



Setting Yourself Apart

John Stanley, Merchandising Guru for the Green Industry, offers this advice on thwarting customer price shopping.

Offer the customer packages that they cannot get anywhere else. This may mean combining products in a different way or providing a different sized product to other people. For example, a plant in a ceramic pot is difficult to price comparison shop with ceramic containers on their own or plants on their own. Customized merchandising that is unique to you will offer that point of difference and move customers away from price shopping habits.

Buyers Guide

The Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers has released its 2009 Buyers Guide, featuring cut-flower growers from the United States and Canada who supply to retail and wholesale buyers, event planners and floral designers.

Link to www.ascfg.org to download a pdf copy or call them at 440-774-2887. A copy is also saved on www.WisconsinOrnamentals.com

Out of Creative Merchandising Ideas?

Check out "Kick-Start Your Creativity" in the May 2009 issue of Green Profit.

Growing Media and pH

Thomas Dudek of MSU Extension reminds growers to check their media pH.

Growers have reported both high pH over 7.3 and low pH below 5.8 problems and many times it was because the media came in without a lime charge or with too much lime. Do not assume that the second or third batch of media you ordered is the same as the first. By rights they should be if the supplier is doing their job, but I have seen mistakes made that result in the grower having to deal with a problem that came from the supplier. Check pH every time you get a shipment and save a sample of the media in a ziploc bag for reference later on if there is a problem.

Also be sure your injector is working properly and providing the correct amount of fertilizer for your crops. A malfunction could result in a pH problem that is the grower's fault. Check your injector's calibration with the fertilizer table on the back of the bag.

Also if you have a shallow well 50 feet or less, your water quality can change with the seasons. We have had a lot of rain in some areas of west Michigan and that can impact the water quality (alkalinity, etc.) and change your media pH. Get a complete water analysis; do not rely on the one from three years ago.

Investing in Customer Service

Do you spend money on advertising? Of course you do, and it costs money. But it has value if it's well done. The same goes for investment in customer service.

Customer service can affect a company's revenue in four ways:

Good customer service can boost repurchase probability and long-term loyalty

Poor customer service can lead to customer attrition.

Lackluster customer interactions may lead to lost opportunities.

Bad customer service experiences have hidden costs, such as the additional funds required to market and sell to new clients.

Have you taken time to observe your staff? Did your customers feel welcome?

Are Your Irrigation and Fertility Practices Backfiring?

The fertilizer and irrigation program that you use to produce your plants should not focus only on producing the largest plant in the shortest time period; it should take into account how these practices will affect plant performance in the consumer's landscape.

By paying attention to the details you can ensure consumer success and cultivate repeat sales.

An [article in the May 2009](#) issue of Grower Talks discussed research conducted at the University of Florida and Cornell University. The information presented is valuable for all growers, large or small.

Saving Heat in Quonset Houses

Check out '[Quick Tips](#)' on www.WisconsinOrnamentals.com for a tip on using winter blankets to save on heating.

Simplifying Home Office Deduction

A bill designed to simplify the process of taking a deduction for home office expenses has been introduced in Congress. The Home Office Deduction Simplification Act (HR.1509) would allow eligible individuals to take a standard deduction of \$1,500 instead of using the current, more complex formula. Additionally, the deduction would be indexed for inflation.

The bill's sponsors, Reps. John M. McHugh (R-23-N.Y.) and Kurt Schrader (D-5-Ore.), explained that millions of Americans who are self-employed or work at home do not utilize the home office deduction because it is so complex. The IRS concurred with that assessment, saying the deduction is underutilized because "complying with the rules for deducting home office expenses can be difficult for small businesses and self-employed taxpayers." The IRS also said nearly half of the taxpayers claiming the home office deduction made errors.

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