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Selling Soil, Not My Soul

Amanda Thomsen



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When you're reading this, my new shop will have been open for business for a few weeks, but as of right now it's a little over three weeks until the grand opening and I have decision fatigue like crazy. It's leading me to make all sorts of decisions just for the sake of getting it over with; I can always go back and refine later.

Many of the things on my list right now are boundary-setting issues, like a return policy and how to deal with stupid questions. Again, I'd like to reiterate that this is not a general garden shop; it's a bit more of a funky rock vibe and my ideal customers are tattooed moms in their 30s and 40s (pet moms fit into the demographic as well). It's not like I'm going to be rude to customers that don't fit the vibe, but I'm fully going into this with the mindset that this shop isn't for everybody. This allows me to focus my purchasing and other facets of the shop on people that will "get it."

Will I adapt if only Karens that want red geraniums come in? Not without a fight. I will be flexible with my vision, but not with my values. I'm committed to offering something different to a cool demographic that's underserved and has money to spend. This won't just be a transactional exchange; it'll be an experience. I'll market this place until everyone is sick of me before I stock "grow dammit!" signs, while still completely expecting to buckle on other fronts:

- My return policy is two days. Since I'm pretty much the only employee, I can ask customers as they're checking out if they understand that they're buying healthy plants and what happens next is up to them. I may even have them pledge an oath, but I'm pretty sure that's going too far. I'll also be stocking lots of vintage and antique accessories, and they may be chipped or whatever from being 70-plus years old and to that I say caveat emptor. I'm giving them a shot to buy a bit of history, but yeah, it may have a tiny bit of wear-and-tear at this point.
- If you sit through one of my presentations at a trade show I'll talk about how important it is to have a dedicated phone answerer and how people call right from their web searches to ask their dumb questions. Still, I'm making my digits intentionally hard to find. Younger demographics are less likely to use their phone as a phone and more likely to shoot me an order via Instagram messages and that works for me. If I'm on the phone talking to some random about how to plant their Home Depot purchases, I really cannot provide the experience to people in the shop that I think they deserve.
- If anyone asks me for an insulting discount on a perfectly good product, I'm going to ask, "Why are you comfortable asking that?" Will I have the guts to actually do this? I think so. Everything I'm bringing in the door feels pretty

personal right now, but I'm sure I'll back down in the future.

- I will not be able to hand out free advice about plants I did not sell to them. I'll be too busy. I'm printing up little "cards" with the info for the county extension on them and I'll be happy to help if there are no other customers or orders coming in the door, but I get to decide that. If they need more help then they can make an appointment and we will sit down and I'll get them squared away for \$3 a minute. I probably won't even collect the money; I just want them ready to put some respect on my check.

Naive? Stupid? Courageous? Yes to all. Retail is a different world these days and I intend to explore it all, but I'm going to go into it feeling like I don't have to sell my soul—just cutely packaged bags of soil. **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.