

Idea Exchange May/June 2010

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Maintenance Programs Pay Off

A pond maintenance program can add up to 30 percent to your annual revenue, said Jeff Spillars, vice president of Winston Co., during his water quality seminar at the Water Garden Expo in Oklahoma in February. In developing a treatment program, Spillars offered this advice:

1. Offer three choices:

Gold - Annual pond cleaning plus once-a-month visits to trim plants, apply treatments, clean filters, etc.

Silver - Annual pond cleaning and six visits for routine maintenance.

Bronze - Six months of visits to apply pond treatments and clean filters.

2. Give each level a better value than the last. Keep pricing where clients think, "Wow, for just \$100 more I can get year-round maintenance."

3. Send customers their programs broken down by day and time so they know when you will come. Leave a card the day you visit to they have a record of it.

4. Keep a "brag book" with you when selling the package to show clients the progression of ponds you maintain and for how many years. Include written testimonials from customers.

5. Price in odd amounts. For example, \$495 sounds better than \$500. Large, whole numbers scare clients.

Passing Notes

During a special session held by one of the largest independent lawn and garden retailers in the United States, Curt Dawson, vice president of sales for Droll Yankees Inc., took the following notes and shared them in a recent company newsletter. "If it works for the largest Independent Lawn & Garden Retailer in the U.S., it can work for you and me, too," Dawson wrote.

1. Who is my customer?

Poll your current customer base to see exactly who your customers are. For example, are there more women than men? How old are they? Where do they live? What are their hobbies, interests and their earning levels? This knowledge proves extremely powerful when providing help and advice from the sales floor to the buying and marketing departments.

2. What do we sell?

You already know the products you sell in your store, but think about it a little deeper. When customers enter your store to solve a problem or to make their back yard more enjoyable, you are providing advice and confidence. If staff understands your products and can communicate that knowledge to customers then the result is sales and confident, happy customers.

3. What makes exceptional customer service?

Going above and beyond to meet as well as exceed customer expectations.

Back to School

Hillermann Nursery and Florist, a garden center in Washington, Mo., teamed up with East Central College in Union, Mo., to offer free classes designed to draw more outside interest and attract new, potential clients to the garden center, according to a recent e-Newsletter from Western Nursery and Landscape Association.

"Classes draw more interest for us when done in coordination with a local college or extension center," Sandi Hillermann McDonald, owner of the garden center, said in the article. Class topics include rain gardening, general gardening and edibles.

Market Experiments

For retailers unprepared to move forward and experiment with new ways of marketing their businesses, 2010 might prove another tough year, according to John Stanley, owner of John Stanley Associates. In a recent Retail Guru newsletter, Stanley offered an action plan to help businesses grow sales. Online shopping proves essential. Consumers increasingly expect to order products online. Train Team Members. Stores increasingly do less team training in product knowledge and customer service. The direct result is declined customer service standards. Successful retailers will start investing more in training their team members. Customers are more interested in the service they receive during a store visit than the products. Participate as a business in social networking. Many garden centers around the world use Facebook to communicate with customers. Start experimenting with Twitter and other social network systems to discover what works best for you and your customers. Offer in-house garden classes. Learning how to garden is fashionable now, so take advantage of the trend. Revitalize or introduce your customer training program to increase education, foot traffic and sales.

Send Us Your Ideas!

We want your ideas about building pond and water garden businesses. You will receive \$50 for published submissions. Send your ideas (50 to 200 words) to smeyer@bowtieinc.com with Idea Exchange in the subject line.