



Curbside & Online Sales

From Shutdown Restrictions to Future Opportunity

by Theresa Dreaney, Owner of Bremerton City Nursery



As 2020 approached we were looking forward to celebrating the 25th anniversary of owning our nursery. Little did we know there were other plans in the works! Early in February as we saw the swell coming our way John said to me, "Would you rather have our family and friends around us, or money in the bank at the end of this?" That question helped us put our options in perspective and guided the choices we would make.

When the stay-at-home order was issued on March 23rd, we chose to close the nursery and build an online store nearly overnight. Even though we were deemed "essential," it was too stressful trying to keep people safe and "socially distanced" within our limited footprint. We have four sons who took on the challenge with us. Our third son Matthew, along with his partner, led the charge by building the virtual storefront and teaching his mother how to become a database administrator/application developer. (Check out Ronny Chieng on YouTube, "The Most Excruciating Form of Torture," if you think this was an easy task!) We were using Vend as our POS and WooCommerce as our online platform. The groundwork was laid, and our website and POS were in place. Now we needed to build a

store and put the parts together.

It took us two weeks to get the site working and loaded with enough products to open. We focused on vegetables, annuals, hanging baskets and organic soils. We loaded over 1000 SKUs, most with photos and brief descriptions. We launched on April 11th and offered delivery to our four local zip codes, with a \$50.00 minimum order, a \$10.00 delivery fee and an "optional" \$10.00 processing fee to help offset the newly acquired expenses of running the site. When we added curbside pickup two weeks later, we realized that most people paid the "optional" processing fee and allowed us to say we had "free" curbside pickup. We continued to operate virtually only for a total of six weeks before reopening to the public on Memorial Day weekend. The hours of work needed to accomplish this is hard to calculate and easy to underestimate. We did not hire anyone; in addition to his own full-time career in Bellevue, Matthew worked tirelessly to help us launch and maintain our site as we learned what we needed to do.

The mechanics of putting all of this in motion is where the rest of our sons, friends and family came into play. We had laid off all our employees in March and were now going to implement this new way of operating our business with "volunteers." We continued to receive our inventory, keeping the plants on the grower racks and organizing by categories, which helped with the pulling of orders. Vend tracked the inventory, and the receipts showed us how many of each item we still had in stock. When the stock dropped below our established limit it was automatically unpublished from the website. We had very few fulfillment issues while we were operating the online store. John and the boys handled the deliveries and organized the curbside pickups. I continued to add items and update inventory on the website.

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Looking back, it is hard to imagine that we were able to pull this off. We sold vegetables, herbs, groundcovers, annuals, perennials, shrubs, soils, and even had our Mother’s Day basket sale online! Was it close to what we would have done had we been open? No, but it paid the bills and filled us with hope for the future. We received a PPP loan in May and brought our employees back for the reopening on Memorial Day weekend. When people realized they could shop in person, the web orders began to decline, although some people still wanted to do curbside pickup and continued to place their orders through the website. The transition from online to in-person saw the most fulfillment issues. It was difficult entering the same plant from multiple growers, and we often let Vend automatically generate a SKU.

We continue to have our online store open for delivery and curbside. We see the opportunities for online as our biggest source of revenue growth in the future. We plan to add a “ship” category and hire someone to help manage and promote the site.

As I write this at the end of November, we are clawing our way back up to 2019 numbers, operating with reduced hours and a limited staff. We are surrounded by family and friends and we have money in the bank! I attribute this mostly to the support of our community. “Shop small” and “shop local” are no longer catch phrases, and we are grateful.



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