

Fedden Customer Insight: Fairweather's Garden Centre

Increasing customer flow, reducing bottlenecks and improving sales



"We are really pleased with the impacts that the changes have had, with average customer spend increasing. We still have lots of improvement ideas still to implement and this is very much a continuous process." Shaun Bowen, Fairweather's Garden Centre.

Summary: Empowering people to drive business improvement

Small independent garden centres face a growing challenge not just to differentiate themselves from larger retailers, but to optimise the value that is inherent in their business. They do not have the buying power to differentiate on price and so creating a unique customer experience – while at the same time leveraging process innovation - is crucial to increased sales and business sustainability.

Fedden USP has been working with one such garden centre in Beaulieu in the New Forest to implement a LEAN project, as a result of which Fairweather's Garden Centre is strongly positioned to compete effectively in the future:

Fairweather's LEAN Outcomes:

- ***Increase in average customer spend***
- ***Improved customer flow throughout the garden centre***
- ***Enhanced customer experience***

Background: A Progressive Garden Centre with Traditional Values

Describing itself as Beaulieu's 'Hidden Gem', Fairweather's Garden Centre prides itself on the wide range of plants that it sells, matched by expert advice and a five year guarantee on all hardy plants. The centre has a particular expertise in lavender, heuchera and agapanthus which, along with many of the other plants, have been grown in Beaulieu. It describes itself as a unique Plant and Garden Centre in the heart of Beaulieu, with its historic buildings offering a fascinating and relaxed atmosphere for garden shopping, while its knowledgeable team members provide inspiration and advice.

Fairweather's has also created Patrick's Patch – an inspiring, educational and productive garden that

grows a wide range of vegetables, fruit, herbs and cut flowers used in Steff's Kitchen, the centre's homely cafe.

Project: Objectives and Planning

Fedden USP was called into the centre by David Aylieff-Sansom, Centre Manager, who felt there was scope to enhance the customer experience, increase sales and deliver greater profitability.

Fairweather's opted for a 3-day LEAN Retail improvement workshop involving a wide a range of staff to ensure project buy-in to the overall objectives, which included driving up sales.

The first stage focused on clearly defining the target customer that would generate the increase in sales sought by the garden centre. This meant confirming exactly what experience these customers were looking for - in LEAN terms this meant defining the 'value' that the customer wants to receive, particularly the 'marginal' gardeners in this instance who need help and guidance through the buying process.

Together with garden centre staff and managers, Fedden USP walked and process mapped the Customer Journey from the moment they enter the garden centre through to the point they exit with their purchases. During this walk, the 'Touch-Points' where the customer interfaced with the process were recorded to assess the value provided – for example did the signage and point of sale information offer adequate guidance the marginal gardener?

Armed with the process map of the Customer Journey - and the location of 'hotspots' around the centre - the team then considered how best to re-design the process to provide the optimum retail experience, using LEAN techniques such as Rich Pictures.

Out of this came an Action Plan, which included a Cost/Benefit analysis to ensure payback. Staff members defined the plan timescales and assigned responsibilities with the support of management.

Project: Implementation and Results

The LEAN team began the implementation phase by moving the Garden Centre entrance to a position that would optimise the flow of traffic into the indoor spaces. Till areas and counters were re-designed in line with staff recommendations to improve the customer service speed and reduce bottlenecks during busy periods.



Centre entrance: Before...



After...



To exit and till points: Before...



After



Improved till points



Customer 'hot-spots'



Improved plant presentation

At the same time, the plant area was re-configured to encourage customer flow to the perimeters of the centre so that the plants could be seen in the optimum layout.

The improved customer flow and more efficient business practices also led to sales opportunities not previously anticipated - for example, the area in front of the main entrance doors is now used to sell high turnover goods with very little effort.

As a result of the workshop and the subsequent changes, the LEAN project succeeded in driving up average customer spend by enhancing the overall customer experience.

Feedback: *"The overall project has radically changed the flow of the business, making it easier to present product and handle customers. Time has been saved in many areas and the opportunity to enhance sales has been greatly improved. Our primary objective was to increase customer spend – from our established customers as well as from 'tourist' trade - but it was key that we achieved this while keeping a warm and friendly feeling to the shopping experience.*

"The investment in both time and capital works has been paid back in year one with ease." David Aylieff-Sansom, Manager, Fairweather's Garden Centre.

Fedden USP LEAN Insights:

Value: This is defined by the customer (not by the retailer!) as what they have received or experienced as part of the shopping process that they are willing to pay for. For example a customer may be willing to pay a price premium if they also receive expert advice from a member of staff.

Process Mapping: This involves breaking the process down into the component steps so as to understand which ones deliver value to the customer and which ones are process waste that should be reduced or eliminated. Reducing down the amount of process waste allows staff members to spend more time with customers rather than dealing with problems in the back-office.

Rich Pictures: An innovative technique used to aid process re-design in order to minimise the amount of process waste and maximise the amount of value the customer receives from the process. Starting with a blank piece of paper, we coach staff to draw out, using cartoon symbols, the perfect process. This is normally done with a small team from different parts of the business to ensure that we have buy-in from all functions to the proposed changes

For more information about LEAN Retail and the HTA funding available to help support implementation please contact Neil Fedden on 07899 971183 or e-mail neil@fedden-usp.co.uk