



Garden Center Flourishes on Strong Technological Roots

When you are shopping for shrubs, mulch, or pansies, you don't think about the technology behind your garden center. However, Michelle Shattuck, who with her husband Jay owns Countrybrook Farms Nursery and Garden Center on Lowell Road in Hudson NH, describes technology as "the glue that holds it all together."

Before hiring Mark Aronson as a network consultant, the glue was not sticking very well. "I don't think my previous expert really understood my business," Michelle says.

Data Enriches Customer Service

Since working with Mark Aronson, Countrybrook is using its software more fully to track business data including inventory. Michelle says, "Instead of guessing we use the computer information. We rely on the inventory system and it is our tool for watching customer sales and ordering. Access to data is better so that's going to make us order smarter. I feel we have a better handle on everything. Everything goes more smoothly."

"People like to know that we're tracking their information and can keep that up consistently. For example, we can track the type of mulch they got last year, and that they bought their magnolia three years ago, information they might not know but we can tell them. We're even considering a customer rewards program."

"The technology is tying everything together instead of all those loose ends out there. It really helps everything. It's the glue that we need."

A Trusted Advisor

Michelle says, "Mark understands the big picture, not just the network, and the retail aspect of my business. He helps me make business decisions and explains what's going to make more sense to my customers AND for my business. For example, he noticed it took a long time to process credit cards, seeing it from a customer perspective and the employee-employer perspective as well. To improve our customer satisfaction he advised me to use the point-of-sale (POS) credit card system."

"My employees have been empowered because I've been empowered via Mark to understand the inner workings of the computers. I have maximized the potential of what I can do with the programs. By knowing more, I can pass more on to them. They are more confident in my abilities and

they can communicate with me whether at a distance or from the office."

Keeping It Running While Juggling Work-Family Balance

"We're seasonal and when we're open - seven days a week - we're very busy. It's important to keep things running. If a problem happens we get backed up. That puts a standstill on sales and could make customers very unhappy. I'm the person present here who has to deal with things daily so I need answers to any problems that come up. Mark answers my questions, taking out the technical lingo so I understand," Michelle says.

As a mother with young children, Michelle has to juggle her responsibilities. She says, "I try to work from the home front . when I don't have to be on site. I'm here a lot and I need to get home to my kids and have a little bit of a life." She is now able to manage the business remotely from home.

"I feel so much less stress and so much better because I can troubleshoot things on my own. Whenever things are over my head, I can get Mark on the phone. He's always accessible. If something goes wrong now, I don't have to run. Whether I'm in the building or off the property, I can help troubleshoot situations. I can log onto the computer system and see what's going on and access daily information - that frees me up. When things go more smoothly at work, I can rest easy at home," says Michelle.



Michelle Shattuck

Key Employee More Efficient

Since working with Mark Aronson, Countrybrook has made a number of improvements including operational backups. For example:

- Sue Remski, the Countrybrook landscape architect, is more efficient. She originally worked on paper but has transitioned to computer software. While working on a design, she can now access a plant list and incorporate the plants and estimates into her design. Michelle describes this as, "a huge milestone."
- The computers are now plugged into battery backups. Michelle says that during electrical storms and a winter power failure, it prevented catastrophic problems and kept the business running.