



## **"Ask And Ye Shall Receive"**

**by Robert Hendrickson**

After a few decades working with garden center owners on their marketing plans, I've found people usually fall into one of two camps. The majority seem to believe "targeting", "taking aim", "a rifle, not a shotgun approach" (like their intended customers are some sort of prey that need to be brought down) is the best and most logical approach when it comes to marketing their company.

A much smaller faction have the confidence to believe that when it comes to effective marketing, "what" you say is far more important than "who" you might be reaching.

### **Retail Rules of the Road:**

**"Your marketing will take on a whole new feel once you begin thinking of potential shoppers as people instead of targets."**

Which brings us to my previous article focused on the single word "why". In that piece I suggested that when it comes to effective garden center marketing, explaining "why" people should buy what you're selling is far more convincing than focusing on "what" products you're trying to sell.

Instead of assuming that I could sufficiently answer the question "Why do people garden?", I decided to conduct a one phrase survey at garden centers, community garden clubs and industry events around the country asking individuals who do garden one question... "*Why* do you garden?". And here's my reason why...

I'm confident that when we learn *why* people who garden like to garden then relay their stories through any number of marketing channels, we provide both gardeners and non-gardeners with convincing reasons they may or may not have considered when it comes to the enjoyment and benefits of gardening. Online retailers tell us that a large number of their sales are the result of customer reviews. Many shoppers are leery of product claims but confidently trust what other consumers have to say. What better message to distribute to your community than sharing what people who actually garden have to say.

So I asked. And people responded. Over 2500 face to face replies. In fact, only two people refused to answer the simple enquiry during my research. Both were guys... both looking for the lawn fertilizer department... both with the same response... "I don't have time for this." Men on a mission. But the rest, both male and female, members of every generation, were happy and even anxious to provide me with their main reason for gardening. Many said they were flattered I took the time to ask.

I made a point in recording the exact words people used when answering the inquiry, "Why I Garden". As the responses grew I noticed similar phrases and categories reappeared. For marketing purposes I consolidated the use

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of words like planet, Mother Earth and good for the environment into one theme. And while the combined response of "growing fresh food and "growing healthy food" became the second most common reason given why people garden, responses using the word "organic" came in at a distant number twenty-seven. And no surprise, gardeners like their dirt. To borrow a Casey Kasem countdown quip, "In at number five..."... I like to dig/smell/touch/play in the dirt". So much for the industry's concern about the negative connotation relating gardening to dirty work. Real gardeners find digging in the dirt one of the most enjoyable reasons for grabbing a plant and trowel. And here's a tip I learned from successful marketers outside the narrow confines of the garden center world. Want to stand out from the crowd when it comes to marketing? Try telling the truth. In the current environment of pompous hype it's bound to catch people's attention.

So here's the rundown of the top thirty reasons given by people who garden when asked to reply to the statement... "Why I garden."

1. To unwind and relax/stress reducer
2. Growing fresh/ healthy food
3. To be outside with nature
4. To create/creativity/expression
5. I like to dig/smell/touch/play in the dirt
6. A nicer home/pride in my home
7. To have fun/feel good
8. For confirmation/job well done
9. To make things pretty/better/beautiful
10. To teach/spend time with family/children/grandkids
11. To attract/care for wildlife
12. To watch things/my garden grow
13. It's healthy/exercise
14. Therapy for mind/body
15. Color
16. Flowers
17. To inspire others/inspiration/share
18. Tradition/my mom/dad gardened
19. The planet/environment/Mother Earth
20. The plants
21. Fragrance
22. To learn from the experience
23. To get fresh air and sunshine
24. Because my grandfather/grandmother instilled the desire in me
25. For a higher property value

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- 26. Unleash my inner chef**
- 27. Organic**
- 28. To create an outdoor entertainment/retreat area**
- 29. To nurture my soul**
- 30. To have something to care for and nurture**

I'm betting the list creates two differing opinions. The shallow approach will be those who do a quick glance and move on to something that coincides better with their own point of view as it relates to marketing. The savvy ones, always on the lookout for ways to stand out from their competition, will look at the list and think... "OMG! I just found thirty weeks' worth of marketing message magic!"

While some business owners look at marketing as an expense instead of an investment, using the tired cliché of "only fish when the fish are biting" as an excuse for not spending money, I've believe that every week a business is open the company should be spending money inviting people to come shop. Obviously some periods of the year deserve more budget dollars than others, but some weekly message to your community should be delivered with the promise that every day is a day worth coming to see what's new. For those with a similar approach to growing a business, this list provides thirty of the possible fifty-two weeks of topics that can be used for enewsletters, radio ads, postcard themes and heaven forbid, even social media topics of conversation.

This list does away with the proverbial marketing question... "So what should we advertise this week?" The answer? "Pick a number from 1 to 30." Any number you choose from this list will be the right answer.

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