

Jeff Warschauer, Nexus Corporation

WHY WE MUST Cultivate New Customers



Warschauer

THE green side of our industry isn't growing. We can blame the economy

– and that's part of the problem – but there are bigger issues we need to address, too.

Our customer base is changing. The 80 million people in the Baby Boomer generation have fueled the greenhouse industry over the last couple of decades. But now they're moving into retirement. They're not gardening like they used to. Generation X is barely half the size, so even if we can interest them in gardening like the Boomers – which is debatable – we're going to have to get twice as many of them buying our plants just to break even. Generation Y is bigger, but they're years away from being a market driver.

We must acknowledge the facts we see around us. The consumer today is not as interested in gardening. You can blame the economy, and I do. But I also wonder if people have just run out of time for having a beautiful landscaped garden in their yard. They go get a couple \$50 containers and put them on the front stoop. Maybe they buy a couple of baskets because they have to look good to their neighbors. Hopefully they do the same for the back patio. But that's the extent of it.

Convert Consumers To Customers

We need to find ways to appeal to new generations of consumers and create new customers. We have to be able to look at the different market segments and the different customers and ask, "What would they want? Why would they

want to buy my plants?"

For me, those questions are easier to ask than to answer, in large part because I am not that customer. I can study. I can think I understand it. But I can't walk in those shoes. How do we do it? We need to hire some of these people to help us understand. As an industry, if we're going to go after Gen X, Gen Y or Gen Whatever, we have to have these younger people – who understand exactly what those consumers want – on our management teams.

Create Partners With Service

But our efforts need to go beyond appealing to consumers. What can you as a grower do to cultivate new retailer customers for your business?

With all the great genetics out there, along with mechanization and education, there are many good growers today. So what sets you and your business apart from the rest? Why should a retailer buy from you? You either have to have a lower price – which you don't want to do – or



Help your retailer customers be better merchandisers. Become a partner that helps both of your businesses succeed.



you have to show the retail customer that by doing business with you, you are going to help him increase sales.

As a grower, you need to be more than a plant supplier. Consider a business model where you help your customers stock and merchandise their stores. Show them how to set themselves apart from their competitors. Provide benches. Charge a fee and help them do a better job merchandising plants. You're not just a provider of plant material anymore. You're not a wholesaler. You're a partner.

To begin growing our industry and our businesses again, we need to find new customers – consumers and retailers – in completely new places. We will have to learn who they are, and understand what they want. We need to help them, whether it's providing new products in new ways, or helping retailers serve their customers. We need to be visionaries. **GG**

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