



Top 5 Merchandising Tips

Tricks of the trade to help you sell more water gardening product

By Rick Weidman, Key Accounts Manager, Aquascape, Inc.

Over the years, during visits to garden centers and dedicated water gardening stores, I have run into varying degrees of successes and failures that retailers have experienced selling ponds, waterfalls and other water features. Each time I left those stores I made mental and written notes on what each store did right and what they may have done wrong. With that information, I've compiled a list of the top 5 things retailers should do to be successful selling the wonderful lifestyle of having water in the garden. Much of this may not be new to you, and many of you may be doing some, if not most all of these points, but until you are doing all 5 items you will not reach the full potential of this profitable category.

Sell the “Lifestyle” - There are two key words here; “Sell” and “Lifestyle.” I have seen a decline in new pond sales in many operations, and this is *not* due entirely to a decline in DIY interest, but in the way retailers SELL the lifestyle. Certainly, display features for items such as ponds, Pondless® Waterfalls, and decorative products such as bubbling ceramic bowls on an Aqua-Basin™ will generate interest, but if they're not built, maintained, and display proper signage, they could be doing more harm than good. These water feature displays should be immaculate and clearly reflect the ease and life improvement they represent. Treat these displays like a car you're trying to sell. You would normally clean the car up and put a sign in the window and park it where the most amount of people can see it, stop and take a closer look. How many people would stop to look at a muddy car that has no “for sale” sign in the window, or a sign with no phone number or information about the car?

Communicate with your customer - even when you're not there. Use signs strategically to your advantage. More isn't necessarily better, and neither is more words. An effective sign could have nothing more than a picture of a family enjoying an Aquascape pond...remember, a picture is worth a thousand words. This is especially pertinent when you consider that the average customer won't spend more than 1-5 seconds to read a sign. Imagine a sign in front of your AquaSurge™ pumps that simply states “3-year warranty” or “75% more energy efficient.” Simple, yet effective.

Offer a complete product line to help build and easily maintain that “Lifestyle.” - Don't presume to know what your customer wants or needs. Offer options because that's what your customer wants. Home Depot doesn't carry just one hammer, though they'll try to communicate to you (through signs and strategic product placement) which one is better and best.

Make it easy for your customer to shop for the products they need - The most important element in achieving ease of shopping is displaying your products by the function they perform. For example, display UltraKlear™ UVs and EcoFloc™ together, along with AquaMats®, AquaClearer™ bacteria, EcoBarley™ and any other item designed to improve and maintain water clarity. Do the same for water quality, pumps and accessories, plant care, fish care, lights and decorative, and even seasonal pond care. To further support this strategy, provide additional literature, such as the Y.E.S. (Your Extra Salesperson) brochures at point of purchase. And, don't forget to take key products out of the boxes...let your customers touch and examine the product. This will raise your customer's level of comfort in the decisions they are making.

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Remember that 80% of all consumer purchasing decisions are made once they're in your store - The key here is to be prepared to address this dynamic by being creative in how you display and sell products. For example, instead of selling just plants and fish, create your own packages of fish and plants that address different pond sizes and customer needs. Create literature that defines these packages and have it available at point of purchase. Or, you could create a package of suggested add-on items for a MicroPond kit, such as lights, black waterfall foam, or small decorative items. Another way to capture additional sales is to take key items from the shelves and display extraordinarily. This could mean using a free-standing POP display, or an end cap, or platform near the pond department. By doing this, you will increase the sales on that item anywhere from 25% to 450% and beyond. You can choose products that already sell well, or something that you feel could sell better if you could just get the message across better through visual impact and signage.

If you follow these 5 points you can be assured that you're on the right track...the track to sales success.

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