

Do You Want to Sell Lots?

It's proportionately more fun and profitable to sell a lot of something than to sell a little of something, isn't it? Here are 10 steps to help you do just that.

By Sid Raisch

Anything worth selling requires selling a lot of whatever it is to make the effort and investment worthwhile. It takes too much effort and is too much of a distraction to get caught up in buying and selling stuff that doesn't have a reasonable expectation of having a positive impact on the financial performance of a company. If you're going to sell annuals, sell lots of annuals. If you're going to sell herbs, sell lots of herbs. If you're going to sell organic solutions, sell lots of them.

My rule of thumb is that if you can't gain at least \$2,000 margin dollars per year within two years of selling something then it cannot contribute enough to warrant the time or financial investment — and that effort should instead go to selling something else.

Some of you are going to have a hard time grasping that concept, and that is because you're entrenched in selling small amounts of a lot of different things, which is exactly why you don't sell large amounts of very many things.

Like a New Computer

Starting with that perspective, let's take a look at the effort and investment that goes into selling lots of organic products. John Dromgoole, owner of The Natural Gardener in Austin, Texas, once told me: "The best way to sell a lot of organic solutions is to sell only organic solutions."

His emphasis at the time was to cause a sharper focus on organics by eliminating the distraction and diluted resources from alternate choices. It meant that it is better to stake a firm claim on the one approach rather than try to be one thing to one customer and another thing to another.

To sell much of anything we had better be meeting the expectations of our customer. However, the apparent expectation of the customer is where we actually get off track on selling organic products, or anything else because we tend to listen only to what the customer says they want instead of what they mean they want.

There are two paths to go down with selling organic products:

1. Soil amendments, and
2. Remedies or solutions to symptoms.

To help the customer, we need to make sure that the plants we sell get the best possible start, and I can't imagine any better way to do that than to make sure that they are grown in a favorable environment, can you? The best method we have to influence the environment that the customer will introduce their plants to when they get home is to send at least part of a favorable environment home with them.

Think of it this way; your new computer looks beautiful, sounds beautiful, and works beautifully when you put it on

your desk and start it up. The next day lightning strikes and the thing fries from the electrical surge and you have to go buy another one. After a week or so the replacement monitor starts to get fuzzy and the color gradually becomes gray-toned. A week later creepy crawly things are moving across the monitor over your documents.

Would you like to prevent this from happening? Who in their right mind would ever think of buying a computer and not plugging it into a new surge suppressor power strip and installing anti-virus software first thing? Why do we let customers walk out of our stores without the equivalent for their plants?

Typically, the approach of a garden center is to stock fertilizer and soil amendments and view it as an add-on impulse or maybe better, as a suggested sale rather than as they should be viewed — an essential ingredient for the customer to receive the underlying benefit of their investment in plants.

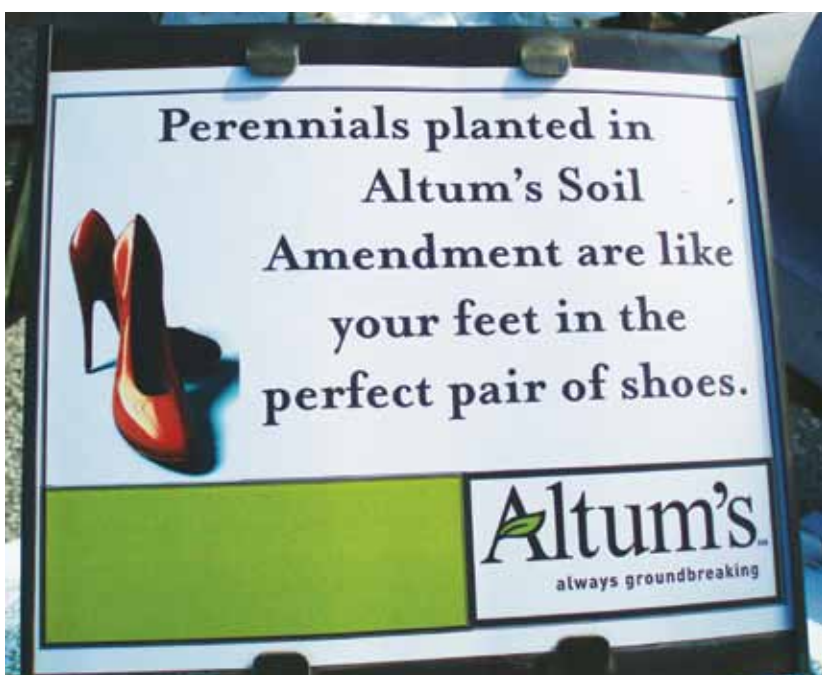
From the Bottom Up

When we measure performance by incremental add-on and incidental product sales it is to most people a satisfactory outcome and is encouraged and developed. But is this the best approach in the long run?

Start with the soil — sell lots of organic soil amendments.

1. Demonstrate the difference. Set up a side-by-side test growing plants in several different but similar products that you choose between. Be sure to include the nationally and regionally advertised brands in your comparison. Include a control by using the typical un-amended soil from your local area.

2. Decide and sell. Choose one primary organic soil amendment and get your entire staff on board to sell it. They'll need to know what the product is, how it is made, and why it will help your customer get more value from the plants they buy. If you need to have more than one size, choose two — a large size and a small size.



MANAGEMENT

3. Sample. Give your staff samples of the chosen product to use at home so they can say, "This is what I use at home." Also consider donating product for a prominent public planting if you are certain it will be properly planted and

maintained.

4. Merchandise to market and sell. Make sure that your chosen product is exposed to your customers multiple times along the typical shopping path is clear and repeated. Use the "batteries in

Walmart" approach with multiple product displays throughout your shopping areas. The final decision is often made at the register and more of those decisions to purchase will be made if there is more exposure to the product you recommend

along the shopping path.

5. Promote your choice. Use all available marketing communication opportunities to tell your customers how and why you chose the product you recommend. Tell them how the product works in layman's terms as well as how much better plants perform when growing in it. Use pictures with captions.

6. Benchmark, compare, measure, adjust. Set up a simple chart showing the product you sold the previous year alongside the goal your staff sets for the current year for the product you selected. Update the chart at least once each week and make your progress a subject of team meetings. Set the expectation that this is a new effort and will be tweaked during the first few weeks, and then annually.

7. Be consistent. If you have a landscape service or do plantings use the same product you have chosen to focus on in the store.

8. Price for profit. If you've chosen a product that is truly better, choose a price that is worthy of the value. Avoid the temptation to discount. Use multiple pricing for three or more bags at the perceived value, (or no lower than the price at your targeted margin, which should be 53-60 percent if you've done everything else correctly). The price per bag for purchases of less than three bags should be exactly \$1 more. People like to save a dollar.

9. Celebrate successes. As milestones and goals are met, have pizza parties, free lunch, or buy a decorated cake and have a celebration party.

10. Keep going. Pay your dues by expecting resistance to the change, listening, redirecting, coaching, and staying committed to your goal.

This is a good solid process to sell a lot of almost anything in a retail store. Try it here and use it in at least one other product area. Once you're skilled you will never turn back from it. **LGR**

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