

## Make It Easy for Me

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I like to shop—sort of. I like to look around, and I don't usually have a problem making a decision. I know more or less what I like, what will fit me, and what will grow well in my garden.

What does that make me? A decisive, but unadventurous, consumer. I drink the same wine, visit the same movie theater, order the same thing at restaurants. When I find a shirt I like, I buy it in six colors. After all, if I know I like something, why would I take the risk of switching? That means once my need is satiated, I'm done. Door shut. Opportunities to sell me more are lost.

There are two ways to drag me out of my rut: 1) stage an intervention, and 2) merchandise the products so it's super easy for me to grab what I want or suddenly "need" and go.

### The Intervention

I wear a polo shirt every single day, but last winter I bought a purple poncho, one of those amorphous sweater-cape-thingys. How did that happen? The store associate staged an intervention. Actually, it wasn't that dramatic. She saw me looking at the poncho on the hanger. She came over and said, "Here, I'll help you put it on. You really won't know if you like it unless you put it on." She was right! I bought the poncho because she intervened in my regularly scheduled shopping program. She expanded my horizons. With her help, I was "successful" in my shopping trip and I returned for more. When I need something other than a polo shirt, I go to her first.

The key is she worked with me so that I felt confident, happy and successful. I took a risk, I got a reward, and it was with her help. Your staff can do that. They can spot someone wandering around, looking confused, and ask what they're shopping for. They can see someone holding a perennial and suggest plants to go with it. If your associates help solve your customers' problems, your customers will come back, because you're now a sure thing. If you see a longtime customer come in to shop, grab them and show them what's new. One of my local garden center owners did that recently, and I now find myself wanting a dwarf elm tree in the worst way, even though I really have nowhere to put one!

### The Display Rack

Another way that garden centers can be more like clothing stores is with merchandising. Take Terrain outside Philadelphia, for example. Okay, before you say "Oh, Terrain, we don't have their budget," let me tell you what I liked about the store, because you can do it, too, with no increase in your budget.

Merchandise your plants in "gardens." This is like making plant "outfits." If you go to a clothing store, you can buy the whole outfit. That is wonderful for busy people, those who tend to buy the same items all the time, or folks who are paralyzed by decision making. At Terrain, they use plants that are stocked in the row behind the endcap to create display gardens. On one end, a butterfly garden. On another, a white and silver garden. You don't have to guess—you can buy one of each plant (or three!) and go home to an instant garden. Most garden centers display their plants by type: all of the heuchera, all of the geraniums, all of the ornamental grasses. That makes it easy to water, take inventory, etc., but that makes it easier for you, not for your customers. Think about also making room for some cash-and-carry displays in prominent areas. Go a step further and provide plant lists and diagrams.

For someone who is new to gardening, merchandising like this will quickly get them started, and they'll probably spend more money on their first trip. And, because they go home and plant an instantly beautiful garden, they'll come back to try it again.

I spent a lot of money at Terrain because they created a need with their gorgeous displays. I looked at them and said, "My yard doesn't look like that, but it could." Are you missing this opportunity with your customers? **GP**

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