



Alicia Rihn  
arihna@utk.edu

Volume 7 Number 2 January 2022

## 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.

[www.e-gro.org](http://www.e-gro.org)

### 2022 Sponsors



Funding Generations of Progress  
Through Research and Scholarships

Ball®

fine



P.L. LIGHT SYSTEMS  
THE LIGHTING KNOWLEDGE COMPANY

Reprint with permission from the author(s) of this e-GRO Alert.

## 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.)

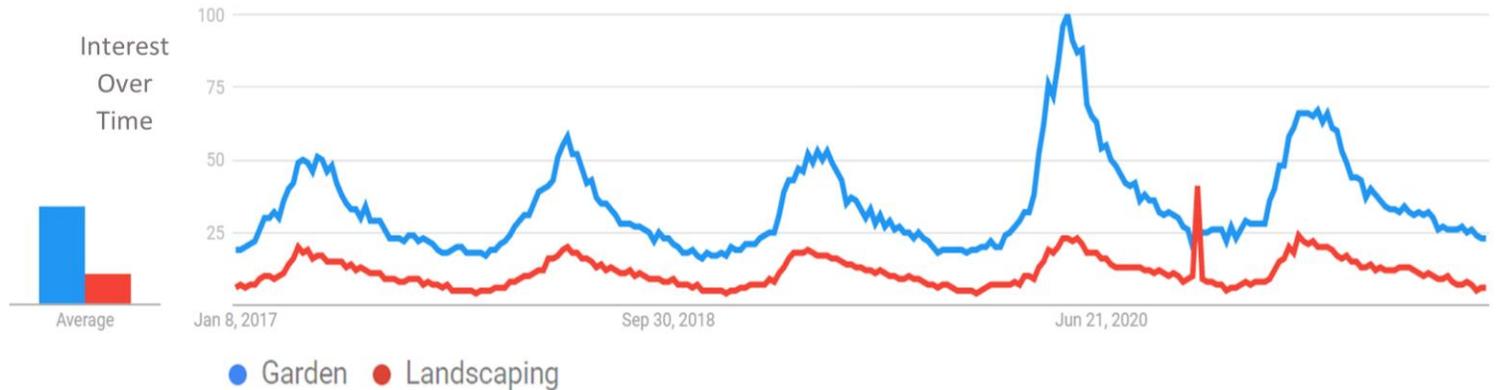


Figure 4. Google Trends from 1/8/2017 to 1/5/2022 Demonstrating Seasonal Searches for “Garden” and “Landscaping” Terms.

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.

**e-GRO Alert**

[www.e-gro.org](http://www.e-gro.org)

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Dr. Nora Catlin  
Floriculture Specialist  
Cornell Cooperative Extension  
Suffolk County  
[nora.catlin@cornell.edu](mailto:nora.catlin@cornell.edu)

Dr. Chris Currey  
Assistant Professor of Floriculture  
Iowa State University  
[ccurrey@iastate.edu](mailto:ccurrey@iastate.edu)

Dr. Ryan Dickson  
Greenhouse Horticulture and  
Controlled-Environment Agriculture  
University of Arkansas  
[ryand@uark.edu](mailto:ryand@uark.edu)

Thomas Ford  
Commercial Horticulture Educator  
Penn State Extension  
[tgf2@psu.edu](mailto:tgf2@psu.edu)

Dan Gilrein  
Entomology Specialist  
Cornell Cooperative Extension  
Suffolk County  
[dog1@cornell.edu](mailto:dog1@cornell.edu)

Dr. Chieri Kubota  
Controlled Environments Agriculture  
The Ohio State University  
[kubota.10@osu.edu](mailto:kubota.10@osu.edu)

Heidi Lindberg  
Floriculture Extension Educator  
Michigan State University  
[wolleage@anr.msu.edu](mailto:wolleage@anr.msu.edu)

Dr. Roberto Lopez  
Floriculture Extension & Research  
Michigan State University  
[rglopez@msu.edu](mailto:rglopez@msu.edu)

Dr. Neil Mattson  
Greenhouse Research & Extension  
Cornell University  
[neil.mattson@cornell.edu](mailto:neil.mattson@cornell.edu)

Dr. W. Garrett Owen  
Greenhouse Extension & Research  
University of Kentucky  
[wgowen@uky.edu](mailto:wgowen@uky.edu)

Dr. Rosa E. Raudales  
Greenhouse Extension Specialist  
University of Connecticut  
[rosa.raudales@uconn.edu](mailto:rosa.raudales@uconn.edu)

Dr. Alicia Rihn  
Agricultural & Resource Economics  
University of Tennessee-Knoxville  
[arihn@utk.edu](mailto:arihn@utk.edu)

Dr. Debalina Saha  
Horticulture Weed Science  
Michigan State University  
[sahadeb2@msu.edu](mailto:sahadeb2@msu.edu)

Dr. Beth Scheckelhoff  
Extension Educator - Greenhouse Systems  
The Ohio State University  
[scheckelhoff.11@osu.edu](mailto:scheckelhoff.11@osu.edu)

Dr. Ariana Torres-Bravo  
Horticulture / Ag. Economics  
Purdue University  
[torres2@purdue.edu](mailto:torres2@purdue.edu)

Dr. Brian Whipker  
Floriculture Extension & Research  
NC State University  
[bwhipker@ncsu.edu](mailto:bwhipker@ncsu.edu)

Dr. Jean Williams-Woodward  
Ornamental Extension Plant Pathologist  
University of Georgia  
[jwoodwar@uga.edu](mailto:jwoodwar@uga.edu)

Copyright ©2022

Where trade names, proprietary products, or specific equipment are listed, no discrimination is intended and no endorsement, guarantee or warranty is implied by the authors, universities or associations.

**Cooperating Universities**

**Cornell CALS**  
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

**Cornell Cooperative Extension  
Suffolk County**

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**

**University of  
Kentucky**



**PennState Extension**

**UTIA INSTITUTE OF  
AGRICULTURE**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

**UCONN**

**MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY**



**College of Agricultural &  
Environmental Sciences**  
**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA**

**PURDUE  
UNIVERSITY**

**NC STATE  
UNIVERSITY**



**THE OHIO STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

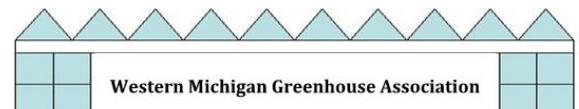
**UofA DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE  
RESEARCH & EXTENSION**  
University of Arkansas System

**In cooperation with our local and state greenhouse organizations**

**MAUMEE VALLEY GROWERS**  
Choose the Very Best.



**Metro Detroit Flower Growers Association**



**Indiana  
FLOWER  
GROWERS  
Association**

