

## Idea Exchange July 2003 - If You Build It, They Will Come

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### If You Build It, They Will Come

Special events can play a major role in marketing strategies for garden centers, particularly those that seek to position themselves as regional destinations. Events build traffic, create loyalty and educate consumers.

Certain garden center projects can become events in themselves: for example, the construction of a display water garden. For example, Gray's Garden Centers of Oregon held a pondbuilding day last year when it expanded its Eugene store, Digger magazine reported. The program was so successful that the chain will hold another one this year at its Springfield store.

To help add value to the event, work with pond equipment suppliers or local pondbuilders. They might choose to donate door prizes, offer special event discounts or provide speakers. Heck, they may even help build the pond.

### One Pond, Hold the Rocks

Edg-Keeper offers contractors flexibility when clients ask for ponds without rock edges, says Larry Olson of manufacturer Oly-Ola Edgings Inc. of Villa Park, Ill.

The company recently cited testimonials from two pond-builders as it seeks to boost contractor sales this year. "In this region of the country, we have areas with sandy soil," says Cheryl Holland of Holland's Water Gardens in Lake City, Pa. "I was looking for a product that we could use to firmly hold a pond liner in place. With Edg-Keeper, we can do a lot more with pond edges."

Martin Hale of The Water Margin aquatic nursery in Oxon, Great Britain, is also vouching for the product. "The Water Margin mainly builds natural or wildlife ponds for suburban gardens," Hale says. "To trap and hide the liner round the pond edge, we use rock, stone or slate. Most ponds are built in or next to lawns. Using Edg-Keeper, we can finish the pond directly into turf, paver paths and flowerbeds. It's quick to use and hides visible pond liner around the waterline. We plan to use it in about two-thirds of future projects."

Hale also plans to distribute the product to other U.K. businesses and sell it online at its new e-commerce site: [www.thewatermargin.com](http://www.thewatermargin.com). For more information, contact Oly-Ola at 800-334-4647 or [www.olyola.com](http://www.olyola.com).

### Give and Take

Local businesses are an obvious target for organizations seeking corporate sponsorship. No doubt you face more than your share of solicitations from causes: Little League and other youth organizations; fundraisers for disease research; support drives for the needy, etc. Not to mention all the environmental related causes—habitat conservation, park beautification, etc.—that see you as a natural donor.

The trouble is deciding which cause, if any, to support. Factor in the extreme seasonality of the water garden business, and it would be all too easy to reject all requests for charity.

One possible approach is to tie in your donations to a special sales event. For example, supermarket Albertson's issues special one-time cards, patterned after their frequent-buyer program cards, to organizations such as soccer leagues seeking to raise funds. The organization then distributes the cards to parents registering their children. The league explains the cards are part of a fundraising program in which Albertson's will donate 1 or 2 percent of revenues from sales on which the card is used.

For Albertson's, the program limits its giving to a percentage of sales directly involved in the program. It also associates the grocer's name with a worthy cause and helps build goodwill.

Albertson's also benefits from the league's marketing efforts. Presumably, soccer moms will buy a few extras when they know a percentage is going back to their kids. In addition, Albertson's will probably capture some rival grocers' shoppers—at least for one trip.

Similar programs could no doubt be developed in the water garden sector, whether a special sale at a water garden center or a commission offered for any installation contracts signed through a promotion.

#### Problem Solving

Solving a client's problems is a terrific way to build loyalty, according to Seth Kaplan, owner of Pet Pantry in Roslyn Heights, N.Y.

Kaplan was speaking about natural dog products at a seminar in Atlantic City, but the idea holds for water gardening as well. Kaplan was describing the loyalty he earned when he recommended various supplements or natural dog food diets that eliminated customer complaints, whether doggie breath or a poor coat. What Kaplan learned is that customers began to see him as a hero once he came to their rescue.

This may warrant keeping in mind next time a client seeks help about a minor algae problem or underpowered pump.

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](mailto:bhutchins@fancypubs.com). Water Garden News cannot take responsibility for return of materials.

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