

Features

12/1/2021

Four Keys to Creating Loyalty

Bill Calkins

If you're following the same trend line as many green industry businesses, you've seen growth in new customers over the past two years due to many factors, not limited to the pandemic, which inspired so many shoppers to get out and garden.

Now comes the challenge: retaining them. That's exactly why *Green Profit* caught up with one of our industry's thought leaders, Sam Kirkland, strategic relationship manager with Epicor Software Corp. for a podcast on engagement. Here's just a few key takeaways.

1. Leveling Up Engagement

According to Sam, modern engagement strategies proving successful in garden center retail include community and local messaging, customer growth management, and loyalty marketing. All of these pieces work together to generate dollars that go straight to the bottom line. "Customer engagement means your store is the first place shoppers think of when they need a product," Sam says.

His number one strategy for messaging is loudly calling out your connection to your local community. "Garden centers are already locally connected, working with community groups, faith-based organizations, schools and more," he says. "Now they need to get the credit they deserve." This is a very strong message in today's retail environment and appeals to customers across generations.

2. Prioritizing Loyalty

Your truly loyal shoppers are your most precious asset. It's time to grow that subset with planning and effort. Sam explains there are some barriers to clear here.

"First off, you have to make it easy and understandable," he says. "A quick explanation and a quick sign-up is the first step." If your team can't explain your loyalty program in 30 seconds, the likelihood of getting sign-ups is low, so keep it simple.

Also, try to create a loyalty program that appeals to folks with different engagement styles. Maybe this looks like discounts, warranties and a newsletter. Sam also suggests exploring tiered loyalty programs where better customers are rewarded with increased benefits.

Finally, here's something to consider: Fee-based loyalty programs targeting your top 20% of brand ambassadors. Think about it—many of us pay annually for the "privilege" to spend crazy amounts of money at Costco or Amazon. This is not a crazy idea!

3. Metrics & Measurement

Key performance indicators are a fancy way to remind you that when you spend time and money on a project, you need to make sure the time and effort is paying off.

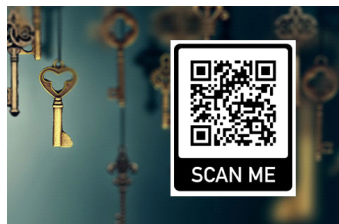
“This is not a ‘do’ but a ‘try,’” Sam reminds us. “Set goals, monitor and be flexible.” There’s no secret sauce here, but there are ways to track and measure success. And you’ll need to pivot and adapt as you go.

When you measure loyalty, some metrics to look at are the number of transactions and visits, as well as average transaction and line items per transaction. Thankfully, companies like Epicor can help simplify this by offering concise reporting programs to help drill down to this level of detail.

4. Making More Customers Loyal

When you begin to think about customer loyalty as a driving goal, interesting information emerges. Your most engaged shoppers spend more and shop more often. They gravitate toward products you recommend and they evangelize your business to others in the community. Often, they shop with you every season and view your store as their one-stop-shop for everything garden-related. And they’re your most profitable group. You want more of them.

Heading into 2022, round up your team and head to the whiteboard. In fact, Sam says to buy a bigger whiteboard and more markers. Start with brand building as a strategy to bring shoppers through the door and then take it to the next level by planning for loyalty. **GP**



But Wait, There’s More!

This conversation was part of a podcast between author Bill Calkins and Sam Kirkland, strategic relationship manager with Epicor Software Corp. Click the QR code or open your favorite podcast app like iTunes, Spotify or Google Play to listen to the full episode of Tech On Demand, brought to you by *GrowerTalks*.