

### Stuck on You

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There's a new social player in town. It's called Pinterest, and it's taken the country by storm. And it has businesses and brands of all kinds on, well, pins and needles, wondering how they might be able to capitalize on it.

Never heard of it? You won't be in the dark for long: As of January 2012, this essentially newborn platform was already captivating users to the tune of an average of 89 minutes a month, compared to 405 minutes a month on Facebook (which has been around a lot longer and has quite a few more features).

In early February, comScore reported that Pinterest had hit 11.7 million (yes, million) unique monthly visitors in the United States alone, less than three years after its initial launch in March 2010. It hit that mark faster than any other standalone site in history. And according to a January Shareaholic report, Pinterest is driving more traffic to company websites and blogs than YouTube, Google+ and LinkedIn combined.

#### But some things speak louder than statistics.

This site, populated with self-curated online pinboards, is a place for users—most of whom are women—to categorize, bookmark, store and share photos of clothes they're wearing, food they're eating, and other lifestyle-centric items that just plain inspire them. Users have pinboards to help prep for their weddings, redecorate their homes and, yes, even plan their spring gardens and dream landscapes.

See that word, "inspire?" This is a site fueled entirely by that feeling you get when you find something unique and amazing—that you need to keep track of it to come back to later, whether you plan to use it or just want to admire it time and again. Something like ... gorgeous flowers.

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#### *Group Boards: Collaborate and Listen!*

*One of the most truly "social" aspects of Pinterest, besides commenting on pins and repinning like crazy, is the opportunity to create collaborative boards.*

*Encourage your garden center customers—especially those who subscribe to your e-newsletter or "Like" your Facebook page — to submit photos of their completed flower beds, favorite backyard statuary, or even gardens they've spotted in their hometown or on vacation.*

*If you have a landscape design/build division, consider creating a shared board with each of your clients. Invite them to find and add plants they love, design inspiration, patio furniture and other accents and pin them to discuss with you later.*

#### Curating, Not Creating



One of the things that sets Pinterest apart from other social networks is that most users aren't actually creating and sharing any of their own content. They're just collecting it.

The homepage is a little terrifying to look at, but once you get past that, the premise is very simple. You first create what are called "boards," as in pinboards, and then populate the board with images called "pins."

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*This pin is from Scott Neave, President of Neave Group Outdoor Solutions, as part of the company's "Our Favorite Plants" board in which they feature their employees' favorite plants along comments.*

When you're surfing the web and stumble upon a photo you absolutely love, you simply "pin it" to one of your boards with the Pinterest "bookmarklet." The site automatically generates a photo credit by linking back to the image source—you can even add a price into the caption that will appear as a banner in the corner of the photo!

Uploading pins is also possible, but if you're uploading images of something that already lives on your garden center's website, consider linking to it there. It'll lead to more traffic for your site, and more opportunities for people to explore once they get there!

## Discovering, Not Pushing

Sure, if you promote your boards and pins well through Facebook and Twitter (you can link your accounts to Pinterest and do so automatically) you'll probably get a fair amount of traffic from your existing customers and start getting some local love on Pinterest, especially if you have a solid online customer base in the first place.

But you may be surprised, once you start pinning, at just who finds your images and starts repinning them. (Pins can spread like wildfire with repins!) There are gardeners everywhere looking for inspiration, and Pinterest has a powerful search function.

A lot of people are using it just to search for images much like they would Flickr or Google Images—so be sure you're descriptive in your captions, and your pins will be found.

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### Jargon-y!

*Never heard of a bookmarklet?*

*It's basically a "smart bookmark" that, instead of simply taking you to a website when you click it, performs an action. In the case of Pinterest, the "Pin it!" bookmarklet actually lets you pin an image directly from whatever site you're visiting—just click the bookmarklet's button and it'll help you through the rest.*

## Inspiring, Not Selling

There's been a lot of talk about monetizing social media and using it to market and sell. Pinterest is more about sharing your excitement about beautiful things with other gardeners and enthusiasts. Use Pinterest to connect with people and simply give of what you do best.

The less you think of it as a way to sell yourself, your services and your products, the more your pure love of what you do will subliminally encourage green thumbs of all kinds—all over the place—to think of you as their partner in planning their plantings and growing their gardens.

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