

## Sell Your Pond, Water Garden Expertise

Tuesday, April 27, 2010, 2 p.m. EDT

No matter how many people attend your event, take the time to develop a strong bond with those customers. Class topics at Across the Pond have ranged from basic pondbuilding to paver installation. You are an expert. We own our pond and water garden businesses because we have the training, experience and knowledge needed in our field. Do your customers realize that? Your experience and expertise is valuable. Conveying your pond and water garden expertise to consumers can be an inexpensive marketing tool to grow your business.

In your local arena, you can conduct regular seminars and how-to events at your pond and water garden store or business, contribute to newspaper columns, write articles and affiliate yourself with master gardeners and garden clubs. If you put yourself out there as a pond and water garden expert, organizations and media outlets will seek your advice and counsel.

An avenue that has been extremely successful for us is to offer free classes. These classes can be as elaborate or intimate as you want, and it is easy to tailor them to any market. Simply choose a topic and advertise it.

We have offered classes in diverse topics such as basic pondbuilding, landscape lighting, container gardening, paver installation, winterizing your pond, attracting nature to your garden and building a bubbling birdbath. Sometimes we design classes to impart knowledge and attract customers to the store. Other times we offer classes that are ancillary to existing projects.

For example, we once did a pond build at the local botanical gardens, and we invited the public to attend a day-long class revolving around the project. The format featured a classroom lecture in the morning and a hands-on session in the afternoon. We charged a fee for the class and donated the proceeds to the botanical gardens.

The event was a win-win for both of us. The gardens raised nearly \$2,000, and we gained public recognition and exposure.

Although the botanical gardens seminar drew a large crowd, classes do not have to be large to prove successful. Even if you only get five people to attend your event, you still can and should develop a strong bond with those customers.

For us, morning classes attract larger audiences than those held in the afternoon. Also, we find that people enjoy hands-on classes more than lectures. Do not be afraid to trumpet your knowledge. Research and rehearse what you plan to say. Prepare for the know-it-all in the audience. There always is someone who will be skeptical. Watch how you present your knowledge. Confidence is key. If standing before an audience challenges you, overcome that nervousness with practice. Remember that you know more than the average person, which is why you are in this business. Modern technology makes expert presentations easier than ever before. A PowerPoint can present all your pictures and cue lines to keep you on course and focused. Be yourself and sell your expertise.