

Renovate, Rebuild Or Start Over?

Sometimes it's difficult to step back and see the bigger picture when it comes to your aging structures. Here are some guidelines for making big decisions this summer and fall.

by Sid Raisch and Robert Hayter

Even though it may seem counter-intuitive to invest in capital improvements during the present economic downturn, please consider the impact of a change in the appearance and function of your store and site.

When we work with clients, the process entails an on-site evaluation of the present facility and the local marketplace. There is usually a history lesson of when and why each part of the facility was constructed, and that often leads to a joke about Johnny Cash's Cadillac, for those of you who may remember the popular song.

*I'd get it one piece at a time
And it wouldn't cost me a dime*

In 1976, the hit song "One Piece at a Time" was released. The song writer portrayed a Detroit auto worker with the hope of fulfilling his dream of someday owning a long black Cadillac. The man, who worked in the Cadillac assembly plant devised a plan to carry one part each day from the assembly line out of the factory in his lunch box or his buddy's motor home until his goal was achieved.

*You'll know it's me when I come through
your town*

*I'm gonna ride around in style
I'm gonna drive everybody wild*



Robert Hayter



Sid Raisch

'Cause I'll have the only one there is around.

Many garden centers were constructed like Johnny Cash's Cadillac was;

It's a '49, '50, '51, '52, '53, '54, '55, '56, '57, '58, '59' automobile. It's a '60, '61, '62, '63, '64, '65, '66, '67, '68, '69, '70 automobile.

For heavens sake don't do what you or your predecessors have done in the past and continue building without having a well-conceived site and facility plan in place. Chances are you won't be able to get local approvals to build or modify what you have without one anyway. That proverbial "midnight building permit" can get you in a lot of trouble with people you don't want to deal with on those terms today.

The biggest room in the world is the room for improvement. There is also a lot of room for error in quality of design and it is very difficult and expensive to repair



Who Are The New Owners?

If your regular customers haven't asked this question in the past several years, you may have been left behind as the marketplace has become more competitive. Well-designed, customer-perceptible improvements that make your store stand out also create a significant emotional stimulus to the product you sell and build word-of-mouth marketing.



When it came time to promote the song “One Piece at a Time,” the owner of **Abernathy Auto Parts and Hilltop Auto Salvage in Nashville, Tenn.,** was asked to **actually build a Cadillac from parts of different model years. The completed 1949-73 Cadillac Coupe Sedan Deville was presented to Johnny Cash.**

past mistakes. If you’re thinking at all of a renovation or new garden center in your future, begin working on your plans now and by the time you have them finished you may be ready to begin the project. If you wait until you’re ready to build you will be tempted to make design shortcuts in your rush to get the project finished, and will be more susceptible to making fatal errors.

The rest of this article will review several of the most important design considerations to help you develop an inspiring, and well-functioning garden center.

Can We Rejuvenate The Core?

Most garden centers derive more than 70 percent of their gross sales, margin dollars and profits from the sale of plants. Those same facilities often display these leafy creatures in nearly un-navigable and uncovered condition. In the event covered shopping is provided, it is often uninhabitable due to unbearable heat. While a local design professional is recommended to navigate the political environment, the unique idiosyncrasies of a garden center require specialized planning not known by most local designers, and equally important, an operational plan that is profitable with the burden of new payments.

Is Bigger Better?

It would be a shame to make a major capital investment only to see over-investment in space for an unprofitable category to cause the entire company to struggle, or to fail. This is an important investment and your planning should include a plan for the profitability of each merchandise category. This should begin with a complete review of the past and

current profitability of each category. If the numbers show a problem, there likely will be a problem. Fix it on paper before you build it.

Putting more merchandise out to sell may have been an effective growth strategy in the past, but the competitive retail environment for non-plant categories has also increased dramatically and those “Silver Bullets” of grills, gifts and glitz have become terribly tarnished.

Managing Legacy Costs

Before finalizing your decision to improve or move, consider the function and affordability of operation. Energy usage and labor are two huge expenses you know you will have in the future but have no idea how much they will cost. Any facility constructed today must be a conservative consumer of expenses – whether by the hour, cubic foot, or kilowatt. The initial design must plug all possible cost of ownership leaks before they begin.

Innovate or Die

The times are challenging and you are up to the challenge if you’ve found yourself actually thinking or dreaming of a new or renovated facility. No one else is going to make the phone calls and get the process started on actually thinking of what you could do. This is a case where good things happen to those who make them happen for themselves. Once you have a plan you believe in you will be ready to pull the trigger and move forward. Get it going now. TGC

Sid Raisch is president of Horticultural Advantage, a consulting firm to independent garden centers. Robert Hayer is owner of The Hayer Group in Pinehurst, N.C. Both are service providers for The Garden Center Group. Contact Sid at sid@horticulturaladvantage.com; contact Robert at rhayer@thehayerfirm.com.



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