



## Winning Strategies: Growing and Selling in the Same Spot

by Judy Sharpton

PART 1 OF OUR SIX-PART SERIES ON STORE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES GOES INSIDE OLIVER B. PAINE GREENHOUSES

### Case Study: Oliver B. Paine Greenhouses

Compensating for lost space in the retail area is often as simple as installing another hoop house, adding benches to existing growing houses or buying in product from an outside source. At Oliver B. Paine Greenhouses in Fulton, New York, all three of these compensating strategies made for a successful transition for a greenhouse used for both growing and selling.

Oliver and Cindy Paine, like many family businesses in our industry, have been in their location for generations. They've weathered a small-market economy they know holds little promise of major development. But, for all those generations, the Paine family has provided jobs and products for their community, and they plan on staying in Fulton and staying in the business of growing.

When I visited their store on a cold day in late fall of 2008, we poured over the site plan and walked the mostly empty greenhouses identifying barriers. Many were common to growing operations trying to double as selling areas. Long, skinny greenhouses that could be accessed only at one end; houses constructed on flat pads but with a problematic grade change between the first and last house; and a too-small cash wrap area. Oliver focused our attention on the newest and largest greenhouse

### Unfolding the Grower's Arms

Folded arms communicate skepticism. The greatest skepticism happens when a grower confronts the conflict between growing and retailing in the same space. Here are five steps to unfolding the arms:

- Create a scale drawing of the entire growing/retailing space.
- Agree that increasing sales is a desirable outcome.
- Calculate the exact square footage of space to be alleviated and determine if equal growing space can be expanded in another location.
- Remove benches to widen aisles to a minimum of 6 ft., 8 ft. for carts.
- Calculate the sales per sq. ft. of the house in growing mode; compare that to same store sales in the house in retail mode (before and after).

### Winning Strategies: The Series

Leading up to Spring 2009, Proven Winners partnered with Growing Places Marketing to initiate a store development program designed for independent grower/retailers to maximize customer merchandise contact. The goal was to increase sales of Proven Winners products as well as other products throughout the store. In a one-day on-site meeting, Judy Sharpton and the owners and staff of each store accomplished two objectives: they identified the location for a Proven Winners Store-Within-A-Store and environmental issues that served as barriers to sales.

In this series of six articles, Judy describes several of the environmental issues identified in this program that are common to many retailer/grower operations, the steps these stores took to alleviate those barriers and the results of those decisions.

in the group. It wasn't working. Shoppers wouldn't go to the rear of the house, making it dead retail space.

I told him why: the narrow access aisles and long benches caused customers to avoid the rear of the house. No customer wants to walk a 96-ft. aisle and turn around in a tight space and walk back, almost certain to encounter congestion with other shoppers in both directions. Paco Underhill told us years ago in his book *Why We Buy* just how adverse female customers are to the "butt brush." This house, built and benched for production, was a case study in butt brushes.

### The Strategy

In the fifteen years I've been working inside the walls of independent retail garden center stores, the one store development strategy that has been blatantly obvious is that all stores who successfully develop a retail operation *first* separate retail from production. These two operations are in such conflict with each other that accomplishing both in the same environment sets up an impossible mission. Successful plant production requires an environment completely different from a successful retail environment with a whole series of competing demands:



Traditional growing benches with narrow aisles discourage customers from venturing too far into the shopping area lest they be caught at the rear.



Removing benches to create an access aisle allows customers to shop the entire area, including the back corners. That's where the 7% sales increase is located.

■ A production environment demands maximum production space with minimum human space. This means the narrowest aisles possible, and even the use of rolling benches to maximize growing space.

■ A retail environment requires at least equal space for the plants and for the humans, including the shopper and the staff. The 50/50 rule widens aisles to accommodate two carts to pass and provide customers adequate space to view merchandise and access the checkout counter.

■ The primary function of staff in a production environment is to nurture the plant. The primary function of the retail staff is to get the plant out of the store and into the customer's trunk. Done successfully, the plant requires little nurturing at retail. It is rare that a single individual possesses both growing and retailing skills. The person who can successfully maintain plants may not see selling as a competitive sport, the primary attribute of a sales person.

■ Maximizing production space creates layers of hanging baskets in the overhead space, even if this means the customer can't reach the product or see down the aisles of the store. A retail environment recognizes that customer/merchandise contact is the primary function of the store and places hanging baskets within easy reach, even if that means fewer baskets in the overhead areas.

With all these conflicts between retail and growing, many stores continue to struggle with growing and selling in the same environment. It is possible to sell plants in the same greenhouse where they are grown, but the space must be configured as retail *from the beginning*. That means, you guessed it, you lose bench space.

Now that we've admitted the remedy, how do you accomplish this? The first step happens between the ears of the grower/retailer. (See *Unfolding the Grower's Arms*.) The grower portion of this dual personality must allow selling the plant to be as important as growing the plant. Beyond that major psychological hurdle, the environmental logistics can be addressed.

### The Solution

What to do? I asked Oliver if we could take out benches. Oliver took a deep breath and replied, "I can take out two." We had just cleared the "between the ears" hurdle. Oliver had additional adjacent growing space and easy accessibility for restocking the house. With two benches out, he could still grow in the space, although just a little less. But more importantly, he took that leap to turn this space into a retail-shopping environment. By combining a comfortable shopping space for their customers along with plenty of Proven Winners plants, point-of-purchase and other merchandising materials, Oliver and Cindy had a successful 2009 season. **GP**

To discuss the development strategies for your store, contact Judy at Growing Places Marketing, [judy@growingplaces.com](mailto:judy@growingplaces.com), or (770) 815-1052. For more information about Proven Winners' Store-Within-A-Store program call (877) 895-8138 or visit [www.provenwinners.com](http://www.provenwinners.com).

Stay tuned for Part 2, which will address "Ob-structures: Roads and Other Immovable Objects."