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Engaging The New Green Industry Consumer

The following e-GRO Alert highlights marketing strategies to attract and engage new green industry consumers in the retail environment.

Lockdowns and work-from-home options during the pandemic gave people the opportunity to participate in new activities, including vegetable gardening, container gardening, and landscaping (Fig. 1). Many people tried gardening for the first time or completed landscaping projects from their “to do” lists. Estimates show 16 million people started gardening during the pandemic (Garden Media Group, 2021).



Figure 1. Garden Center Herb Display. Photo credit: Alicia Rihn

As a result, sales of plants and gardening supplies increased an estimated 8% to 36% between 2020 and 2021 (Garden Media Group, 2021). Many of the new customers are younger than 35 years old, are interested in growing their own food, and have different needs than older generations.

This e-GRO Alert focuses on two marketing strategies that can be used to engage and draw in this younger customer group to your retail establishment.

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1. Use Promotions and Retail Layout to Highlight Information that is Important to Customers

Promotions and in-store information are key promotional materials to inform customers about the benefits of plants and gardening. Many plant benefits cannot be ascertained from visually inspecting a plant which makes in-store signage and labeling more important. Plants and gardening provide aesthetic, cognitive, economic, educational, emotional, environmental, physical, and social benefits, but customers (and new customers in particular) are less aware of these benefits. In-store signage and plant tags are great ways to communicating these messages at the point-of-sale. Sharing content related to the benefits using online platforms is another way to encourage customers to view plants as having more value.

Similarly, customers (in general) are exhibiting a greater interest and valuation for sustainability in the marketplace. This interest is particularly strong among younger consumers and is a key factor encouraging consumers to grow their own food because they have control over the inputs while growing their own produce.



Figure 2. Value-added Signage Encouraging Sustainable Purchases. Photo credit: Alicia Rihn



Figure 3. Creating Space for Customers to Linger. Photo credit: Alicia Rihn

To capitalize on customer interest, use in-store signage to inform customers about sustainability initiatives, local initiatives, and so forth. (Fig. 2). How are you giving back to the community and environment? Tell your customers about the good work that you do!

New customers are also experience oriented. Green industry firms can provide sitting areas, or areas where customers can take in the ambiance, to encourage lingering and engagement (Fig 3.).

There is an opportunity to partner with other industries (food trucks, cafes, etc.) to build an inviting or event atmosphere. In-store displays can be designed to encourage photo opportunities which customers can share with friends and generate e-WOM (e-word of mouth) advertising.

Lastly, as new customers come into the establishment for the first time, they may be unaware of all the services offered by the firm. Informational signs can inform them about additional services that experienced customers may know about, but new customers are not aware of (e.g., herb/vegetable container designs; patio gardening help; etc.)

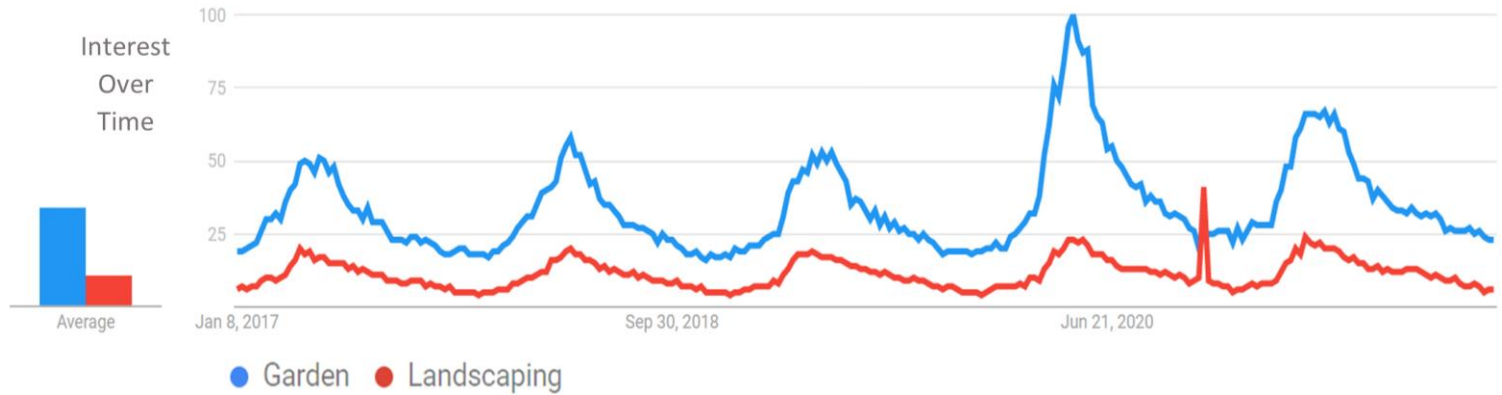


Figure 4. Google Trends from 1/8/2017 to 1/5/2022 Demonstrating Seasonal Searches for “Garden” and “Landscaping” Terms.

Photo credit: Google Trends (2022)

2. Use Online Platforms to Efficiently Reach and Inform Customers

Younger consumers use online platforms to immediately search and gather information. It is important for firms to have information readily available for customers where and when they are looking for it. Online platforms are continually changing and different platforms appeal to different customer groups. Pay attention to who your customer is, what platforms they prefer, and the type of content they are interested in learning about. From the management standpoint, pay attention to potential fees associated with the platforms and whether you have a staff member who has the expertise and time to maintain the firm’s presence on the platforms. Alternatively, if there is a firm or consultant that could be hired to bolster your online presence. It is important to find and use a platform that gives you the greatest exposure to your customer group(s) but also use a platform that can be efficiently maintained by your firm.

Outdated online information may confuse customers or reflect negatively on the business and discourage new customers from visiting. According to Google Trends (2022), Google searches mirror seasonality with gardening and landscaping searches starting just prior to the growing season (Fig. 4). This is good timing because green industry firms can refresh their online content during the winter months, so it is prepared and ready for the following spring.

Lastly, aesthetics are very important in the green industry. Online platforms need to have high quality photos and visual demonstrations. Both items are a good way to engage new customers and provide them relevant information.

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