



Novelty Manufacturing combines color, quality and collaboration to help its garden center customers succeed.

A Novel Idea

by Richard Jones, Group Editor
rljones@meistermedia.com

It's often surprising to see how much companies can evolve over time, shifting from one product line to another, or sometimes even changing from one industry to something completely different. Novelty Manufacturing did both.

Its business today as a supplier of durable, lightweight pots and planters is a far cry from the metal cookie cutters and toy sheriff's badges that were its stock in trade when the company began more than 85 years ago.

That may sound like an odd transition, but it makes sense when you consider the simple business strategy behind it: identify an opportunity, bring your customers the best product you can, and work with them to help them succeed. Novelty Manufacturing moved from the novelties that gave the Lancaster, Pa., company its name to metal flower boxes in the 1950s and eventually to plastic planters.

Led today by owners Mark Bolt, Joseph DiMeo and Tim Winger, Novelty Manufacturing produces and sells a varied selection of flower boxes, planters and other specialty containers. All of their products are selected with an eye toward helping their garden center customers succeed.

Listen To Your Customers

"We are a small company, but we are innovative and we try to be on trend," says Sales and Marketing Manager Beth Bowers. Closely following the color trends is a regular task for Bowers, as is spending time asking customers at trade shows or in their garden centers what styles or features are important to them. She points to the success of Novelty's imported ArtStone line of colorful resin planters as an example.

"It's been very popular, especially with the shapes and the colors. But, we also try to design flower boxes and planters that are horticulturally correct." Almost all of the company's containers have features that allow water retention, proper drainage and self watering, for example.

Pots And Plants Together

But no matter how eye-catching a planter is when stacked in a display, Bowers says it's just as important – if not more so – to provide pots that look good with plants in them. And when selecting which planters to add to the company's product line, that criteria often means leaving a certain color or design out of the mix entirely.

"It's tough, because we get these colors in and they're beautiful when you see the pot by itself, but when you get a plant into it, it totally distracts from it. It doesn't match anything," Bowers says. "For example, brown is a very popular

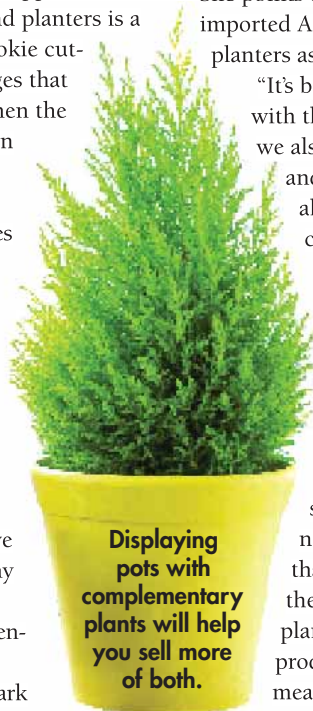
color right now, but brown on one of our ArtStone pots just doesn't work. The pot has a whitewash finish to it and brown just makes it dull and muddy."

She says in her experience, the best way to find that great mix of pot colors and plants is to go straight to her garden center customers. "When I'm putting together our catalog or creating displays, I try to find plants that are a little different, something that will really complement the pot, so when I get a new planter in, I take it to a local garden center and I say, 'Tell me what you can do with this.'"

The result is often display ideas that not only help Novelty Manufacturing sell its planters to a garden center, but also merchandising ideas that help that garden center sell the planters – and the plants – to the consumer.

"I encourage them to choose plants that look the best, and to not be afraid to try something a little different. Something might not be your first choice, but it may end up being the best looking because it complements the pot the most.

"I know my product," Bowers says, "and I rely on the professionals to help me make my planters look good." TGC



Displaying pots with complementary plants will help you sell more of both.


Novelty
For More Information
Novelty Manufacturing
800-4-GARDEN
www.noveltymfg.com