

CUSTOMERS UNDER COVER

When Petitti Garden Centers opened their newest store on the West side of Cleveland, they worked with Cravo to cover the entire outdoor shopping area

Green Profit visited the brand new Petitti Garden Center in Avon, Ohio on a drizzly Saturday morning this spring and witnessed a rare rainy-day garden center phenomenon—customers outside filling their carts with plants. The reason for this was quickly evident. They were shopping under cover, out of the elements.

We caught up with Cravo's CEO Richard Vollebregt and Petitti's own A.J. Petitti to find out some of the details about the new project and to find out how consumers are reacting so far this spring.

"So far everyone (and everything) loves it," A.J. says. "The plants and the customers!" Cravo's signature retractable-roof structures help create an ideal environment for plants, as well as customers, while costing significantly less money than traditional greenhouse space or "stick and brick" buildings. The plants are also protected from heavy rain, reducing dump and increasing perceived value.

Richard Vollebregt is quick to point out the fact that protecting merchandise and keeping plants looking fresh encourages sell through, positively affecting the entire supply chain. "Garden centers are able to bring in fresh product continually, because it's turning," he says. "This helps the retailer and his or her suppliers. There are benefits for every level."

Costs Down, Sales Up

Retailers using retractable-roof structures are also moving hard-goods under them during spring, utilizing the extra square footage to increase sales opportunities. "In prime selling season, you need as much square footage as you can get," Richard says. "A traditional building can cost four times as much as a retractable-roof structure." And more importantly, at the end of



Between the two Cravo retractable-roof structures, Petitti's planned a curved-roof "Garden Street" to merchandise highlighted items and improve traffic flow.

the season, a building is still there costing you money in terms of heating, property taxes and insurance, he says.

A.J. explains that saving money on structures was a definite factor when choosing the Cravos but protecting the plants and creating an optimal shopping environment was even more important. "When it's rainy, we can pull the roof to keep them dry. When it's sunny, we can open it up and it's like you're outside," he says.

And the covered shopping has already affected the new store's bottom line. "I would say our sales are double, at least, on rainy days."

Richard agrees, estimating that a store's annual sales could rise as much as 20 or 30% with covered shopping and that sales will double or even triple on rainy days. "The bottom line is that when you start thinking about shopping behavior, bedding plants really are an impulse," he says. "Customers set aside time to plant, but they will not shop in the rain." A covered shopping environment allows them the freedom to shop in inclement weather and then plant when the rain stops.

Four Seasons

A retractable-roof structure offers benefits for retailers throughout the year, Richard says. In spring, they not only open up when weather is good, creating an outdoor environment, they



Check it out!

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also eliminate the dark look that's common under stationary roofs. In the heat of summer, the roof can be partially closed (along with shade cloth options) to create a cool environment that not only makes shoppers happy but reduces water demands by keeping plants cooler, as well.

In stormy conditions during the fall and winter, a retractable-roof area can be used to retail Christmas trees and or pumpkins, as well as for storage. Richard explains the roofs can be designed to support extensive snow loads.

Is It For You?

It seems like every year the success of garden centers across the country (and the world) depends on Mother Nature. Rainy spring weekends reduce sales to next to nothing and retailers are forced to play catch-up to make their numbers. Maybe it's the nature of our business but new technology and uses for existing engineering can help lessen the impact weather has on your livelihood. If you are looking for ways to "weatherproof" your business, retractable-roofs covering all or part of your outdoor sales areas may be the answer.

It's certainly working for some progressive retailers in North America, including the new Petitti Home & Garden store in Avon, Ohio. Are they pleased with the decision to cover their sales yard? "I'd do it again in a heartbeat," A.J. says. 🍀