools and resources from your wholesale partners or brands you sell.
10. And all that said, keep them simple.

While we wish that people would slowly navigate retail benches and displays, this efficiency model is here to stay. Before the pandemic, time is one of those resources that most folks didn't have much of. So as people are able to get out and about, that bonus time that we had during quarantine to spend on projects will be gobbled up. That likely means less time in the store, making those high-impact endcaps do even more heavy lifting than ever. **GP**

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