



# Garden retail trends report

January 10, 2014

## Welcome to GCA's New Monthly Newsletter

Garden Centers of America (GCA) has a renewed vigor and is continuing to expand the services available to you. As part of this expansion, we have revamped the whole concept behind our monthly newsletter. It is the goal of GCA to provide you with the information and resources to help you grow your business. Garden Retail Trends Report is designed to keep you on top of what's hot in retailing, both within the industry and out.



## Where to Focus Your Social Marketing this Year? Facebook Is Still King



As you map your store's social marketing strategies for the new year, consider this: Facebook is still king in social networking circles, according to a new Pew Research Center Internet Project study. Seventy-three percent of U.S. adults ages 18 and older who are online use some type of social network - and 71 percent are on Facebook, up from 67 percent a year ago.

Shown to have the broadest demographic reach, Facebook is popular across several groups, while the other sites in the study - Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn - have more specific, and therefore more limited, user profiles. Women are four times more likely than men to use Pinterest, for example, and LinkedIn is more popular with college grads and high-income earners.

Another stat in Facebook's favor: More users log on at least once a day, 63 percent, compared to 57 percent on Instagram and 46 percent on Twitter.

## Five Ways to Energize Your Garden Center's Brand

The National Retail Federation (NRF) offers these five tips to help independent retailers grow their brands, from its Retail's BIG Blog:

- 1. Invest in your Facebook image** - The best way to leverage Facebook is to spend money on it. A winner of NRF's "This is Retail" contest, Tanna Dang, pays a professional photographer and a copywriter to put together polished Facebook posts and cover photos for her Honolulu boutique, Eden in Love. One of her Facebook posts helped move product that had been sitting on the shelves for weeks, she says, and her shop has sold out of other items just hours after posting them at Facebook.
- 2. Look for reasons to celebrate** - Another winner of NRF's contest, Kim Williams of Tallahassee's The Polka Dot Press, a personalized stationary shop, gives customers reasons to come in her store and celebrate. She hosted a chocolate martini party for customers just to say thank you, during which she turned off the cash register - before turning it back on at the demand of guests eager to shop.
- 3. Make change happen** - Eyewear store Owner Mark Plessinger tells the story of rundown Main Street in his hometown of Columbia, SC, and his efforts to bring it back to life. After finding success with art shows at his store, Frame of Mind, he used the concept of synergy to band together the street's merchants in an effort to collectively draw more than each could draw on its own. It works - the events bring up to 1,500 people. More new businesses are opening in the once-abandoned Main Street storefronts, too, thanks to the buzz.
- 4. Be authentic** - An event or promotion that works for one small business might not work for another. Know your garden center's customer base and tailor a traffic-driver to their interests. For instance, Frame of Mind hosted fire-spinners and belly dancers to appeal to its eclectic customers, and The Polka Dot Press held back-to-school photo sessions and "meals in minutes" workshops for its base of moms. If many of your customers are foodies, consider a Fresh Cooking from the Garden event this spring featuring the flavors of homegrown herbs and veggies.
- 5. Keep in mind, you can't do it all** - Choosing which social media outlet to use to best serve your customers can save you time and effort. Williams ceased publishing her blog after several years because it was a "time suck" and it didn't result in sales for The Polka Dot Press. Instead, she focuses on Pinterest, a better way of connecting with the moms who shop her store. What can you streamline at your garden center to invest your efforts in the most worthwhile pursuits this year?

## Peter Shankman, IGC East Keynote: Managing Social Media Starts with Good Service



Putting out fires caused by bad reviews at social media sites is like putting customer service in reverse, says Marketing Maverick Peter Shankman. IGC Chicago's hit keynote from last summer is back by popular demand this year, ready to wow the audience at IGC East.

Shankman says, "People are going to talk, whether for good or bad, about your garden center. Thanks to social media, it's never been easier to share, to the world, anything and everything. But the majority of companies out there are spending money on social media only to fight fires." He continues, "Here's a thought - start spending money on customer service now, and you won't have to fight the fires later."

"Stop looking at social as the first line of defense. It should be the last, and you should rarely have to defend your garden center. If you're providing amazing customer service, the social-sphere voice should be primarily positive, with only occasional blips."

Don't miss Shankman's IGC East 2014 Keynote, "The New Rules of Social Media." Additional keynotes for IGC East and IGC Chicago will be announced soon. IGC Keynotes are free to all! Attendees registering by March 31 are eligible to win one of 10 Apple iPads. Register today at IGCshow.com.



## Bridging the Digital Divide: In-Store Shopping App Promises Benefits Over Buying Online

IBM Research is working with several businesses to merge the immediacy of shopping brick-and-mortar stores with the intelligence of online shopping - to your garden center's future benefit. New technology in development will allow IBM's artificial



intelligent computer system, Watson, to act as a personal shopping assistant in-store.

After opting in and sharing their shopping history, customers will be able to walk into a store, and the app will know what products to suggest to them, much like online

retailers such as Amazon do now: "You recently purchased this fairy garden bench. You may also be interested in this matching trellis." Instead of waiting for the merchandise to ship, customers seeking instant gratification will walk away with the products in hand. Store staff will be empowered, too, gaining access to customer loyalty data, sales histories, user reviews, blogs and magazines to better guide shoppers toward the items that would most likely result in the sale.

## Garden Centers, Beware! These Mistakes Kill the Customer Experience

Amid reports that 89 percent of consumers will switch to a competitor after a bad shopping experience, Business2Community warns against these common mistakes made by too many retailers. Make sure you're not one of them.

**Keep that 1990s attitude.** Assuming customers are loyal for loyalty's sake is a mistake. Ignoring the reality of today's marketplace and failing to treasure your loyal customers today will likely mean they might not be there for your garden center tomorrow.

**Make it complicated.** It's easy to recognize how online labyrinths can drive away customers with too many steps or registration requirements, but the brick-and-mortar experience can be just as frustrating. Failing to staff appropriately, creating store layouts that are confusing and being out of stock on items can drive customers to your competitors.

**Hire wrong.** If your employees are miserable, it will translate into a miserable experience for your customers. Make sure to get the right people on board, not just the ones with the right resumes or skillsets.

**"It's not my problem."** There's nothing worse than being a customer who is passed around like a hot potato. It could be a cashier who doesn't know how to handle an exchange or a staff member who repeatedly puts the customer on hold. Whatever the situation, the people representing your garden center should know the protocol and be equipped to deal with the problem.

## Now Trending in Garden Retailing . . .

- Are you offering coupons at your website and Facebook and in your e-newsletters? **Redemption rates for digital coupons are between 10% and 15%, compared to less than 1% for traditional coupons**, according to McKinsey & Company's 2013 U.S. Consumer Sentiment Survey.
- Get social to get more families through your doors. **Mothers use social media 20% more than the average population**, Punchbowl.com reports.
- **Consider using the popularity of "selfies" to your garden center's advantage** - encourage customers to take a picture of themselves in a specific location in your store or with a certain product, then ask them to post it at social media sites with a predetermined hashtag. As an incentive, Mobile Marketer suggests entering "selfie-takers" in a drawing to win a prize.

## TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR GCA MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS



### IGC Show Launches East Coast Edition, IGC East & IGC Chicago Set For Summer 2014

Even more benefits are on the horizon for GCA members!

The IGC Show will take place in two locations in 2014. IGC Chicago will convene, as usual, at Navy Pier on August 19-21, 2014. IGC East will make its debut August 5-7, 2014 at the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center complex in National Harbor, Maryland, located on the Potomac River, just minutes from Washington, DC, providing easy access to GCA members. Both IGC Shows will offer all the features and benefits the industry has come to expect: thousands of new products, free inspiring keynotes and headliner concerts, plus scores of spot-on conference sessions and networking opportunities at the GCA member lunch, as well as all of the GCA member discounts you enjoy in Chicago.

Watch for more details soon at [www.IGCshow.com](http://www.IGCshow.com).