

Drought Special Report: SPIN CITY

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Become a Media Maven

In times of drought, many media outlets seek experts who can enlighten their audiences on the topic. Retailers can position themselves as industry experts and resources for consumers in their communities.

Catch the attention of local editors or television producers by writing a narrative about ways to combat lawn and garden issues during a drought. Start by writing an introduction about the current situation including the conditions of the drought, and lead into between four and five concise, yet meaningful, tips for addressing the situation. Examples of such tips could cover watering less frequently, but deeply, at the soil level to saturate root systems; mulching around the base of plants and trees to hold in moisture; information about the use and installation of rain barrels to capture the all-important small amount of rainfall when it does rain; and other insights you know. Each tip should include at least 75 to 100 words. You can do this with video, as well—just make sure it's scripted and no longer than two minutes long.

Find contact information for editors and producers at local newspaper, magazine, television and radio outlets. Once you have the contact information, send your article or video to the editor or producer with a thoughtful letter outlining your expertise, background and information about your store's ability to communicate valuable content relative to the drought or watering ban. Offer to meet with the editor or producer to discuss the possibility of serving as an industry analyst or information-provider at his or her convenience. It may sound time consuming, but your customers having the right information could save your bottom line in a drought.

Build Social Media Communities

Conduct a social media campaign to provide helpful information about caring for all types of live goods during the drought. Include how-to posts and comments on your store's Facebook Timeline or through your Twitter feed. You can link the posts to your website or blog, where you can post longer narratives and photos showcasing the ideas and tips along with a list of "must-have, down-with-the-drought" products to beat the heat. Post photos you take of the products, and write and post a couple of sentences for each, explaining why each product is a necessity.

This is a great opportunity to promote as many products as possible for drought-time use, not least of which should feature drought-tolerant plants. Post for your social media fans and friends an ongoing series of "drought-tolerant plants 101" content. Each day, post a plant of the day along with a description of why and how it works well in dry conditions. Use these posts to persuade and convince customers they can still garden and maintain good curb appeal during a drought.

Check your social media channels often to answer any questions or address comments from your followers. Answer posts the same day they are posted, and during the same hour if at all possible. Enlist your staff members to assist with your social media channels. If the drought has caused a slow-down of customer traffic, use the extra time to build social networking communities online. Doing so could reach potential customers on their computer screens, tablets or smartphones, where many are spending hours a day.

Customize Drought-Oriented Inventory, POP & Signage

A given, it would seem, but take a look around your garden center. You know where everything is in your sleep. Though, for many customers, one plant looks (and performs) like any other. A rain barrel might appear as if a garbage bin to the untrained eye and simply be overlooked. So create signage to draw the eye towards drought-tolerant plant stands and benches. Fashion a nearby display with the same "must-have, down-with-the-drought" products you posted on your website, blog or social media channels. Not only will it grab customers' attention as they walk the aisles, but it could serve as the backdrop for one of the media interviews you secure.

Find ways to take on the challenges that come with the drought, and use it as a chance to prove yourself an expert with solutions and ideas that so many in your marketplace will probably seek. And, in the meantime, a little rain dance might not hurt. **GP**

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