

Trevi Fountain Visit Demonstrates How Displays Sell Water Features

Thursday, July 30, 2009, 3:00 p.m., EDT

My wife, Jeannie, and daughter, Olivia with me at Trevi Fountain in Rome.

Trevi and other fountains draw incredible crowds. As I sit here in Rome watching my wife and daughter throw coins in the Trevi Fountain it strikes me with wonder at the crowds this fountain draws. It's not just this fountain. There are fountains everywhere in Europe, from the elaborate Bernini-designed Fountain of the Four Rivers in Piazza Navona to the block-long, multi-level fountains above the Place de Casino in Monte Carlo to the simple but ornate dog-watering basins in a park off the Gothic Quarter of Barcelona. Certain European cities offer special tours just to view the water features.

People naturally are drawn to the sound and splendor of water. They have been for centuries.

In Pompeii, the ancient city in southern Italy that was destroyed by a volcanic eruption in 79 A.D., there is evidence of courtyard fountains and pools in many of the excavated homes. Water gardening might be new to the United States, but in Europe, it has been as much a part of everyday life as the modern-day Starbucks.

As a retailer, I probably cannot attract the same crowds that flock to the fountains of Rome, but I can create high volumes of foot traffic that regularly return to my stores by offering an attractive environment that is aesthetically pleasing, convenient and informative. To do this we use water as centerpieces in our store displays. Water features draw more people into the store and create more interest and excitement than anything else we do.

Build it and they will come. As retailers and pond builders, we can merchandise with water features and create 'hang time' -- the longer we keep a customer in the store, the more they spend.

Visitors soon become customers once they experience the joy of feeding and petting the fish, see the bubbling boulders that attract birds to our Nature Garden or sit in a swing by the recirculating urns. Moreover, they come back and bring friends with them.

The key to these water displays is selection, variation and service. Also consider size and price point. After all, not everyone can afford a Trevi Fountain reproduction.

Make sure you have on-hand inventory to support the displays. Once a customer decides to buy, they want it there and then. If you cannot offer it immediately, the customer will find it elsewhere, most likely on the Internet.

Offer different choices in price as well as scale. A small bubbling urn on an apartment patio can provide the same ambiance as a huge fountain in a piazza setting. Once the displays are built, train your employees to sell. They

need to understand the components.

We are not selling a widget off a shelf. We are selling a lifestyle, a quality of life and a feature that allows everyone to enjoy their own European experience right in their own gardens.