

Idea Exchange August 2004 - Diving In

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Diving In

Breaking into the pond business — successfully — doesn't have to be as hard as it sounds, according to Greg Wittstock of Aquascape Designs Inc in Batavia, Ill. Speaking at the National Hardware Show in Las Vegas, Wittstock told a curious retailer exactly what he needed to do to get started that day.

First, Wittstock recommended that the retailer purchase a pallet of micro pond kits. This order would include a free pond kit to set up at his store to draw attention to the product and show customers exactly what they are purchasing.

Next, put on a pond-building training day, said Wittstock. Advertise the event in local media outlets. Charge a fee for attendance, but give the fee back to attendees in the form of a gift certificate — ideally to be used on the person's first pond kit.

The average pond hobbyist will install three ponds in his lifetime, said Wittstock. Sparking the passion for ponds in a person will pay off for your business for years to come. Getting your feet wet by offering pond kits will be sufficient for a while. But once your customers get a taste of the hobby, you'll have to start retailing individual items to keep up with their rebuilds and upgrades.

Women Shop with Caution

Women shoppers are spending more cautiously than in the past, WSL Strategic Retail reported in its latest How America Shops study.

For example, 66 percent of women shoppers said, "It's important for me to get the lowest price on most things I buy," and 59 percent said, "Before I buy something now, I stop to ask myself, 'Is this a good use of my money.'"

More than 62 percent of women shoppers had shopped at a dollar store in the past 90 days, up from 56 percent in 2002. Also, 13 percent reported shopping on the Internet within the past week, compared to 9 percent who had shopped a drugstore.

In addition to an overall cautiousness, the research firm reported women were looking for bargains on certain products to afford premium brands of other products, and appreciated stores that either offered everything or specialized.

The study also found that 64 percent of women considered quality browsing as No. 1 factor in defining favorite place to shopping place.

The research firm conducts its How America Shops survey biannually, polling 600 women and 200 men nationwide.

Fiber-Optic Lighting

During the coldest months, a dormant pond needn't be an ugly pond, said A.J. Hetzke, general manager of Unitrac in Rochester, N.Y. Fiber-optic lights, impervious to temperature, illuminate ice or moving water from beneath the surface, or highlight other dramatic pond features, such as rock formations or fountains.

"Fiber-optic lighting is easily hidden and contains a color wheel so you can flip a switch and let the color wheel rotate," said Hetzke. "One of our Minnesota customers likes them better than traditional lights for landscaping because they don't have any lenses that will crack in the winter."

Landscaping Doorknobs

Word-of-mouth is still the most effective form of advertising, and one company has a landscaping tool for that.

A Lansing, Mich.-based marketer for the floriculture and horticulture industries will print tag-on-door advertisements for pond installers and maintainers working in the field.

John Henry will print landscape promotional service tags for door handles of residences or businesses, which the company claims will add business through word-of-mouth. Little additional time or cost is accrued because they are placed on doors near the worksite — or anywhere.

Perforated business cards at the bottom of the door tag can be removed and saved by the prospective customer.

We want your ideas on building water garden businesses. We'll pay \$50 for published submissions. Please send your ideas (50 to 200 words and photos, if any) to: Idea Exchange, 3 Burroughs, Irvine, CA 92618; fax: (949) 855-3045 or e-mail wbwilson@bowtieinc.com. Sorry, we cannot return materials.

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