

Kiss My Aster

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Flavortown

Amanda Thomsen



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I believe we already have what customers want. Our products are so in demand, so widely thought of as indispensable, that there could practically be a garden center across the street from a garden center and they could each be rolling in dollarbucks.

Let's just imagine there was an imaginary place where there was a part of town where all the garden centers were clustered, sort of like a garment district or area for nightlife or entertainment. So let's say there's this garden center district, filled with dozens and dozens of garden centers in every flavor and you are one of them. Now, how would all those individual garden centers differentiate themselves? One would, right away, choose to offer the lowest prices and gather a reputation as such. One would have the best design services. One would have immaculate customer service, from car door to checkout. One would be quirky and imaginative.

And then it evolves past that. One specializes in a huge assortment of plants for xeriscaping. One is only a tree nursery. One is known for charitable giving. Someone has those really big statues of bears. One focuses on orchids. One has a cute gift section. Another bonsai. Each garden center, although in close proximity, finds its niche, and therefore, the right customers find them; there's a relationship there and therefore some loyalty.

How many of those garden centers would try to do it all? I mean, since it's all hypothetical. I feel like even though we aren't all clustered together in a district, in real life do you immediately know what your specialty would be? I know it seems silly to spend time thinking about such a hypothetical, but in a world that's currently evolving toward more experience-based shopping I feel secure saying that you should feel out what your secret whatfor might be and then focus on it. It's almost like having a second, more creative mission statement. (Because we all have a first mission statement that we think about and refer to each and every day, right? Right?)

What I'm saying is that I'm surrounded by garden centers that are less than 10 miles from me, but I'll drive an hour to get to one that has a reputation for something special. Why not be something special?

Why focus instead of doing it all? Listen, you can still do it all, but have one flavor in the stew that's a little bit stronger. Let that be your objective. Why not? If your thing is "a classic ma & pa operation," why not lean into it? Let us learn about Ma & Pa over social media and have your newsletters be charming and folksy.

My point being that when you look at it through a different lens, you can have this newfound perspective to say, "Oh, I

know exactly what I'd do" in this imaginary scenario, but can you apply some of that to what you're doing today in your actual, real-as-a-100-degree-day-in-August garden center?

When I look at my admittedly infinitesimal operation this way I feel inspired, clear-headed and downright giddy about the direction I should be pulling. I was able to put it down on paper which direction to head, what my ideal operations and products would look like. I wasn't made to do or be "everything for everyone" and I'm pretty sure the future of retail isn't heading in that direction, either.

So ask yourself this:

What do we do differently than everyone else?

What do we already do better than everyone else?

What should we be focusing on?

What do we focus on now?

What do customers think of us as?

What are the long-range steps we could take to be a little more specialized?

What should be highlighted on social media?

Is trying to do everything to everyone the right thing for us?

What if there was another garden center next door? **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.