

Idea Exchange January 2003 - Smooth Selling

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Be prepared to sell from the initial inquiry until after installation. How do you differ from your competition? How many ponds have you installed? What is your price range? How fast can it be done? How are you going to work with the client? By highlighting up front why they should choose your company, you are more likely to continue and close the sale.

Think Big: Most first-time pond owners don't know that they need a filter to keep their water clean. They don't know that within months the energy savings from an energy-efficient pump will pay for the pump's extra cost. They don't know how proper equipment can reduce maintenance. They don't realize they will eventually want to add fish. They don't know how important a minimum depth of two feet is for fish health and reduced water evaporation. They don't know that once the pond is rocked, filled with water, landscaped and stocked with growing fish and plants, it will seem to have shrunk.

By teaching clients what they don't know, installers establish credibility and increase sales. Through education, installers will often achieve larger projects and happier clients.

Earn trust: Ask to step into the prospect's home to see the primary viewing areas from inside the house. Don't be pushy. Get a feel for their style from the appearance of their house. Let them do the talking. Why do they want a pond? What's important to them? Discuss the pond's location and size from inside the house.

Build credibility: Display your portfolio to learn the style of pond the client prefers and to showcase your skills. Have three references from satisfied customers readily available. Have a pond site available for show and tell.

Education Sells: As you teach clients about pond ecosystem, they will understand the need for good filtration and circulation. Keep it simple, using basic terms to explain beneficial bacteria and bio-mechanical filtration.

Upsell: Once outside, use a garden hose to play with size and shape. Once you get a basic design, suggest options such as beach and bog areas. Sell surrounding landscaping that ties into the pond.

Close the Deal: Throughout your interaction with the client, act as though the sale is a foregone conclusion. Provide an incentive to close the deal at the end of the consultation. For example, let them know how fast you get booked and that every day they wait could mean weeks or months before their installation can be done.

—Contributed by Tavo Holloway. She is president of International Pond Supply Inc., Santa Fe, N.M.; 888-646-5474; www.pondsource.com.

Smooth Mailing

Rolf and Anita Nelson of Nelson Water Gardens & Nursery Inc. are big fans of customer mailing lists. Their trick to building the list: writing down names and addresses on their invoice pads.

Regular pruning is key to keeping the list thriving. Keep track of spending by customer and purge non-performing customers from time to time, they recommend.

The Nelsons mail postcards promoting special events and a newsletter, which introduces new products, lists events and offers tips.

Love (the) Shack

Adrian and Marcelo Rackauskas, owners of Aquatic Gardens in Margate, Fla., relocated and expanded their business from 3,500 square feet to 8,500 square feet in July 2002.

The expansion allowed them to establish a large pond area with a 17-foot dock and a large pond in front of a shack, according to Tetra's News Splash, a newsletter for Tetra's certified retailers. The shack doubles as the store's receiving room, letting the store optimize space allocated for display.

Water Garden News seeks your ideas on building water-garden businesses — whether it be better retailing, installation and design tips, how to retain and motivate employees, or how to market your business. We'll pay \$50 for published submissions. Please send your ideas (50-200 words) and photos if appropriate to: Idea Exchange, Water Garden News, 3 Burroughs, Irvine, CA 92618; fax (949) 855-3045, or e-mail bhutchins@fancypubs.com. Water Garden News cannot take responsibility for return of materials.

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