

Don't Just Get By — Be the Best!

Bird Watcher Supply Company and Cole's Wild Bird Products – Atlanta, GA

Graduating from startup entrepreneur to owner of both a seed mixing company and multiple retail stores is a complex challenge. Richard Cole's journey from mixing seed for a few friends to owner of four business units — Cole's Wild Bird Products and three Bird Watcher Supply Company stores — is a study in managing growth.

And his team's focus on putting their customers first has resulted in being labeled some of the best birding stores in the country by suppliers.

In his pragmatic way, he humbly says... "who knows if that's true...and who cares." He stays focused on making his customers happy. Pride is a big part of the staff's attitude. That old-fashioned adage, "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing right," still applies in this team.

He has concentrated on customer service by teaching and rewarding his people for acknowledging each customer who arrives, attending to their needs, and developing the product knowledge to fill those needs. Customers know they want good customer service, but it's something they know when they see it...but can't really define. They walk into a store, their pace slows, they start to relax and are drawn to the appealing presentation of products. It's ambience. It's merchandising. And it's a mix of sensory experiences



Bird Watcher Supply Co. maintains a product display garden at the sidewalk entrance to their open mall location to catch the eye of passing nature lovers.

A well-designed display with colorful packages can point out key selling points in the one-and-a-half seconds you have to grab the consumer's attention, and an appealing display pulls people to those packages.



— good smells, bright lighting, clean aisles, organization that invites the customer to explore and learn.

Richard hires a “mystery shopper” to come buy products and return them. And he and his staff take to heart what these professional customer service researchers tell them. They are pleased with how often the reports are glowing — “clean, orderly, excellent presentation of products, inviting.” They strive for a comfortable

environment between the retailing poles of “country clutter” and “sterile.”

As the company outgrew its seed mixing roots, Richard and his wife, Nancy, had to face the hard truth that they are “thing managers” and not people managers. So they hired an experienced manager from outside the industry who had experience in multi-store management. They have now put a management structure in place, complete with a plan that

includes procedures for precisely how everything should look to the customer. Two stores are almost identical with only minor differences. New concepts are tested and added to “the plan.”

One of the axioms of the retail trade is that success depends on “location, location, location,” and when you look at Richard’s strategy, you get the feeling he’s found what works for him. The three Bird Watcher Supply Company retail stores are



**Drippers,
Misters,
Waterfall Rock
and Bird Baths.**

**Makers of Fine Accessories
for the Garden Bird Bath**

*(Shown is the Morning Waters
Bird Bath with Dripper)*



**If you would like a catalog please call us at
800.373.8787 or write to us at:
Winged Aquatics • P.O. Box 3406
Camarillo, CA 93011-3406 or
e-mail us at jcaquatic@aol.com**

Sold at most Lawn and Garden Centers

located in strip centers next to major malls that are on the beltline around the city. The Atlanta locations include Kennesaw, Roswell, and Duluth.

Does he put a lot of stock in location? "Location buys you a lot — but not everything," he muses. "Many businesses fail in bad locations, but a few succeed in bad locations. One niche retailer is located out in the middle of nowhere and even though a big box store moved in nearby...he thrives. He knows his niche, and everybody knows him. He's doing a lot of other things right." As Richard reflects on his experience in the birding industry, he recalls a

"We have a real industry now, very good products at good prices. It's getting harder for startup manufacturers to compete; but we need more periphery products."

number of bird stores that closed and guesses that 50 percent of each failure was due to location. The remaining factors were not enough hard work and making too many major mistakes in retailing basics.

Planning a Display

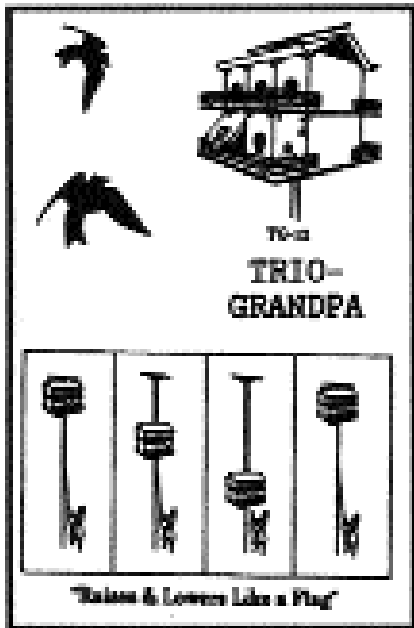
How does this expert at display start planning for a new merchandising effort? "Look at how it fits with everything around it. Is it against the wall or on the floor? What is the product mix...seed and feeders? Which products have nice packaging? Will the big, solid items fit down low? How can you hang a product to be easily seen and tested? Are there decorative touches that will add ambience and color?"

"If I get a good display from the manufacturer, I use it! One supplier has a nice display that comes with straw...it's a complete setup...easy to install and maintain, and it's different. It's fun...and customers are drawn to it because of the color and texture."

Packaging is a big winner for Richard's stores. We discussed in depth the trends and needs, and Richard is pleased that birding product manufacturers are making strides in providing colorful, appealing



IT'S PURPLE MARTIN TIME!



GARR'S Wholesale

*PRESENTS a Special Discount
Promotion on the complete line of*



Manufactured by:

NATURE HOUSE

**The LEADER in Design & Sales
for Over 38 Years!**

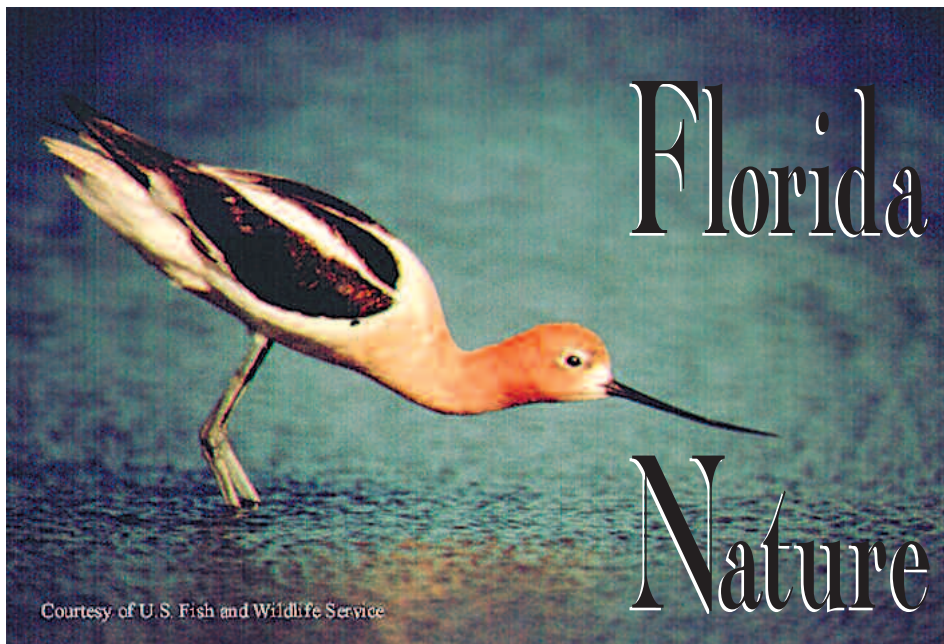
GARR'S Wholesale

1-888-754-9613

Phone: 1-888-754-9613
Fax: 615-754-9633

11620 Lebanon Road
Mt. Juliet, TN 37122

garr@dellnet.com



Courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Florida Birding Festival & Nature Expo



Serious birders, beginning birders and nature lovers are planning now to flock to the 3rd Annual Florida Birding Festival and Nature Expo.

Enjoy top speakers, workshops, lectures, field trips and more. The new Nature Expo features more than 100 exhibitors with the newest in birding and outdoor gear.

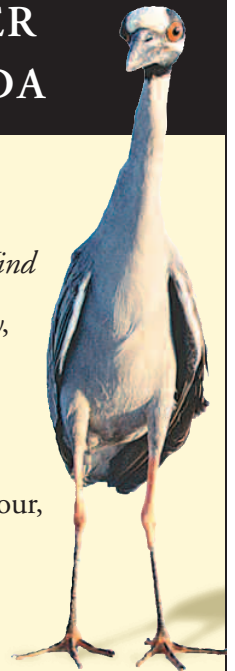


FLORIDA BIRDING FESTIVAL & NATURE EXPO

OCT. 5 – 8, 2000
HARBORVIEW CENTER
CLEARWATER, FLORIDA

Festival Highlights:

- Scott Weidensaul – author of *Living on the Wind*
- Kenn Kaufman – author of *Kingbird Highway*, the story of a natural obsession that got a little out of hand
- More than 20 workshops and 35 field trips, including an all-day Florida “specialties” bus tour, pelagics and shorebirds galore
- In 1999 more than 3000 visitors came to the Nature Expo
- Nationally advertised and heavily promoted in Florida



Great opportunity for both retailers and manufacturers to exhibit.

Call (or write) for a complete registration packet.

Birdwatch America
15 Forest Rd. • Hancock, NH 03449
Ph: (603) 525-3803 • Fax: (603) 525-4062

packaging that both protects the products in shipping and grabs the buyer's interest with graphics, color and selling copy. "FAB...Features, Advantages, and Benefits...that's what sells a product."


Entrepreneurial Spirit

Competition in the seed industry is increasing, just as it is in the retailing industry. "We hate to see it," he moans, "but it keeps us honest!" he adds with a

**Backyard
Nature
Products
Inc.**

**Manufacturer of
high quality metal
and wood feeders**

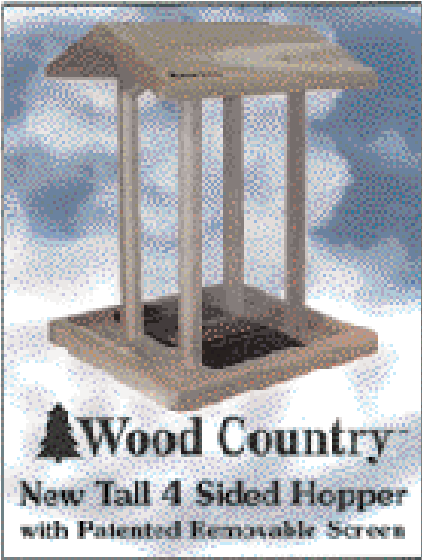
BIRD STUFF™



**Small
Dome**

Metal Bird Feeder

Stainless Steel Screen
Thistle or
Sunflower/Peanut
Completely Assembled
& Individually boxed



Wood Country

New Tall 4 Sided Hopper
with Patented Removable Screen

Toll Free
800-817-8833

Fax: 920-649-4415
417 Vogt Lane, Chilton, WI 53014

Call for
a
Catalog



The retail team works together to select product and balance the store experience (left to right): Richard and Nancy Cole (owners); Scott Brenner, Retail Operations Manager; Traci Brown, Store Manager-Kennesaw.

chuckle. "It makes you work hard to have an edge over the competition. It gives the consumer product differentiation, and eventually, better pricing for everybody. It's the businessperson's goal to find holes they can fill — location, convenience, or attitude!"

Industry Trends

Richard is eager to find new products that have a steady supply available — it takes a "real company" to meet the needs of a retail customer. Hobbyists just can't deliver in a timely manner or in the quantities required once the retailer advertises the product, puts up expensive signs and has customers waiting for product. What products are on the upswing? "Gardening. Water and ponds. Water gardening is very information intensive. We need easy to assemble kits that prevent hand holding.

"And we need manufacturers to help us sell their products. Packaging. Decent prices that are competitive with the big box companies around the corner," he lists quickly.

Richard is glad to find new products — good products and good suppliers are the lifeblood of his business. And he urges every bird store owner to attend the Atlanta BirdWatch America Show.

"This show is increasingly the place manufacturers premier their new products. We spend a few hours at the gift show and it's done — but we spend two days at Birdwatch America talking with our suppliers and looking for innovative new products.

"We have a real industry now, very good products at good prices. It's getting harder for startup manufacturers to compete; but we need more periphery prod-

ucts. Ways we can serve our customers with related products. Edge products — like crossover pet products or light garden items — stepping stones or garden benches, things that the birder will also like, and that fit into the trend for outdoor living rooms.”

Even though the nature products industry is relatively young, there is rapid

“My strategy is that of every niche retailer — be quick, nimble, and move around the big guys. I would even locate next to them — put me next to one of these guys and they will bring the traffic to my door.”

expansion in the number of specialized stores and manufacturers. “My best suppliers — both manufacturers and distributors — call to ask what’s happening with the market, and to exchange ideas to improve, fix, or better meet pricing challenges. Sometimes they send prototypes and I give them feedback, put them in my yard to test, or put them on the shelf to get comments from customers. That ‘listening’ is important to make the product and its marketing strategy fit the real market.”

Strategy

Richard acknowledges that he sits in a unique position as both supplier and retailer. “Wearing two hats really helps me understand how to set retail prices, and present products effectively. Our biggest competitor is not other birding stores, but the big stores that are continually expanding into the retail territory. The playing field is just not level. Margins don’t compare. Selection and service are my competitive edge. I work hard to select the mix customers want: sizes, colors, materials — everything optimized to provide choice for the customer. Selection makes displays look better. And we have a wonderful selection in the industry today — I can only stock about a fourth of the products available — but that’s much broader than the discount stores can effectively stock.

“My strategy is that of every niche

retailer — be quick, nimble, and move around the big guys. I would even locate next to them — put me next to one of these guys and they will bring the traffic to my door. I focus on how to work within the realities of the marketplace — the big boys in discounting and gardening have added volume to the industry and that makes all our products more affordable. For that I’m glad!

“Now it’s my job to build momentum out of the increasing interest and broader exposure for birding. Niches exist

because of better service, a nice look, more selection and decent prices. That’s our focus.” ■ by Carolyn Allen

Cole’s Wild Bird Products
PO Box 440173
Kennesaw, GA 30144
Phone: (770) 426-8882

Birdwatcher Supply Co.
2000 Branch View Dr.
Marietta, GA 30062
Phone: (770) 426-4113

Mother Nature's Monitor™
Tune in to nature's symphony on any FM radio...

Enjoy the sounds of nature in the comfort of your own home! Mother Nature's Monitor™ allows you to bring the natural sounds of the outdoors inside by transmitting them through any FM radio. Hang the wireless monitor by bird feeders, birdhouses, fountains, or anywhere you hear the sounds of nature.

Feldstein
& Associates, inc.
800-755-6504
www.markfeldstein.com