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# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

## How does your garden grow?

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**W**hen Bruce and Ruth Harper established Harper's Garden Centre in Ancaster, Ont., in 1948, customers came from far and wide to experience the family-owned business's trademark quality, selection and customer service.

When competition began to stiffen, the company introduced Harper's Shopping Money, a loyalty program that rewarded shoppers with a currency that could be used towards future purchases.

The small business still stands on the same 10 acres where it was founded, nestled on the Niagara Escarpment, and offers the same wide-ranging selection and excellent customer service that have kept it in business for 67 years. But after more than 20 years of dishing out the custom-made currency, second-generation owner Nancy Harper Patterson decided it was time for a change.

Although the program worked for the business and was very effective, Ms. Harper Patterson says she wanted a new communication tool, one that would offer more information on her customers as well as enable her to communicate with them. And she also wants to be able to keep rewarding those who are faithful shoppers.

As a small business owner, Ms. Harper Patterson was eager to gain a better understanding of her customer base while rewarding her regulars, many of whom make the drive from Toronto and beyond. Printing the custom currency eventually proved too laborious and costly, which is why the company embraced Vicinity, the automated system offered by Rogers Communications.

Now Ms. Harper Patterson is able to spend more of her time concentrating on the business, while Vicinity's Autopilot feature rewards her most loyal customers and gives less frequent shoppers a reason to return.

"I'm way too busy to sit down at the computer and do a lot of communicating with my customers, so we have [Autopilot, which gives them] little nudges," she explains. "If they still don't come in within a certain period of time, we can give them an incentive, such as a discount."

Canadian small business owners that use Vicinity are able to select from seven Autopilot settings, including automatic incentives for high-value customers, birthday promotions, seasonal discounts and loyalty rewards.

"If they haven't seen a customer coming back in 30 days, an automatic message gets sent out offering 5 per cent off if they come back in seven days," says Fiona Lake Waslander,



general manager of Vicinity at Rogers. "They can go in and see how many of these messages were delivered and by what channel. They can see how many redemptions of that offer were made over what time period. They get access to all of that."

Ms. Lake Waslander also points out that Vicinity provides shoppers with a single platform where they can access the rewards programs of multiple businesses. Customers can even choose whether they'd prefer to receive incentives by emails or text message.

"The offers that are sent out actually get a response rate 10 times greater than email, Facebook, direct mail and newspaper ads," she says, noting too that users are never bound by contracts.

"We stand behind that by not having a fixed-term contract and by giving them all the data, so they can see how it's working."

Most importantly, Vicinity allows small businesses to operate on a level playing field with their enterprise competitors who are able to outspend them on marketing and customer loyalty programs.

"Businesses are investing so much in loyalty and automated targeting and micro segmentation, and small businesses have been shut out just because of cost and expertise," says Ms. Lake Waslander. "We're really excited that Vicinity can give small businesses access to the sort of technology that was previously only available to the big guys."

Small business owners who want to take advantage of new marketing technologies are advised to check out Rogers Talks ([rogerstalkseven.com](http://rogerstalkseven.com)), a free coast-to-coast speaker series featuring some of Canada's most influential business experts.

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