

## Experts Suggest 3 Successful Pond and Water Garden Industry Marketing Techniques

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Marketing experts advise business owners to resist the impulse to cut marketing expenditures, even as the recession makes some scramble to tighten their belts. "We have more than 80 years of proof -- from a Harvard Business Review report in 1927 to "Advertising in a Recession" by Bernard Ryan, Jr., published in 1999 -- that cutting back on marketing during a recession is a mistake," Participating in pond and water garden tours enable businesses to stay in the front of past and prospective clients' minds. (Courtesy of Kathleen Buckner/BowTie Inc.)said Boyd Blackwood, a veteran marketing professional and owner of Smart Marketing on Any Budget in Little Rock, Ark.

A McGraw-Hill study of 600 companies between 1980 and 1985 showed that sales for companies that aggressively marketed during the recession of 1981-1982 rose 256 percent over those that cut back. Those company's sales continued to grow up to three years after the economic downturn, Blackwood said.

The lesson from these studies is that the more you are in front of customers now, the more they trust you and value buying from you when they open their wallets again, said Troy D. White, owner of Responsive Direct Marketing in Calgary, Alberta. Pond and water garden business owners can capitalize on the value of the hobby to develop successful marketing strategies, White said.

Customer appreciation events can effectively reinforce your company's brand while showcasing your latest products or building techniques to an already loyal client base. Mike Garcia, founder of Enviroscape Inc. in Redondo Beach, Calif., throws an annual backyard bash at his home showroom.

The event includes music, swimming and a carne asada barbecue prepared in his outdoor kitchen. Garcia said he encourages guests to bring prospective clients, broadening his company's exposure to a new pond and water garden customer base in a fun, no-pressure environment.

Pond and water garden tours offer past and prospective clients an exclusive entrance into the often-private world of ponds and water gardens, putting a builder's work on center stage while demonstrating the endless possibilities water features offer. Steve and Pam Parker, owners of Alpine Aquascapes in Katy, Texas, coordinate two pond and water garden tours each year.

In the fall, they plan a full-day outing that exhibits 35 to 40 of the 375 ponds and water gardens Parker built throughout the Houston suburb. The Spring Moonlight Tour features 10 of Parker's ponds and water gardens.

These free-of-charge events attract up to 175 guests each, providing past clients with a chance to exchange ideas and planting the seed of inspiration for new pond and water garden prospects, Pam Parker said. The couple recruits participants by advertising in their local newspaper and on their website as well as by mailing flyers to their pond and water garden customer base.

Sponsoring grassroots pond and water garden clubs can help businesses build brand recognition and establish them as a valuable resource and trusted partner for pond and water garden enthusiasts, said Kiley McMichael, associate marketing manager for United Pet Group and TetraPond. "Pond owners are proud and want to share what they're doing," McMichael said. "We have found that little clubs grow into bigger ones."

Setting up a pond and water garden club can be as simple as providing a bulletin board in a visible place where members can exchange contact information or supplying pond and water garden clubs with the names of new customers. Once clubs are established, pond and water garden stores can play an ongoing role in maintaining them by helping to facilitate pond and water garden tours and events. McMichael said offering product samples provides a continuous consumer base for their products and services.