



"The Question Remains... Why?"

by Robert Hendrickson

My previous article outlined the results of a survey asking people who garden to provide me with their reasons *why* they garden. Over 2500 replies were then consolidated into thirty key categories based on words people used in the surveys. The purpose was to identify customer-centric values that would become the basis of a marketing campaign.

Retail Rules of the Road:

"It doesn't matter what it is, what it does or how much it costs until you explain why it should matter to the customer."

Often garden center ads fail to provide potential shoppers with anything more than the name of a plant, a few superlatives and a price. With television ads, we see thirty seconds of garden center structures, slow pans of greenhouse benches, hear a background of bird sounds while a dreamy voice-over tells the viewer to shop at the garden center with the logo on the screen. Nowhere in the ad, whether it be print, electronic, digital or even billboards does a compelling reason why anyone should care become apparent.

Like a one-column newspaper ad that ran in our local paper. Obviously the garden center is on a tight budget given the size of the ad, although they did spend extra dollars for a yellow background and colorful type. (Here's a tip... If you're a print advertiser and can't afford full-color photos, don't use background screens and multi-color type in hopes of gaining attention.) Whether this garden center should be spending their limited funds on newspaper advertising is a different issue, so for now let's stick with the ad itself.

Print ads regardless of size, shape or type of publication can be divided into just three parts... headline, body and logo. The ad in question used the most important section of the ad, the headline area, to list... their name, their claim of being "America's favorite garden store", that they employ experienced, knowledgeable staff, have over 5000 of the highest quality products, possess some unknown certification and offer classes. That's not a headline... that's a company bio.

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The body of the ad, the area best used to provide an explanation of "why" a potential shopper should care about what's being offered, outlined an upcoming class with *what* was going to be discussed but no reason *why* a reader should be interested in learning about the topic.

The logo area, other than that's where the company name should have been placed instead of at the top of the ad, was fine with the address, hours and website.

As a result we have a garden center owner spending several hundred dollars on an ad, screaming for attention with gaudy colors, then bragging on themselves without providing one example of *why* any reader should care. A reminder of when people tell me that from their experience certain marketing options no longer work, I reply... "Maybe you shouldn't blame the messenger".

So let's take this same ad and format it in a way that provides not only information but also compelling reasons to help potential shoppers understand *why* they should care.

First we create what I call the "Story Steps Screenplay"...

Characters: people with an interest in fresh, healthy, tasty food

(Tip: This example reminds me of when the CEO of Panera was asked to define his company's target market. His reply, "People who eat." Keep that in mind the next time your media sales rep tells you their company is perfectly positioned to reach your target customer.)

Setting: any size home with a yard, porch or patio (and people who eat.)

Needs: the desire and confidence to grow healthy, fresh, good tasting food

Resolution: we can help you grow good tasting, good for you food your family will enjoy

Closure: who we are, where we are and how to find us

The process isn't concerned whether the ad is being created for print, radio, television or online. Once the message is created it can be adapted and sized to any delivery method you choose.

But sticking with the ad example we're trying to improve, let's compile the message into the three components of a print ad...

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Headline: Fresh, healthy and homegrown

Body: Whether you're a longtime gardener or a beginner, growing great tasting, good for you food is actually pretty easy.

Like asparagus. Plant once and enjoy for years.

And strawberries. Just a dozen plants and you'll have sun-sweet berries for the whole family.

There's even blueberries and raspberries you can grow in containers right on your deck or patio.

Learn all you need to know this Saturday at our free grow your own workshop.

Healthy, better tasting fruit and veggies right out your backdoor.

It doesn't get any fresher than this.

Logo: Greenside Up Garden Center
On 4th and Main in Hannibal
And at Greenside Up dot com
See you in the garden.

Now let's count the '*why* they should care' potential shoppers will hear in the message...

Why #1: Because we help experienced and beginning gardeners

Why #2: Because growing good for you food is easy

Why #3: Because you plant asparagus once and enjoy it for years

Why #4: Because just a dozen strawberries can feed an entire family

Why #5: Because now you can grow berries in a container

Why #6: Because better food is right out your back door

Why #7: Because it doesn't get any fresher than this

And the subtle **Why #8:** Because we're right there in the garden with you.

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With editing to fit the delivery method you choose, these words become the core message for a billboard, radio ad, tv spot, direct mail postcard, newspaper ad, newsletter article or social media outreach. Want to attract the next generation of shoppers to your center? Provide them with more than a list of tomato varieties. Tell them *why* growing their own food is better for their family. Want to reconnect with customers who used to plant vegetables but may have lost interest? Remind them *why* they should tune-up that tiller again.

The result of more shoppers will be a reminder of *why* you ran that ad.

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