

GARDEN & Chic life

Adventures in
IGC Entrepreneurial
Retailing

featuring
Snow's Garden Center
Charlottesville, VA

Corbin Snow, Owner

CORBIN SNOW, OWNER of Snow's Garden Center and a 34-year-old Gen Xer, is the fourth generation to take over the family's 98-year-old company in Charlottesville, VA. "The fact that we've been in business for almost 100 years provides a level of daily inspiration," Corbin says.

Taking over the business came with carrying on the responsibility of providing gardening knowledge to the community via The Snow Knows Gardening Show on NewsRadio 1070 WINA. Corbin's grandfather started the program, now billed as the "longest continuously running garden show in the world," in the spring of 1950. "It's the most listened to weekend talk radio show in Central Virginia, with more than 16,000 listeners every week," Corbin says.

What started as a prerecorded, 15-minute, twice-weekly lunchtime gardening segment has evolved into an hour-long Saturday morning live call-in program. Now, many listeners Facebook, Twitter, e-mail or text message their questions. "I love how it's evolved," Corbin says. "I'll give out my cell phone number, and people will text me questions." The Gen X / Gen Y customers, especially, have embraced Snow's social networking presence.

One of the garden center's most successful promotions, especially among Gen X / Gen Y consumers, has been a test drive event with Subaru. "We usually do two events a year with the local Subaru dealership. Subaru is kind of a Gen X / Gen Y car company, and they're really focused on the



green effort," Corbin says. During the Saturday events, the dealership brings three to four cars to the garden center. Anyone who test drives a car receives a \$25 gift card to Snow's. "They'll give away 100 gift cards in three hours," Corbin says. "You're not getting 60- to 70-year-old people showing up, it's people 30 to 45 years old."

It's a big win for Snow's. Not only does Subaru buy all of the gift cards from the garden center, it also sends more than 6,000 direct mail pieces and 10,000 e-mail blasts, all with Snow's logo included in the designs. Corbin says, "They're hitting all

of our customers who are coming here that day, and we know those customers are going to come right in and redeem those gift cards right after they get out of the car.”

Retail Focus

Snow’s has taken a few journeys down different paths with the goal of expanding the business, such as adding a cafe and offering boutique-type items, but the garden center has found returning to the farmers market-style garden center they’ve always been proves most successful.

From April through October, Snow’s brings in fresh fruits and vegetables. “We’re selling local produce - some grown by our customers who buy their shrubs and trees here and bring us their crop of cucumbers for the week,” Corbin says. Homemade jams, jellies, sauces, ciders, barbeque spreads, pickles, relish, Virginia peanuts and other local products round out the farmers market offerings. “It’s bringing us customers who maybe traditionally wouldn’t have stopped here at all, and it’s definitely bringing us repeat business,” Corbin says.

Besides shopping, which Corbin loves to do, magazines like *Garden Chic* are a source of display inspiration. “I love window displays, and I’m a shopper, too. My wife loves taking me out,” Corbin says. “I enjoy *Garden Chic’s* illustrations. I like to visually be able to see what other people are doing in their stores.”

Because Corbin feels nature itself is inspirational, his displays indoors incorporate outdoor elements. “We’ve got a 12-foot tree inside of our store right now,” he says. The tree displays birdhouses, hanging among silk wisteria and landscape lighting; additional birding items surround it. Corbin says, “You can’t help but be inspired and just touched by nature.” ■