

Marketing Munchies Podcast Transcript

Episode #22

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Announcer: Welcome to the Marketing Munchies Podcast series hosted by Dr. Bridget Behe. Each week Bridget and her guests will share information, insights, research-based findings, and her 30 years of experience to help your horticultural business connect better with current and future customers. Now, let's join our host, Dr. Bridget Behe.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Welcome back to the Marketing Munchies Podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Bridget Behe. Today I have with me a dear friend and colleague, Dr. Patricia Huddleston. Pat is a professor of Retailing in the Department of...

Dr. Patricia Huddleston: Advertising and Public Relations.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Welcome, Pat.

Dr. Patricia Huddleston: Thanks, Bridget.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Pat, you've been studying retailing for quite a few decades. What makes retail such a compelling sector for you to study?

Dr. Patricia Huddleston: Well retailing changes on a daily basis, and if you follow the news at all, every day there are new retailers coming on the scene. Some of the legacy retailers, for example, *Sears*, are struggling. Just following what's happening with the companies, what drives consumer behavior, the fact that there is always something interesting and exciting going on, makes it a really compelling study.

Dr. Bridget Behe: What do you think are some of the reasons that *Sears* hasn't quite figured out how to be successful?

Dr. Patricia Huddleston: Well, I think part of the reason for *Sears*, I mean there are many reasons, but one of the things that *Sears* has not done in the past decade is to invest in its infrastructures. Their stores are run-down. They do not create a compelling shopping experience. *Sears* claim to fame has been their hard lines which tend not to be as profitable as soft lines like apparel. If you think about some of their competitors like *J.C. Penney*, or even lower end like *Target*, they have more of a fashion image, and *Sears* doesn't really have an outstanding image in the minds of consumers. *Sears* just...I think they're on life support right now.

Dr. Bridget Behe: What do you think would be a lesson that garden retailers might learn from looking at *Sears*'s inability to be successful or just this long term struggle? What do you think a small independent retailer could learn from some of the struggles they've probably seen *Sears* go through?

Dr. Patricia Huddleston: I think that retailers need to create a compelling shopping experience for consumers. That might be new and fresh merchandise, and of course, garden retailers.

They're a perishable product, so they're going to change continuously. Offering knowledgeable sales people at the point-of-purchase, making it easy to move around, making the purchase journey easy. Make check-out easy. Make getting information easy. Some of the products that you'll buy at a garden center, you'll need help getting out to the car. Making sure that each of the touch points that a consumer encounters on that shopping journey is as seamless and as easy as possible.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Well that's great. Changing gears just a little bit here. What do you think are some key distinctions that retailers need to do or have in their physical space as compared to the online shopping space? We see some retailers venturing into online shopping (not as much garden retailers), but some retailers, and what do you think are some of the key considerations for, especially garden retailers in that physical space?

Dr. Patricia Huddleston: In the physical space, I think no matter what kind of retailer you are, you need to make it easy for consumers to move in the space. You need to provide way-finding, and usually that's going to be in the form of signage. Some retailers are moving to electronic signage, but you can do it with paper signage but make it easy for consumers to find things. Most people are time-impooverished, and they want their shopping journey to be enjoyable and as efficient as possible. Of course, lighting is important, because lighting affects how colors look. I think that would be particularly important in a garden center where if you're dealing with annuals, for example, color is going to be a big decision factor. You also, at least personally, (there have been studies on this) cleanliness is important. Again, in a garden center, that could be an issue, because you're dealing with things that grow in soil (things can get kind of messy). You want to keep things clean, neat, and as compelling as possible.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Do you see much way-finding that is not pretty obvious like signs that would have this departments here, that department there? Do you see many retailers using more subliminal ways like attractive displays at a distance or other non-written cues? Do you see that happening much?

Dr. Patricia Huddleston: I wouldn't say "subliminal," but pending on the type of retailer, for example, if we're talking about department stores or stores that sell wearing-apparel, they'll use mannequins. You might not see a sign that says "Junior/Mrs. Dresses," but you can tell by the outfit that is on the mannequin what that particular department is selling. That will help you decide whether or not you want to go in, but most retailers are going to make it really clear through signage to get people to move around.

Dr. Bridget Behe: That's good. I wish we could get more people to read the signs.

Well, thanks, Pat. It was great having you on the Marketing Munchies podcast, and I hope to have you back as a guest again soon.

Dr. Patricia Huddleston: Thanks, Bridget. It was fun.

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Announcer: Thank you for joining us on this week's Marketing Munchies Podcast. For more information or to download the transcript of this podcast, please visit, connect-2-consumer.org. That's C-O-N-N-E-C-T, dash, the number two, dash, C-O-N-S-U-M-E-R, dot, C-O-M.