

LIVING AND WORKING IN A DIGITAL WORLD

I don't know about you, but I often fantasize about the day when I can actually meet with a friend or colleague, in person, over some lunch, maskless. We could talk about anything other than viruses and "the new normal." Perhaps one day soon I can even travel to another state, walk the aisles of a trade show floor, sleep in a hotel.

So much of what we do in our professional (and personal) lives today is done online. In the horticulture industry, face-to-face interaction and nurturing our personal relationships has always been a top priority. But given the extreme circumstances we are living in today, very few of us are traveling or working outside of the home unless necessary.

Cultivate, our industry's biggest North American trade show, was severely disrupted due to health guidelines and travel restrictions. But the organization came up with an alternative plan to bring us all together despite the setback of not being able to gather physically.

I have to say, like many of you, I was skeptical about how Cultivate Virtual would play out. As the event kicked off while I manned the GPN booth, I started receiving chat messages from visitors. Some were just a friendly "hello," while others had questions about the magazine or wanted to discuss potential article topics.

It took an hour or so of getting used to, but the energy was refreshing. I hopped from booth to booth, even sent a chat to say hi and learn about new products or discuss industry happenings. I don't know about you, but few things are as awkward as standing next to a trade show booth, waiting for a representative to wrap up a conversation with someone else so you can step in. Ah, silver lining — no awkward hovering!

In this month's Chat Room survey, I asked readers if they attended the virtual event and how they enjoyed this new format. About half of the respondents said they did attend. Some were, of course, critical — which is to be expected. Nothing could ever take the live event's place. But many attendees thought it was better than expected and even made new contacts or found new companies they were not aware of. I shared some of their quotes on page 12.

If anything, I feel this pandemic and the new virtual world we're living in is certainly teaching us all a lesson on better ways to communicate within our own organizations and to our respective audiences. Creating a presence on digital platforms has been important for years, but it's more important now than ever.

On page 20, you'll find a Q&A we did with a company that specializes in digital marketing for the horticulture market. Coincidentally, I "met" Allison from Everbearing Services while roaming the Cultivate Virtual trade show floor. She had a lot of information to share, so we continued the conversation on the pages of GPN.

How are you stepping up your online marketing strategy? Are you actively using social media and updating your website? There is a lot to think about, but it's definitely not as difficult as it seems — as long as you have a plan and execute.



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SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

GPN (ISSN 1529-5524) is published monthly by Great American Media Services Inc., 75 Applewood Dr., Suite A, Sparta, Michigan 49345. Subscription rates in the U.S. are \$30 per year (Canada is \$50 and all other countries are \$60 payable in U.S. currency). Reproduction of contents forbidden. Copyright 2020. Periodical postage paid at Sparta, MI and additional mailing offices.

Printed in the USA. Postmaster: Please send address changes to Great American Publishing, PO Box 318, Lincolnshire IL60069.

