



Curbside & Online Sales A Foundation Grows & Delivers Opportunity

Q&A with

**Elliot Gregory, Business Technology Manager
& Anna Paolozzi, CPH, Green Goods Buyer
Watson's Greenhouse & Nursery**

Q: What platform are you using for your online storefront? What do you like best about it? What challenges do you have with it?

EG: Shopify. I like the user interface and customization, the app is very useful, sometimes better than the desktop version. I use the app constantly on my phone when I'm out checking inventory or adding items. When we were desperate to get annuals online in the spring, we had multiple people using their phones to add items and it was very efficient.

Plenty of challenges with shopify from themes not working correctly to tax not calculating correctly. We had to create a tax collection and manually add every product so that when they were purchased the tax was overridden with WA tax rate.

Q: Does the platform integrate with your inventory? If not, what is your strategy for adding and updating plants and products?

EG: Shopify does not integrate so we had to manually check inventory for the last 7 months. This last month we finally got an integrated system called Accumula so now every product that has a specific SKU has the inventory being updated in real time. We still have inventory issues with items that are generic SKU like Geranium 4". Those items do not update inventory in real time and it is a big pain to track those manually :(

Q: Thinking back to Spring 2020, walk us through some of your steps taken - from decision to launch to maintenance - of your online storefront.

EG: Well, I had already begun starting the online store on shopify a year or so before covid so I had the foundation of everything we needed to sell items online. We knew we needed to get as much spring products online as possible so we just started adding every single annual and vegetable to begin with. Once we started

selling tons of annuals online, we had to manually check inventory almost every day, which was very time consuming, but totally worth it. Next season we will have to figure out a better method to tracking inventory (which would be to have specific SKUs for everything) but we are not sure we will be able to do that for everything.

Q: How much staff did it take to serve your online storefront? How many people were employed to launch? How many people were employed to maintain and serve orders? Was this their sole focus? Were their several individuals involved in one order, or did a sole employee handle an order?

AP: Staff required ranged from 2 to 6 people on any given day, but all new cashiers were trained to pull orders right off the bat.

Q: Reflecting back, what would you have done differently? Were there any unexpected positive outcomes?

EG: I would have created a guide book on how to add items to shopify (mobile and desktop guide) so that I could delegate those tasks to others without having to teach them directly. We have sent the guide out to multiple people now and it works great. Pretty much the biggest thing I would do differently would be to create a system on how everything needs to be done from adding products, checking inventory, to fulfillment. Write it all down in a guide and delegate as much as I can free up my time for growing the online store rather than operating it. Positive outcomes were that the online store created a lot of work for people, so anyone who was working with online orders learned a ton about plants and where everything was in the store.

AP: Designated spots for curbside pick up, someone to man the curbside area and a phone so they could work on other things between customers.

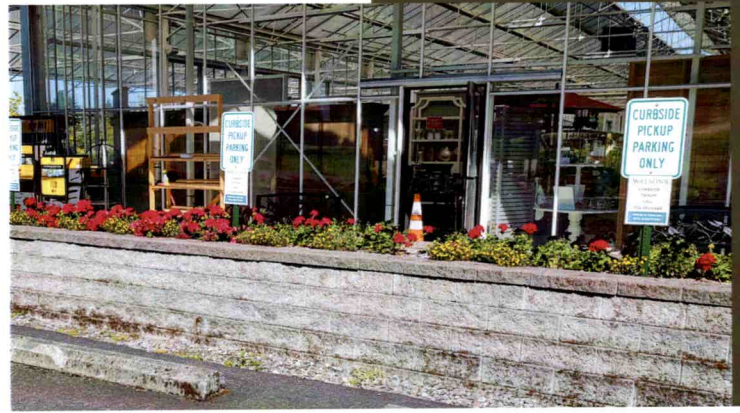
**We want to use
the online store
as a marketing tool
as much as an avenue for sales.**

Q: With regards to the impact to your bottom line, did the sales outweigh the inputs needed to maintain, manage and service orders via your online storefront?

EG: Sales by far outweighed the inputs needed to maintain. We did not have to hire anybody specifically for online orders. It just created a lot more work for people who already had their daily work. One huge bonus is that our store was technically open 24 hours a day. We would see sales come through at literally 3AM.

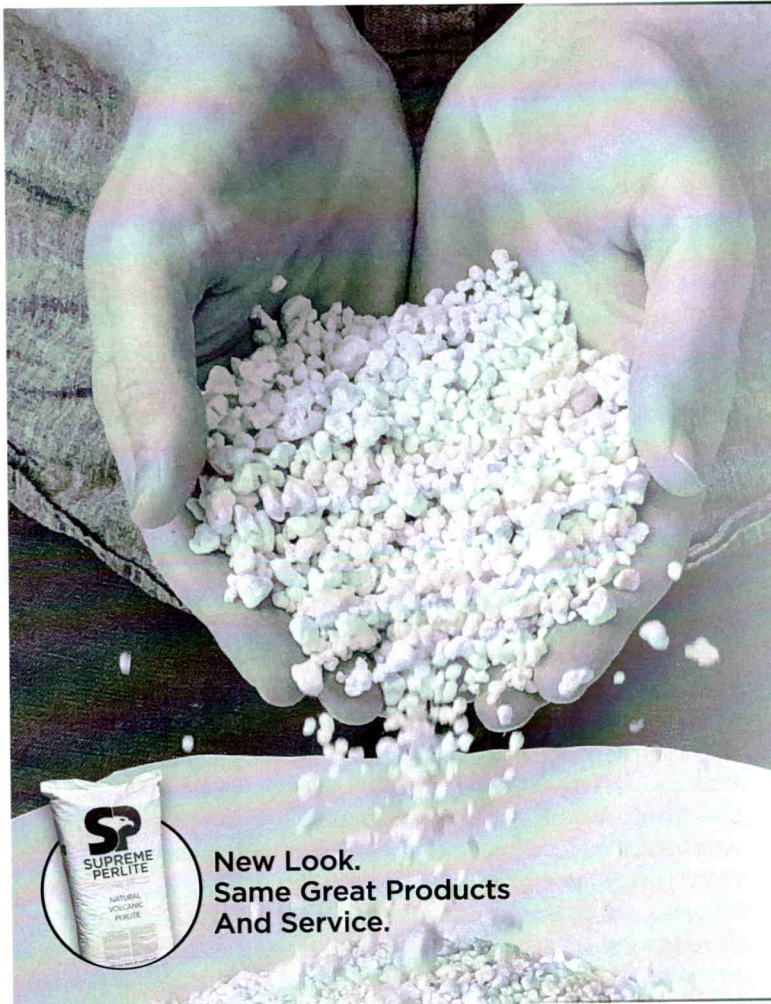
Q: Looking forward, will you continue to offer and integrate your online storefront in your overall business & marketing plan?

EG: Yes, everything we do is now integrated into our online store. From social media and email marketing to our google ads. We are trying to create the online experience to resemble the in store experience. Right now we are adding as much holiday decor as possible and curating our online catalog and landing pages to be Experience Holiday at Watsons. Almost every social media post or email that goes out will link directly to products we are selling online. We want to use the online store as a marketing tool as much as an avenue for sales.



Q: Now that online shopping has fully penetrated the nursery industry, how do you see this shaping our industry for the future?

EG: For retail stores I see this as a huge marketing tool for customers to browse through pages and pages of products online then they come in the store having a good idea of what they want. We will always want the option for online shopping to be available, but we would much rather them see the products online then come into the store to buy it. I can imagine the future online stores to be closely integrated with the retail storefront, so that customers can see the product online and have that link to a map of the store of where those products are located. In a future where social distancing is the norm, I envision more people using their phones while shopping in store to find products without the need for face to face interaction.



Is Your Perlite Supreme?

Supreme Perlite is an all-natural, expanded volcanic rock that promotes long-term balanced soil conditions for healthy root development.

Choose from four grades and sizes. Packaged in bags and super sacks. For all horticultural soil types. Certified for organic use.



supremeperlite.com • 503.286.4333