



WHAT Makes you *Unique?*

By
John Stanley

The aim of any retailer is to get the customer to talk about them to their friends and to get the existing customer to return to their store. This means that in a lot of garden centres I visit, the conversation being held between managers in the business needs to change, if the business is to grow in a rapidly changing retail environment.

Too much conversation is focused on product. The product is what they buy, the experience is what they remember. If we remember something we will talk about it to our friends and will want to return to the store to get more of that experience. The focus of conversation in management meetings should be more on the experience, and less on the product.



What is Your Signature Experience?

I think there are five key questions that we should be asking in business meetings and then an experience for the customer can be built around the answers to those questions.

1. What is your brand image and what experiences can be introduced that are consistent with that brand image? All team members should know what brand image you are trying to create and then they know what strategies need to be implemented around the brand that can help build the business. Customers get confused when you go out of certain parameters in experience building and product development. One area of concern is often when it comes to pricing. I often work with garden centres who develop a price strategy that is based on being cheap when the customer is looking for value. I have one garden centre client who keeps promoting to the team that the customer does not mind spending the money, but they do not want to spend is their time in the garden doing the garden chores and that the approach to the customer should reflect this when a conversation is being held with them in the garden centre.

2. What distinguishes your garden centre from other garden centres in the same catchment area? I often visit garden centres that look similar to the

one I have just left. Why? There are so many opportunities to look different to the local competition. The last thing you should be is a “me too” garden centre in the customers eyes. At least change the entrance to the garden centre so that it changes in appearance regularly and looks different to the competitors.

3. What categories of products are unique to your business and are you promoting them, developing them and making them a hero category in the eyes of the customer? We have seen many urban garden centres develop the indoor plant range and start to own it in the customers eyes by offering the product in a unique way.

4. Identify all the “Touch Points” on the customers journey with your business and make sure where possible you are promoting the experience rather than the product at these touch points. Many of those touch points will be via social media, before, during and after they have visited your garden centre.

5. Make sure the strategy encompasses all of your team, and they all live by the same promise to the customer. I was recently working with garden centres in Ireland and checked into a small restaurant in a country town at the end of the day. The beer came from a distillery at one end of the road, the vegetables came from the farm over the road and the fish I ate came from the loch outside of the restaurant. The food was exceptional; the service was exceptional until I went to pay.

I got to the counter to pay and the team member said “Was everything okay?” The look on her face when I said “no” was of complete shock. I informed her it was “amazing, not okay” It was a pity that the management team had not encompassed her in what experience they were creating and it was not an “okay” experience that she should be promoting.

You cannot create an “okay” experience and grow your business, go out and create a memorable experience that encompasses everyone and get customers to talk about your business.

