

Foodies Hot @ IGC Show

A hot offering at this year's Independent Garden Center Show in Chicago was the debut of specialized "foodie" vendors. Fresh baked pies, custard serving machines and packaged fudge were solid hits among the thousands of garden centers in attendance. Many seem to be catching on to the season-extending and bottom-line benefits of the category. While some IGCs maintain the full-cafe concept won't work for them, they see packaged fancy food items as a welcomed expansion.

'Experience' Retail

With the recession, and now perhaps a second dip, consumer lifestyles have changed - out of necessity. Experts say the new opportunity for retailers is to provide an "experience" to today's consumer. You destination garden centers especially have a golden opportunity to get consumers out of their world and into yours. Don't worry, they will buy once there, but the pull of your unique shopping experience will get them out of walking the shopping mall and on the road to you.

GYO Veggies - and Fish

Another standout at this year's IGC Show was The Aquaponic Source's AquaBundance System, which combines growing vegetables with farming fish for the dinner table. Using organic hydroponic techniques, fish waste feeds the plants, which, in turn, clean and filter the water that returns to the fish's environment. IGC show goers were fascinated with the technology - and the potential to turn it into a cool in-store display and a hot new category for their stores.

'Cause Marketing' Cares

The new buzzwords are "cause marketing." Made popular by the likes of U2's Bono, this trend-forward marketing effort ties a passionate charitable cause to the sales of consumer products - with a portion of profits donated to the cause. A new wave of cause marketing is coming to retail hort, including Proven Winners ColorChoice's breast cancer research-focused Invincibelle Spirit Hydrangea. With the goal of raising \$1 million, participating IGCs are planning "Pink Day" events. It's a win-win that drives sales!

You
Can
BE
GARDENCHIC

Sell 'Gardening Genius'

The latest research from John Stanley Associates shows that 40 percent of shoppers rely on a retail salesperson for accurate product knowledge. You know consumers aren't going to get that down the street at the orange big box. Your garden center should be cashing in on the "intelligent advantage." Take a lead from the Apple Store's Genius Bar, where staff brainiacs deliver answers in a hip environment. Don't be afraid to play it up with a bit of humor - "Garden Geeks to the rescue!"

The Future of Lawns?

There has been a fair bit of debate in the consumer press lately about the future of the American lawn. Some pundits contend future home landscapes will be comprised of less green carpet, using turf as an accent rather than the central theme. Yet a valid defense of lawns is that they are eco-friendly, not only offering carbon benefits but also a cooling effect. Are you ready with the facts? Also, don't overlook trendy grass alternatives like ornamental peanut in warmer climes.

