

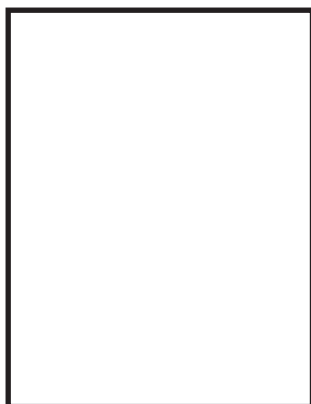


Bulletin

The Information Source for the Floriculture Industry Since 1929

CIRCULATE

Tips for A Better Relationship with Your Hispanic/Latino Workforce



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A grower once told me, "If I couldn't hire Spanish-speaking workers, I'd be out of business very fast. In my area that's the only help I can get." A strong economy and low unemployment rate have made it difficult for many employers to find help for their businesses. Even now, in a post September 11 economy, things have not changed much. It seems that only immigrant workers are willing to do many jobs that we Americans won't do.

Most of the comments I have heard regarding Spanish-speaking workers have been very positive. However, poor communication skills have frustrated

growers with limited Spanish-speaking capabilities. Lack of good communication between workers and their supervisors not only is inefficient, but also can be dangerous. Please keep in mind that language is only part of good communication. Symbols, signs, expectations, or behavior – which are all influenced by culture – are an integral part of the communication process. In this article, I will discuss aspects that deal with the learning of Spanish as well as communication in general,

of which language is only one aspect.

SHOULD I LEARN SPANISH?

Not necessarily. However, if you have to deal with a Spanish-speaking workforce, knowing even some rudimentary Spanish can save you a lot of headaches and earn goodwill. Do you remember the last presidential campaign? Do you remember both candidates trying to communicate in Spanish to potential voters?

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BRANDING: IS IT WORKING?



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Branding in horticulture: Is it real, can it be real, or is it only a dream?

After years of talking about developing successful local, regional, or even national brands for green horticulture products, a number of firms around the country are taking the necessary steps to make their branding dreams a reality. Work is now being done by a number of greenhouses and nursery retailers on the local or regional basis, and several firms are each working

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OFA

An Association of Floriculture Professionals

Our mission is to assist the floriculture industry in being competitive, profitable, and responsive to its needs.

(As adopted by the OFA Board of Directors 2/18/01)



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AMERICA IN BLOOM: READY FOR TAKEOFF

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As we were going to press, civic leaders and gardening enthusiasts from all over were asking about the first edition of America In Bloom (AIB), a national beautification campaign and contest organized by our industry and hosted by the Ohio Florists' Association (OFA). Several communities have already registered, and by March 31 we hope to have 50. All participants will be recognized at the first awards symposium we're planning for this fall in Washington, D.C.

AIB made its debut as part of Canada's successful Communities In Bloom (CIB) program last summer. CIB is a national beautification contest Canadian parks and recreation officials started eight years ago. It's modeled after similar programs in France, England, and Ireland.

For two years, floriculture industry leaders have been working closely with CIB to launch AIB in the United States. The focus on landscapes is very appealing as a way to increase demand for plants and flowers and their presence in our daily lives.

Conceived by Bedding Plants International (BPI), AIB transferred to an industry task force hosted by OFA after BPI dissolved in July 2001. While there was momentum to expand AIB into a national promotion order funded by container assessments, in August 2001 the task force decided the best course was to build the contest through public relations and voluntary financial contributions.

AIB gained valuable experience last year when four U.S. cities twinned with four mentoring Canadian cities to compete as pairs in CIB's international division as a pilot AIB contest – Stratford, Connecticut, and Stratford, Ontario; Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and Medicine Hat, Alberta; Monroe County, New York, and Oshawa, Ontario; and Portland, Maine, and Saint John, New Brunswick. The cities were recognized during the Canadian symposium September 19 to 22 in Saint John.

CIB communities compete in population categories provincially and then graduate to the national contest. Judges appraise community efforts in eight categories – tidiness, environmental awareness, community involvement, heritage, urban forestry, landscaped areas, floral displays, and turf and groundcover areas. While no winners were selected for this

trial year, all eight cities were praised for paving the way for what will become the first stand-alone AIB contest this year.

Hundreds of cities and towns already have activities and resources that fit AIB's spirit and judging criteria. What the program does is bring all community efforts that improve the quality of life under an umbrella that creates a sense of unity. The contest is a forum of expression and a rallying point. All participants win by working together to beautify and improve their communities.



A BIG BUILDING YEAR

Through the transition from BPI to OFA, substantial progress was made in 2001 to build a foundation to launch AIB. Task force chair Ron Pierre and long-time business partner John Van Wingerden of Green Circle Growers/Express Seed Co., Oberlin, Ohio, mobilized growers and allied industry representatives to give the time and money necessary to move AIB forward. All the trade press stepped up as sponsors by participating in a collective free advertising campaign to promote AIB and keep interest alive through editorial coverage.

I think we all can agree that AIB took on an even greater meaning after the September 11 terrorist attacks on our country. As our nation heals and maintains its resolve in the ongoing war against terrorism, our industry will play a role in making a difference where we live and helping communities continue to express love and support for our country.

Funds raised last year purchased the rights to the program from BPI and have covered costs associated with the pilot program in Canada and continuing consultation with CIB as well as producing professional marketing materials vital to launching the program:

- a highly informative and functional web site – www.americainbloom.org
- video footage that is also available on CD
- a customizable Power Point presentation
- stationery
- posters and promotional literature

The marketing tools developed by Zaunscherb Marketing Inc. (ZMI), Hamilton, Ontario, incorporate consistent themes and imagery with messages directed to specific audiences as well as the public at large. Jennifer White of *GrowerTalks* magazine helped develop the AIB messages as a task force volunteer. In December, *Greenhouse Grower* magazine published a 24-page "Guide To Planting Pride" for its full readership and overprinted 5,000 for AIB to distribute. As contest committee chair, I've been presenting AIB to interested groups, including the International Master Gardeners convention, American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA) leadership, and the ProGreen Expo.

OFA's Laura Kunkle has been a tremendous help by taking over AIB's administrative duties. In addition to fielding inquiries and executing our mailings to thousands of cities and governors, she is keeping the task force on track. Outgoing OFA executive director Dennis Kirven and OFA officers Jack Schmidt, Joe Boarini, and Kathy Benken have all played a strong role in bringing AIB to where it is now. Industry lobbyists, ANLA, and the Society of American Florists (SAF) also support our initiative.

Last but not least, AIB is indebted to CIB's executive director Raymond Carriere, and Frank Zaunscherb of ZMI, who have a strong history developing marketing strategies for CIB and clients in our industry. Their guidance has

been invaluable. We also thank AIB judges Alex Pearl and Matt Rosen for their drive and enthusiasm in lining up more judges and entrants for AIB, and all the allied representatives who have been diligent in participating in the task force meetings.

WHAT'S NEXT?

In the next two months, we will be finalizing registrations for the first AIB contest. Although we are limiting the scope to 50 communities to keep the first edition manageable, our goal is a minimum of 30 communities. We will also be finalizing our awards symposium venue and program, which will include educational seminars that will provide our industry with the opportunity to teach parks and grounds managers how to use our products.

Volunteer judges will be trained by CIB on March 16 in Toronto during the Canada Blooms flower show. Once the final tally of registrants is in March 31, we will plan logistics for the judging. The same two judges will visit all the entrants in a population category. Evaluation will begin in early June in hotter climates and go through late July in cooler climates.

AIB will also kick off a new round of fund raising within and outside the industry. The finish line for the industry campaign will be the OFA Short Course in July. At the same time, we will be pursuing strategic partnerships. A good example is CIB's partnership with Air Canada to cover expenses related to judges' travel.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

You can get involved in America In Bloom by:

- Working with municipal officials and civic organizations to register communities in your area. The deadline is March 31. Get started today by ordering "America In Bloom: Your Guide To Planting Pride In Your Communities," which features how-to advice on organizing locally and ideas for public plantings.
- Planting the spirit by installing patriotic landscape plantings, hanging baskets, and window boxes. Just think red, white, and blue.
- Giving time or money to the cause.

For more information on how you can support AIB and to order materials, contact AIB at OFA's office – 614-487-1117, e-mail aib@ofa.org, or log on as a supporter at the web site – www.americainbloom.org.

OFA



Cash In On Containers



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It has been a wild ride through 53 years of trends in home horticulture. I write garden books and give lectures or demonstrations on “hot” developments in gardening. If I hadn’t kept up with trends, I would have missed marketing opportunities for my books and lectures. So, I kept my ear to the ground. Still do.

Imagine this: I was there when wholesale growers moved from wooden flats into plastic pots, when “Instant Color” wiped out the market for green seedling plants, when perennials began their surge in popularity, when herbs were all the rage, and when water gardening went mainstream. But nothing I saw in all those years can equal the speed at which container gardening is catching on.

I was living in northern California when Dr. Ken Baker’s research at UC Berkeley began to be seen in soilless mixes for containers. Before long, researchers in the Southeast translated

Baker’s research with redwood sawdust and sand into pine bark and peat moss mixtures. And I watched Eastern researchers like Ray Sheldrake, John White, and Roy Larson, along with many others, perfect peat-lite mixes for greenhouse growers. What a spot I had for keeping track of developments! I was with Sierra Chemical in the early days of their introduction of Osmocote for greenhouse and nursery crops.

The perfection of container growing by commercial producers set the stage for containers to move into home gardens. A few containers had been in home gardens all along, but they lacked lightweight, high-performance potting soils and cultivars developed specifically for growing in containers. And other than a limited selection of clay pots and wooden window boxes, there was little choice in containers. No one back then dreamed that an avalanche of containers would come from Mexico, Italy, and southeast Asia.

No single development started the stampede to containers in home gardens. So many things peaked at the same time: dependable potting soils, controlled-release and water-soluble fertilizers, spaghetti-tube drip irrigation systems with timers, water wands, every kind of container under the sun, and incredibly beautiful and durable cultivars bred for container growing as well as for ground beds.

During this past year, I presented about 40 lectures or demonstrations. More than half were on the subject of “Contain Yourself... Everything’s Gonna be All

Right!” From that you might gather that I am trying to convince audiences not to buy ready-planted containers. Far from it. I like to work surrounded by ready-planted containers so I can point to them as the easy way to acquire a container garden. I also like to work side-by-side with someone from the garden center staff when I am doing in-store demos. I point them out as the creators of all the beautiful containers around us. But I also want gardeners to experience the joy of watching a container garden they designed and planted grow into a thing of beauty.

Unquestionably, there is a high degree of interest in planting one’s own containers, both to save money and to exercise individual creativity. After I complete a lecture or demonstration, I like to walk around the garden center to see what is going on. On several occasions, I have seen an audience member with a cart filled with a large container, two bags of potting soil, a dozen plants of the kinds I used in my demos, and a water wand. We look at each other and smile... teacher and student. It’s a good feeling.

The boom in container gardening is no “hula-hoop,” of that you can be sure. It is here to stay, and if you are not making bucks off the trend, you have only yourself to blame. I see large pre-planted containers selling at anywhere from \$150 to \$350, depending on the affluence of the community, the value of the pot they used, and the size of the plants used in the design. I see home gardeners becoming so sophisticated about container plantings

that they inquire about plant fragrance, attractiveness to hummingbirds and butterflies, drought resistance, and the ultimate size of the plant.

You already know there is a hunger among home gardeners for more information. They want to know more about gardening, and now that they are seeing beautiful, thriving container plantings in so many commercial settings, they especially want to know how to design, grow, and care for their own container gardens. So, if you are not staging seasonal demonstrations on container gardening for spring, summer, and fall color, why not? With strong publicity, you will easily draw in enough customers to make it worth your while.

One word of caution. Try out the new cultivars before you begin including them in ready-made containers. Some will not tolerate drought for even a day or two. Some will melt out following heavy rains and high temperatures. Some may live through the summer, but will cease blooming after a few weeks of color. Some will stand up to a moderate cold snap, while others are blasted by a hint of frost.

My living in the South skews my ratings of new flowers, of course, toward cultivars that are like that famous pink bunny with the drum. They just keep on going despite heat and humidity. I call them “bullet-proof.” For mixing in containers, I like the several new colors of angelonia, the compact cultivars of lantana, ‘Million Gold’ butter daisy, improved bacopa, Dahlberg daisy, and

the 'Yubui' and 'Hotshot' colors in purslane.

For stand-alone flowers, I love the two colors now available in the 'Dragon Wing' begonias, the compact cannas with soft blossom colors, and the cupneas such as firecracker plant and cigar plant. Hawaiian snow bush looks good by itself in containers too. Of course I would like to grow geraniums, fuchsias, and tuberous-rooted begonias in my southern

garden, but they are a lost cause. I want more than a brief show of color.

Before I begin my lectures, I ask for a show of hands of how many in the audience already are growing plants in large containers. Usually, about three out of four raise their hands. After a bit more probing, they share with me their reasons for growing in containers. Some are growing old and want the "no-stoop" convenience of containers.

OFA Garden Center

Others are dissatisfied with their gardens in the ground and want icing on the cake.

Some want an herb garden or a butterfly magnet by their back door or kitchen window. More and more are reporting that they have no ground in which to garden, and they don't want apart-

ment or condo life to prevent them from gardening. Yet, for more than any other reason, gardeners want ways to express their creativity. And a container is a heck of a lot easier to prepare and plant than a new garden in the ground. So help them fulfill their dreams, and make a profit in the process. OFA

JIM WILSON TO BE 2002 SHORT COURSE KEYNOTE SPEAKER Sunday, July 14, 8:15 AM

Jim Wilson, one of the best-known faces and voices among TV gardeners, will be the keynote speaker for the 2002 Ohio Florists' Association Short Course.

For 10 years, beginning in 1984, Wilson appeared as a co-host on the PBS television program **The Victory Garden**. And since 1997, he has appeared on HGTV as a co-host with Great Britain's Peter Seabrook on episodes of the **Great Gardeners** series.

2002 marks Jim's 54th year in home and commercial horticulture. He gardens on a farm in upstate South Carolina, while also serving as National Spokesperson for the **Plant a Row for the Hungry** program sponsored by the Garden Writers Association of America.

Wilson serves as a home garden consultant to Fafard, Inc., makers of Fafard[®] and Majestic Earth[®] potting soils for indoor plants, outdoor containers, and hanging baskets.

In his career in horticulture, Wilson worked in management positions with a garden seed company and a manufacturer of controlled-release fertilizers. He served seven years as executive secretary of All-America Selections,

where his work took him to several foreign countries. He and his late wife, Jane, operated a commercial herb farm for seven years, serving fine restaurants with fresh herbs.

Wilson is a prolific garden writer and lecturer, with a number of books to his credit, including a December 2000 release of *Jim Wilson's Container Gardening*. Other previous publications include: *Landscaping with Wildflowers*, *Landscaping with Herbs*, *South Carolina Gardener's Guide*, and *Bulletproof Flowers for the South* (flowers and foliage plants that resist heat and humidity).

Wilson works the interface between commercial growers and home gardeners. He describes himself as an expediter, catalyst, and cheerleader. Wilson is a South Carolina Certified Master Gardener, and for his advocacy of Master Gardening, has been named an Honorary Master Gardener by the Cooperative Extension Services of Alabama, Georgia, Kansas, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, and Oregon. He is a Fellow of the Garden Writers Association of America, and in 1995, was installed in its Hall of Fame. He is a Life Member of the National Council of State Garden Clubs.



**JULY 13 – 17, 2002
GREATER COLUMBUS
CONVENTION CENTER**

2002 Short Course Registration Timeline

- April 29 – May 1** Registration/Reservations accepted via on-line and faxes (8 am EST)
Mail must not be postmarked prior to May 1.
- May 2-3** Registration/Reservations accepted via on-line, faxes, and mail
- May 6** Registration/Reservations accepted via on-line, faxes, mail, and phone (8 am EST)

More information will be available in the Short Course program, which will be mailed in early April.

TIPS FOR A BETTER RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR HISPANIC/LATINO WORKFORCE

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How about NAFTA (or ALCA in Spanish)? Do you think that the tragic events of September 11 will stop globalization? In my opinion, the recent atrocities will no more stop global trade than pirates stopped international commerce centuries ago.

Is it difficult to learn another language? That depends. Urgency, cultural interest, and talent all play a role. For some people, learning languages is relatively easy. If you are like me, you will have to work a little harder than average. Regardless, if you want to, you will learn enough to communicate with your workers. To avoid frustrations, set realistic goals: start by learning a certain number of words, and after that try a few verbs, etc. As much as you can, try to make it a fun project.

Is Spanish difficult? Yes and no. If you are a person who likes structured things with clear rules, you will like Spanish. A one letter-one sound system makes reading much easier. Verbs are more difficult than in English. Pronunciation will be a killer at the beginning. For most English-speaking people, it's just as difficult to pronounce the open vowels of Spanish as it is for us non-natives of English-speaking countries to pronounce the English language vowels. Do not despair! Time and effort will take care of the bumps at the beginning of the road.

What is the best way to learn another language? Different people learn in different ways. Find what works for you. Two effortless first steps: if your office is connected to the Internet, you can pick a Spanish lan-

guage radio station and play talk shows as background throughout the day; you can do the same with CDs and records of Latin music. This will help you develop the ability to distinguish words. Whatever method you choose, be sure to make it fun. Here are some suggestions: take a conversational Spanish class; travel to a Spanish-speaking country; listen to tapes (bookstore or library); find a tutor (it can be one of your employees); watch Latin TV; make your own tape; get to know your Spanish-speaking employees; read a weekly business column like BizAmericas (www.mundohispanico/negocios).

Are there different types of Spanish? Yes, just like New York English and Mississippi English are different from Australian English. These national and regional differences should not be a problem if you learn basic, standard Spanish. Standard Spanish is identical from country to country, so everybody can communicate using this form of the language. It is estimated that less than 10 percent of Spanish may be different from country to country. The only problem may be encountered if slang is used or when people have a heavy accent. Do you have problems understanding someone from New Zealand or England? In my opinion, most of the differences between the Spanish from different regions are at the same level as those from different English-speaking countries.

RESOURCES

In addition to the traditional Spanish teaching tools available in bookstores or

libraries, I suggest you get some of the following:

1) *Spanish in the Field. Practical Spanish for Ranchers, Farmers, or Vintners.* By C.P. Clough, J.C. Comegys, and J.K.M. Saddler. agAccess Davis, CA. 1990.

2) *Ball Floriculture Dictionary.* By V. Hoyosde Martens and M.L. NydiaPalma de Villareal Ball Publishing, Batavia, Illinois, 1995.

3) *Thomson's English/Spanish Illustrated Agricultural Dictionary.* By Robert P. Rice, Jr. 1993.

4) WPS video in Spanish. EPA approved and prepared by MSU.

5) *Spanish for Greenhouse Supervisors.* Claudio Pasian. Ohio State University Extension Publication and CD.

This last one is a collection of words and phrases both in English and Spanish, strictly dealing with floriculture terminology. It is sold out at present, but we expect to have a new version sometime in 2002.

Electronic Dictionaries and Technology. This "artificial intelligence" translation, whether by electronic device or Internet, cannot convey subtleties of language and only occasionally works by translating word for word (literal). Beware! It is commonly said that "the translator is a traitor."

Emergency Translations. At least one telephone company offers translation services through bilingual English/Spanish-speaking telephone operators. This service is frequently used by hospitals and other public agencies that provide an emergency response. The cost varies according to the company.

COMMUNICATION

Someone has said, "Communication is a

process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior." In other words, how we say something may be as important as the words we use to say it. According to A. Saunders, a cross-cultural trainer, "A very big barrier for a new project team where members are from different parts of the world is not language. It is the baggage each team member carries in his/her own cultural suitcase." We all carry a cultural suitcase containing a set of values. These values originate from the family and country in which we grow up, and they can be influenced by the organizations we belong to or even the workplace. Therefore, to facilitate good communication, it is important to have an idea of the cultural baggage or customs of other individuals.

STEREOTYPING

There is one danger in dealing with cultural baggage and values of individuals: stereotyping. According to the Webster Dictionary, a stereotype is "a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment." So, what can we do to avoid stereotyping and at the same time use or acknowledge someone else's cultural values to foster better communication? There is no simple answer to this question. Be a good observer, receptive, and open-minded. Study the culture of your workers, but be ready to accept that although people behave and react in a given way in a certain country or culture, an individual may not fit such norm.

Cultural generalizations.

One stereotype that has been commonly accepted is that Latinos need less

personal space and make less eye contact. Well, I read recently that some studies contradict this theory about the need for less personal space among Latinos/Hispanics. It may be true that some Latinos/Hispanics make less eye contact, but definitely not all. In every culture and country, there are shy people.

Some say that Hispanics/Latinos are less likely to report problems at work. I suspect that this generalization is wrong, but acknowledge that it may be true for some. Many times, when facing these stereotypes, it helps to put ourselves in the other person's shoes. Imagine yourself

one day looking at your family and deciding that for their sake and future, you will leave everything you know to go another country where you do not speak the language and do not understand the culture. There, you have found the job that will pull you and your family out of the hole. One day, something goes wrong with the equipment you and your co-workers are using. Your first reaction will be fear of losing your job. Under those circumstances, would you try to tell your boss about the problem considering that you do not speak the language and do not know the culture? Again, try to walk in their shoes – you'll become more



understanding and a better factor of change in the behavior of the people you supervise.

Hispanic vs. Latino.

Hispanics are persons with a Spanish ancestry, while Latinos are those from Latin America (south of Rio Grande) regardless of ancestry. This terminology refers to the origin of people, not their race. For instance, some Latinos are African Americans, while others are not Hispanics (e.g. European origin). More

than anything else the Latino/Hispanic issue is a cultural one.

Cultural differences. Yes, there are cultural differences among Latinos/Hispanics from different countries. However, remember that people everywhere have much in common, such as a need for affiliation and love, participation, and contribution. Many times, the differences between individuals are superficial. Deep down, we are all the same. **OFA**

BRANDING: IS IT WORKING?

Continued from page 1

hard to create a national brand that allow products to have a better sell through at retail and demand better prices and margins for the growers and retailers.

The question then is, are any of the horticulture branding programs working? If so, why and how well are they working? And if not, why and if they will eventually, when?

To answer the branding question, it is important to first have a definition. Branding is the process of helping the consumer create a psychological affinity to a product or service. It is quite different from marketing, which is the methodology or process that you might use to establish a brand. Branding is everything you communicate to the consumer, even the negative things you might communicate, in spite of yourself. By definition then, brand is whatever the consumer thinks of when they hear your company or product's name. And, if they do not think of anything, you are not branding.

With this in mind, let us look at the status of some of the current efforts. While the most recognizable efforts are being conducted on a national level by names we know in the horticulture industry, it is worthwhile to look at a couple of local or regional efforts that illustrate the similar challenges faced by all the branding efforts – and the one key component of the process this writer feels common to all efforts, the need for servicing the displays by the grower's staff. **Clackamas Select**, the brand developed by Clackamas Greenhouse in Aurora, Oregon, is entering its fifth year. The program is sold as an exclusive to more than 100 Fred Myers stores in the Pacific Northwest. Some of the success of the program may be that it is for a limited season, and it features new products that are rotated in and displayed on an end cap display during the season. All of the products are supported by point-of-sale marketing posters and signs produced and displayed by Clackamas. Also, perhaps the most important part of the program is the servicing of the displays by the delivery drivers. While it is unclear how lasting the brand name is with consumers, the

in-store staff is very aware and supportive of the brand – an important first step.

In the West, **Color Spot** has the widest regional production and distribution and so the most potential for brand recognition. However, in most retail outlets, the products, while displayed in colorful packs, are often not grouped together and offer little or no point-of-sale promotional material. It appears the firm has work to do in making Color Spot a recognizable consumer brand.

On a national level, **Proven Winners**, the first brand to be promoted nationally, is continuing to grow and gain recognition from the retailers. Their recently introduced Proven Winners Certified Dealer program has enjoyed a successful start with more than 1,000 employees of 47 dealers signing up in the opening enrollment. The program was created to train the retail employees on the benefits of the Proven Winners programs and the quality of the products. This, coupled with a strong Point of Purchase (POP) program, a wide range of products, consumer print advertising, as well as consumer television including Home & Garden Television (HGTV), The Weather Channel, and the Learning Channel, has helped gain good retail support. According to Marshall Dirks, marketing director of Proven Winners, a large part of gaining that better support comes from the brand's efforts, including its media campaign, changing the POP program to provide more helpful information, and placing more "how to" information on their tags. Additionally, they are revising the photos on their promotional materials – changing from a close-up of a flower to a broader shot to show more of the WOW, or the garden potential of a variety. While the company is making continued progress with the branding, Dirks states that the greatest barrier to expanding the brand is still getting retailers to know about Proven Winners.

Another major national effort is Ball Seed Company's **Simply Beautiful**. In the spring of 2000, Ball conducted a number of consumer focus groups, gaining insight into what consumers are seeking. The results indicated that beautiful, reliable products and better information about using the plants they purchase were the most important issues to consumers. Based on that information, a program was crafted that

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BRANDING: IS IT WORKING?

Continued from page 7

coordinated Ball Seed's various trial ground results with consumer desires for information about plant size, color, sun or shade use, and general usage, creating a "Garden Know How System."

The System was tested in six independent garden centers in 2001. Based on the success of these test markets, Simply Beautiful products are outselling non-branded plants by two-to-one. The next Simply Beautiful program will be brought forward in the spring of 2002. Ball will roll out a public relations campaign by advertising the program directly to consumers via television and magazine advertising. According to Jeff Gibson, marketing manager for Ball Horticulture, the company recognized at the very beginning of the process that the biggest challenges would be 1) getting started, 2) keeping focused, and 3) keeping the effort going for the long-term. By taking the time to do the consumer focus group research and using the information to design the POP material, they are now prepared to fully promote the program.

Ball Horticulture feels that having a long term, highly valued relationship with the growers will help them gain market support. Gibson noted that a number of growers who have been working on building their own brands are now asking about co-branding with Simply Beautiful, giving them both another advantage. Gaining long-term commitment from growers and independent garden centers is the key to the brand's future success.

When asked about the biggest challenge to the program, Gibson noted that the potential for success is all in the detail. The brand will only be as good as the ability to execute on all details, getting the plants into the store at the right time, on time with all the proper tags and POP material. The ability to control product quality and presentation at the point-of-sale is the key.

The Flower Fields, the other major effort at national branding, has unique strengths in that it offers the widest range of products and many programs to add value for the grower and retailer. With four of the world's leading plant-breeding companies providing genetic material, The Flower Fields offers more than 1,400 cultivars. The partners, Fischer, Goldsmith Seeds, Yoder Brothers, and the Paul Ecke Ranch, are each recognized as being industry leaders in genetics and so provide Flower Fields with tremendous range of choice for the growers and retailers. To support the genetic material, The Flower Fields has introduced a wide range of point-of-sale materials. They are providing banners, signs, and new color chip tags to complement their logo pots. The color chip tags are designed to suggest other



flower colors to complement the plants the consumer has already chosen, thus building total sales. The common message of The Flower Fields is "Where Color Grows," and the tags were designed to enforce that concept. When Laurie Scullin, director of marketing at the Paul Ecke Ranch and one of the key developers of The Flower Fields program, was asked, "Is it working?" he responded with an honest, "The ballot is still out, but we believe it is." He further commented, "Retailers are paying attention and beginning to require programs, and with our products and POP material, we are well positioned to serve them."

While growers are expanding their use of The Flower Fields, they are facing a challenge in how to serve both large and small retailers, according to Scullin. He stated that another issue of the branding effort growers must address is helping the retailer with the price. If low price is going to be the retailer's primary concern, none of the various marketing or branding programs may work. The Flower Fields seeks to help retailers be educated to the value of Value Added products and POP material while listening to consumers and customizing the programs to fit the retailer. The wide range of products and packaging offered by The Flower Fields is allowing customized programs for different retailers of all sizes. When asked what he saw as the barriers to success for The Flower Fields, Scullin responded, "There are no true barriers except the industry learning how to merchandise, getting everyone in the market channel to use the tools."

Overall, branding seems to be catching on. With all the activity by the three national efforts along with some local and regional activity, there is growing awareness of the potential of branding. Programs are in place and are working. Laurie Scullin and Jeff Gibson both commented that while the perception is that three national programs are competing, there is room in the market for all three efforts and more. Getting the customer in the door and then getting a better price for the product should be good for everyone. That is the ultimate benefit of branding to the grower and the retailer. For consumers, branding promises to bring quality, value, and information to help assure success in their gardens. All the tools are in place. Now only the market can measure the success of branding. Let us check again in the fall.

OFA

Watch your mail for the
2001 Season Sales Summary
sponsored by *GMP*ro Magazine & OFA

Cultivating Great Employees

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What have you done lately or even last week to cultivate great employees? In your business, you are constantly working to cultivate clients and to cultivate a profitable product. But, do you take the time to cultivate your employees? In your fast-paced work environment, cultivating employees is an important part of your business operation that sometimes may be forgotten. Cultivating employees is a daily task that can be accomplished in many different ways. Here are a few methods that can help you accomplish the task of cultivating great employees.

PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Ohio Florists' Association provides a wide range of educational opportunities for you and your staff. Whether it is the annual Short Course or a regional workshop, OFA offers outstanding programming to cultivate your employees in the skills they need to succeed within their jobs. When attending large events that have many break-out sessions for your employees to choose from, you may want to take some time prior to the event to review the choices and offer insight into which session might be most beneficial. It is also helpful to discuss what information you might be seeking for them to gather from the session. This will help the attendee in absorbing and then in sharing the key

information with your business after the event is over.

Another option is to check out the schedule at the local community college. Courses are offered that can help groom middle and upper management on their managerial skills. This also provides a great opportunity for them to network with other managers or supervisors who share similar work environment challenges.

Field trips with employees are a great way to expand their understanding of the business. The field trip could be to an end-user or a supplier of a key product for the business. Scheduling a trip may initially seem like time taken away from getting the job done. In reality, it is a great investment in your business and your employees. When you provide employees with the opportunity to see beyond their work environment and gain a greater understanding for the different elements of the business, their value to you and your business will increase.

KEEP PEOPLE IN THE LOOP

Employees want to feel they are "in the know" about what is happening in their work environment. Providing current information is key to cultivating great employees. In some situations, management does not have all the answers to a new procedure or problem, so they choose not to address the issue until they have all the information. They are fearful of appearing as weak leaders or stupid, so they choose not to talk about the situation. Meanwhile, the employees are spending time speculating and starting rumors that may be untrue or worse than the actual situation.

The best course of action is to share with your employees what you do know about the situation and also admit the parts that are unknown. This will increase employee loyalty and gain their respect for you as a leader.

Keeping people in the loop can be accomplished by a wide range of methods. From regular staff meetings to memos, choose a system that works best with your work environment and with your employees. Don't be afraid to ask for their input on how to best communicate with them for the greatest impact on their ability to achieve their job responsibilities.

DESIGN AN AWARENESS PROGRAM

Most businesses thrive on each department or team to contribute their portion to the end product or service. But, many times, employees are not aware how each piece of the puzzle fits together to achieve the end result.

During a recent trip to a large florist shop, I visited several departments that were responsible for an enormous daily output of floral creations. The three key departments that I spent the most time in were telephone sales, design, and delivery. Each department had many employees who worked to keep up with the daily volume of business. And each department seemed to detest the other departments, because they felt under appreciated by co-workers for their contribution to the end product.

The telephone sales department complained that if it wasn't for them the orders wouldn't be taken,

the designers wouldn't know what to create, and of course the delivery people would not know where to deliver the order. And the designers thought their jobs were the most important, because no one would have a job if it were not for them creating outstanding arrangements.

The delivery people thought they had the most important job, because if it weren't for them, the floral arrangements would never get to the intended receivers, so no one else would have a job.

The owner would have been wise to initiate an awareness program or cross-training program to educate the employees on the importance of each of their jobs within the business. Spending a day or part of a day with another person in a different department is helpful in the process of creating a greater awareness of the responsibilities and challenges they face. The interaction has a likelihood of establishing a greater appreciation between the employees. In cultivating great employees, it is helpful for them to understand how each department affects the end product or service that is provided to the customer. Employees who possess a broader knowledge and can see how the pieces of the puzzle fit together will be a greater asset to the business.

Cultivating employees can be accomplished by many different methods. The methods do not have to be fancy or elaborate. The key is that you are making the effort to incorporate them into your everyday work agenda. Cultivating great employees just makes good business sense! **OFA**

2001 Ohio Regional Poinsettia Cultivar Evaluation

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PART I: CONSUMER EVALUATION

This year's trial, again sponsored by the Ohio Florists' Association Grower Extension Committee and The Ohio State University (OSU), Department of Horticulture and Crop Science, has just been completed. The trial has two distinct parts, a consumer evaluation portion on which we are reporting in this part of the article, and a grower evaluation, which will be the subject of Part II of this article.

With one exception, the design of the consumer evaluation portion of this trial is similar to that used for the last three years. It was again held in conjunction with the poinsettia sale run by the horticulture honorary society Pi Alpha Xi (PAX) on November 29, 30, and December 1. PAX customers typically are Ohio State University faculty, staff, students, plus a portion of Franklin County residents attracted by ads in local newspapers that come to the University to buy their poinsettias. A high percentage – we estimate as high as 95 percent – of those who walk through the door leave with at least one poinsettia. It was 312 of those poinsettia buyers whom we asked to participate in our evaluation. This is an increase of 18 percent over the number of last year's participants – our previous high.

This year, we had 52 new cultivars, a few of which

were older standards for comparison. Five wholesale/retail growers around Ohio – with one plant of each cultivar being sent to OSU by each grower – grew these cultivars. The greenhouses that participated in the trial were Barco Sons Inc. in Medina, Bostdorff Greenhouse Acres in Bowling Green, Diefenbacher's Greenhouse in Cincinnati, Dill's Greenhouse in Columbus, and Lakewood Greenhouse in Toledo. The poinsettias were grown under similar conditions (The cultural specifics are presented in the follow-up grower evaluation beginning on page 12.) and delivered to OSU one to three days prior to the consumer evaluation. They were placed in the Howlett Hall greenhouse, where they were later evaluated. All plants of each cultivar were grouped together (no replication), with cultivars being numbered and randomized on the bench. No attempt was made to group cultivars by color or type. Because plants were not sleeved or boxed for any significant length of time, their handling more closely approximates that typical in a retail greenhouse than a box store.

The cultivars used in this trial are listed in Table 1. Dummen USA, Stanwood, Washington; Paul Ecke Ranch, Encinitas, California; Fischer USA, Boulder, Colorado; Oglevee Ltd., Connellsville, Pennsylvania; and Selecta/ HMA, North Kingsville, Ohio, generously supplied rooted cuttings.

We asked consumers to walk through the greenhouse and rate each cultivar, based on its overall appeal on a 5-point scale with "5" being the top score. Earlier in this article, we mentioned an exception to the similarities

in the design of this and the previous year's trials. The difference is that we asked participants this year to place a silent auction bid (if they so chose) on up to three cultivars (one plant per cultivar) that they would be willing to come back and purchase at the price they listed. We set the minimum bid at \$10, which was PAX's price for the same size (6.5-inch) poinsettias they were selling. The evaluators were told that the proceeds of the auction would go to PAX.

This differs from the question that we asked the previous two years, which was "What three (i.e. up to three) cultivars do you like so much that you would buy them if you found them in a store?" Both questions help identify "niche market" cultivars, i.e. cultivars that a significant group of people like very, very much, but only receive average ratings because there is also a sizable group of consumers who don't like them well at all. The advantage of this year's question is that it may be a better measure of actual buying behavior and perhaps, therefore, a better indicator of niche market potential. About 81 percent of the people with the highest bids came back to pay for and take home their poinsettia(s). This is a good return rate considering the evaluation and auction were held at the end of the quarter and many people were on vacation or home for the holidays.

So what are this year's results? From one standpoint, they were very similar to last year's – seven of the top 10 cultivars were red (Table 1). Last year, 8 of the top 10 cultivars were red. This year's top-rated

reds included 'Rebel Red,' 'Orion Red,' 'Max Red,' 'Red Elf,' 'Christmas Cookie,' 'Premium Red,' and 'Festival Red.' There was a slight difference in ratings by gender. Males tended to rate some non-red and novelty cultivars, including 'Sonora White Glitter,' 'Cortez Burgundy,' 'Winter Rose Red,' and 'Coco Pink' a little higher. Women rated some of the reds higher, including 'Red Elf,' 'Early Joy,' 'Royal Red,' 'Red Diamond,' 'Christmas Candy,' and 'Elegance Bright Red.' The exceptions to this observation were the novelties 'Carousel' and 'Silverstar Marble,' which women rated higher than men.

The youngest age group in our study, the 18-to-25-year-olds, in general, gave lower overall rating scores than the other age groups. It was exhibited in many of the individual cultivar ratings. Exceptions to this observation were the cultivars 'Monet Twilight', which the youngest age group rated a little higher than the others, and 'Cortez Burgundy', which the two youngest age groups rated higher than the two older age groups.

It is interesting to note that some of the top-rated reds in last year's trial that were included in this year's trial did not rate as high. This is despite the fact that they were produced in the same greenhouses each year. What a difference a season can make. A take-home message is that these results should only serve as guidelines. Growers need to trial new cultivars in their own facility before making a major shift in cultivar selection.

The non-red cultivars in the top 10 ratings included

'Sonora White Glitter,' 'Jingle Bells,' and 'Snowberry Punch.' 'Sonora White Glitter' was included in last year's trial where it received only an average rating, but it was the top "would buy" favorite. This year, not only was it among the top-rated cultivars, it also received the most silent auction bids (33) and its top bid (\$26) was among the highest made for any cultivar. Other varieties receiving top bids include: 'Winter Rose Red' (20 bids, top bid \$25), 'Cortez Burgundy' (19 bids, top bid \$25), 'Plum Pudding' (14 bids, top bid \$30), 'Jingle Bells' (12 bids, top bid \$20), 'Silverstar Marble' (11 bids, top bid \$25), 'Snowberry Punch' (11 bids, top bid \$15), 'Strawberries & Cream' (10 bids, top bid \$20), 'Rebel Red', (7 bids, top bid \$15), 'Santa Claus Marble' (6 bids, top bid \$14), and "Orion Red" (6 bids, top bid \$12). Of these top 11 cultivars, only 'Rebel Red' and 'Orion Red' are reds.

Changing the second question from "Would you buy?" to "What would you bid?" had a major impact on response. In 2000, 83 of 272 (about 30 percent) poinsettia buyers said that they would buy the top selection 'Sonora White Glitter' if they found it in a store. This year, 33 of 312 participants (about 10 percent) placed a silent auction bid for the same cultivar (again the top selection) and came back to OSU to pay for the plants. Is this new question a better measure of niche market potential? It is definitely a better indicator of consumer behavior than the old question. Having bidders come back and pay for their plants, though, may lessen the impulse aspect of buying behavior and make our silent auction a conservative measure of market potential. To help address this issue, we want to work with a number of central Ohio retail florists on cultivar selection and sales tracking in the future.

Table 1. Consumer ratings of the poinsettia cultivars at the 2001 Ohio Regional Poinsettia Cultivar Evaluation.

OFA

2001 OHIO REGIONAL POINSETTIA CULTIVAR EVALUATION

PART 2: GROWER EVALUATION

The grower trials were held December 6 at Bostdorff Greenhouse Acres in Bowling Green and Lakewood Greenhouse in Toledo; December 7 at Barco and Sons Inc. in Medina; December 10 at Dill's Greenhouse in Columbus; and December 11 at Diefenbacher's Greenhouse in Cincinnati. This is a change from previous years, when the grower trials were typically held during the week and a half prior to Thanksgiving. This move was necessitated by the fact that later varieties were not yet showing full color, which introduced a bias into the evaluations. Moving the grower evaluations to the first and second weeks of December put it into the middle of poinsettia shipping season for many growers. With heavy promotion by local grower groups and ourselves, we had a turnout that was equal to or better than previous years. More than 120 growers, sales reps, and others turned out for the five evaluations. This report will focus only on the 89 growers who participated.

The setup was similar to that described already for the consumer evaluation in Part 1, except that only one plant of each cultivar was presented for evaluation. They were numbered and placed on a bench in random order with enough space given to each plant that they could be considered individually.

As in the consumer evaluation, we asked growers to rate the individual cultivars on overall appeal on a 5-point scale with "5" being the top score. We also asked growers to tell us which cultivars (if any, up to 3 cultivars) that they would trial or grow in their own greenhouses next year because of what they saw in this year's trial.

The results of the grower trial are presented in Table 2. Because growing conditions differed to some degree among the five facilities, summary grower response data is presented for each location. While in general, there was relative agreement in cultivar ratings among the trial locations, there were a number of exceptions. For example, 'Coco Pink' rated well (3.7 to 4.4) everywhere except at Diefenbacher's in Cincinnati where it only rated a 2.4. An overall grower rating average was also calculated and used to sort the cultivars in the table.

The overall averages for the growers and consumers (last row of Table 2), suggests that growers evaluated cultivars a little more critically than consumers. While 70 percent of the top 10 picks among consumers (Table 1) were reds, only 40 percent of the growers' top 10 selections were red. 'Freedom Red', 'Christmas Dream', 'Orion Red', and 'Prestige Red' were the four reds among the top grower ratings.

'Cortez Burgundy', 'Sonora White Glitter', 'Monet Twilight', 'DaVinci', 'Nutcracker Salmon,' and 'Nutcracker Pink' were non-reds/novelties among the top grower ratings. 'Cortez Burgundy', 'Sonora White Glitter,' and 'DaVinci' were also among the top consumer selections.



Growers said that 'Cortez Burgundy' (48), 'Sonora White Glitter'(29), 'Christmas Dream' (15), 'Strawberries & Cream' (8), 'Prestige Red' (8), 'Nutcracker Salmon' (8), 'DaVinci' (7), and 'Nutcracker Pink'(7) were the cultivars that they were most interested in trialing next year. Most of these cultivars are very new, and this trial was the first (or among the first) exposure(s) that many of the growers had to them. 'Strawberries & Cream' is an interesting inclusion to this list, because its overall rating was generally low. Despite that fact, some growers appear to perceive its potential consumer appeal.

Growers in this evaluation expressed interest in or highly rated a number of the cultivars in which consumers in Part 1 of this article also expressed interest. To get a better measure of how well growers are or plan to address consumer cultivar priorities, we might add a question to next year's grower evaluation asking them indicate which cultivars they are growing for 2002.

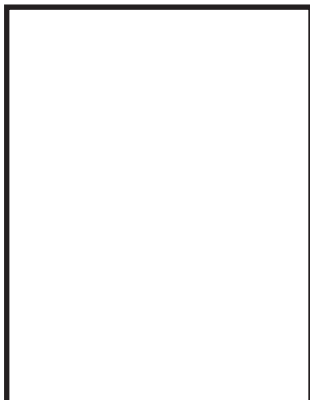
In a "wrap-up" article in a later *Bulletin*, we will follow this trial presentation with the results of a limited postproduction trial that is continuing. We sleeved and boxed three plants each of 'Christmas Cookie,' 'Rebel Red,' 'Sonora White Glitter,' 'Max Red,' 'Cortez Burgundy,' 'Orion Red,' 'Red Elf,' and 'Jingle Bells' for 48 hours beginning December 3. They were then placed unsleeved under "room conditions." These will be described in the wrap-up article. All of the cultivars were holding up as of New Year's Day with the exception of 'Cortez Burgundy.' Also in the article, growers from the five trial sites will share the cultural practices under which they produced their crops.

Acknowledgments: In addition to the poinsettia breeders/suppliers, we would like to thank Terry Diefenbacher, Walter Krueger, Jane Ellsworth, Jerry Dill, and Richard Bostdorff for the time and resources shared with us in producing the poinsettias for the trial. We thank Audry Bates and David Snodgrass at The Ohio State University who made crucial contributions in data collection and care of the plants at the University. Thank you also to Mike McCabe of McCabe's Greenhouse & Floral and the OFA Grower Extension Committee for their involvement in conceiving, organizing, and sponsoring the trial.

Table 2. Grower ratings of the poinsettia cultivars at the 2001 Ohio Regional Poinsettia Cultivar Evaluation.

THE NOVICE & CONTAINER GARDENING

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It is December 31, 2001 as I write this. The poinsettias are gone. The Easter lilies are on the benches. Life goes on. I don't know about you, but I am looking forward to 2002. 2001 was a tough year. At Ellison's, we have positioned ourselves for another challenging year. The difference is we know going into the year we have to implement our "back to the basics" plan in all areas – even in our container gardening programs.

Container gardening is relatively new at Ellison's. I marvel at the greenhouse operations that have been doing it for years and doing it so successfully. We are still novices hoping to get it right. Part of the reason we are novices is because we have focused on traditional potted blooming and foliage production. In the last few years, we have expanded our product line and added items like herbs, perennials, and container gardening, because we have had to expand our customer base from independent retail florists, supermarkets, and interiorscapes to include independent garden centers. Each segment of our market is riding on the tails of gardening being the number one hobby in America.

Another reason we are still novices is because, as independent as Texas is, it is very traditional. It takes three to five years for products and trends to hit Texas. We go to the OFA Short Course to see new varieties and new products, and we come home all excited. No matter how much marketing and selling we do, Martha Stewart has to talk about it three years before consumers are willing to buy it. Scented geraniums are just now part of the buying patterns of major cities in Texas. Container gardening is just now ripe for Texans.

I share this to explain why we have to do our container gardening somewhat differently than most. We have to have it basic and traditional enough that it will sell. It doesn't matter how much I like some products and designs and "wish" everyone would like them. (Boy, what a hard lesson to learn!) The majority of what we produce we know will sell. We introduce new products and concepts with each segment of our market on a very limited basis.

At this point in our container program, we utilize the expertise of the industry for our designs and product selection. I hope in a few years we will be more innovative, but until then, what a wealth to draw on there is. We get our designs and a lot of our product selections from Dr. Teri Starman of Texas A&M University (she has great handouts that are easy to read and easy to follow. She also is part of the wonderful website www.aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu). She has done numerous

talks about container production. We also use the wonderful book that Kirsten Ouellet did called *EuroAmerican Container Garden Cookbook*. Between the two of these ladies, even we can become experts.

We use the basic elements of design: tall, accent/focal, fillers, and something trailing down the container. We also use odd numbers of plants. We use the color wheel to ensure our plants our complimentary. Our containers range from 10 to 22 inches.

We do have to be careful, though. Texas weather is brutal in the summer. All of the wonderful annuals and perennials that do well on the West Coast, East Coast, and most of the United States will not tolerate the heat in Texas summers. I have yet to see geraniums in full bloom in August in the direct sun. Some products labeled "full sun" mean "shade" here. And the ones labeled "shade" mean they will not grow. I think all labels should say "This is the way it is – except in Texas." That's another way of saying we select product that is heat tolerant and more drought resistant. This does limit our product selection.

We will use vegetative annuals, seeded annuals, perennials, and foliage. We work with all suppliers looking for the best variety of product that will do well in our area. For the vegetative annuals, most of what we will use is bacopa, petunia, coleus, vinca, begonia, calib, and dianthus. For the perennials we will use salvia, lantana, verbena, penta, phlox, and lobelia. For the foliage containers we use nephtytis, marginata, pothos ivy, diffenbachia, spath, calathea, and ferns. Foliage containers are mainly for our interiorscapes and are not limited to our spring or summer container production. This is a very new area for us and we are excited about it.

I said earlier that even our container gardening program had to go back to the basics when we started. We looked for containers that could be multi-use. We started out with fancy ground and hanging basket containers. The challenge was we had so much invested in the pots/baskets that we had to limit the product, and in some cases, priced ourselves out of the market. We have learned to work with our customers to stress lower cost containers for more variety, color, and style of plants. Our containers are shipped with no pot or hanging basket showing. This is a very simple thing, but a very basic concept.

Like every crop we do, the goal is to make money. I believe container gardening is profitable and can be very profitable as long as it does not become a commodity. Not to get on the old bandwagon, but ... you have to know your costs and you must sell "different" product at a premium. I was outraged this year to find out some growers were selling 'Plum Pudding,' 'Winter Rose,' and 'Carousel' at the same price they were selling red poinsettias. What were they thinking? How are we going to increase prices if our own growers don't value the concept "premium products?" At our Poinsettia Celebration this year, consumers did not hesitate to pay \$4 and \$5 more for novelties like 'Winter Rose,' 'Carousel,' and 'Plum Pudding.' My buyers didn't mind either.

My theory is this: You produce container gardens that can make money for your buyer and you, and your buyer will come back for more. Pretty basic and it works.

My wish for each of us in 2002 is that we may all be wiser, more basic, more passionate, and more committed to our industry in 2002 because of 2001. Our industry needs that, and we need our industry.

OFA

Branding: An Industry Joint Venture

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Branding is a term that has gotten more discussion in our industry than any other marketing issue. Embraced or dismissed, branding has been the topic of more programs, forums, trade articles, and dinner table arguments than anything since the first Home Depot garden center opened.

As with so many other issues in our industry, brand-

ing has taken an us-vs.-them mentality, with independent retailers participating in a love-hate relationship with the proliferation of vendor-supported “branded” programs. In all the confusion, our industry’s consumer presentation has come in second. In the end, branded products are only valuable in so much as they attract customers and enhance margins. And, it is clear that brands do just that everywhere else in retailing. Why not in the green industry?

Before I take a stand on branding, a definition is helpful. The best one I’ve seen is in David D’Alessandro’s

Brand Warfare: 10 Rules for Building the Killer Brand. D’Alessandro, a long-time public relations professional who was on the team that invented Orville Reddenbacher’s popcorn and most recently is CEO at John Hancock, defines branding as taking a commodity and adding personality and promise. He also points out that brands are created over a period of time. Both of these concepts are important to remember in our industry’s fledgling branding efforts.

Perhaps the best example of a brand created over time by adding personality and promise to a commodity is Atlanta’s own Coca-Cola – an international branded presence created from flavored carbonated water. Over time, with the use of consumer benefit positioning that first targeted women, Coca-Cola has used everything from fresh faces singing about teaching the world to sing (while being refreshed by a Coke) to lovable Polar bears, to create a consistent personality and promise – a product that is

not only good for the individual, but good for the entire world. The Coca-Cola Museum in Atlanta, where visitors pay admission to hear the Coca-Cola message, is almost embarrassing in its presentation of the product and the company as a world presence. That’s a long way from colored water. But it all happened by the D’Alessandro definition: over time with personality and promise.

In the green industry, the closest to a branded product to date is the Wave petunia. What could be more of a commodity than a petunia? This one, however, comes with the promise of superior color and “Ride the Wave” personality; this is not your grandmother’s petunia.

Both the Coca-Cola and the Wave models illustrate another characteristic of brand creation: the brand is based initially on a single product. When that product – Classic Coke, the Big Mac, or Purple Wave – is completely established as a brand, only then do effective extensions work.

Continued on page 16

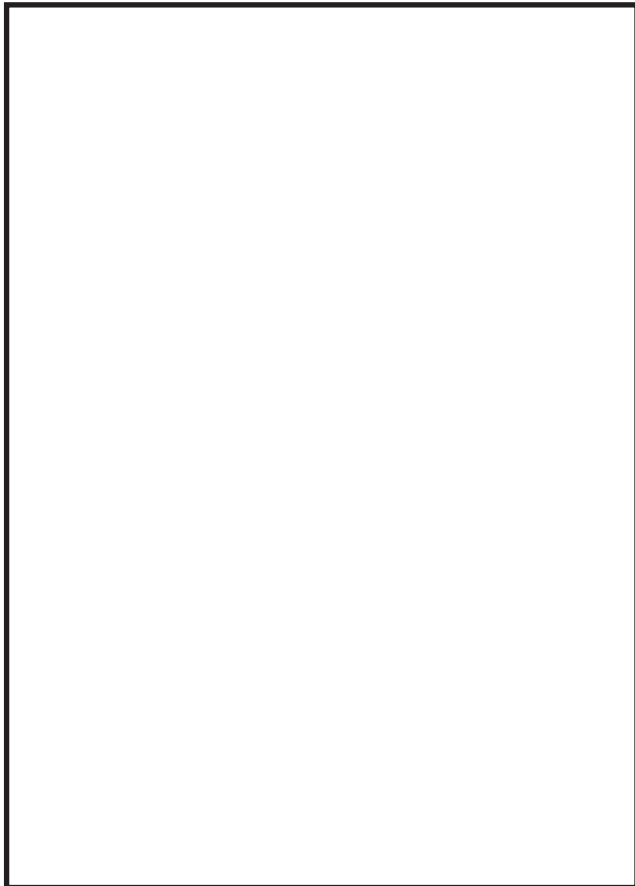


Figure 1. The Gardens to Go™ collections at A Proper Garden are designed to increase average sales by making customer-buying decisions easier while supporting the garden center’s positioning statement “Creating the garden you’ve always imagined.”



Figure 2. Simply Beautiful™ promises a product that’s easy to use, with positioning that gives the product real personality as a “Weekend Getaway” – a brand in the making. *Photo courtesy of Ball Horticulture.*

BRANDING: AN INDUSTRY JOINT VENTURE

Continued from page 15

In our industry, the attempt to establish entire plant collections as brands has come with serious consumer limitations. Not all products in the collection have proved to be of equal consumer appeal; the weaker elements of the product line have diluted the impact of the brand. One rule holds true of all brands: no amount of promotion will establish a second-rate product. All you have to do is remember "New Coke" to prove that no one has deep enough pockets to sell a product, branded or not, that consumers don't want. So product mix is key.

So, what about branding in the green industry under the D'Alessandro definition? The brands, already established over time, that consumers interpret as having

both personality and promise are the independent garden centers. In a research project conducted by P.K. Data, consumers reported that they selected the individual retail garden center first, for both its personality and its promise, and made individual product selections second. The implication is that products selected by the garden center are trusted by the consumer. Consumers like to shop the store because they like the feel of the shopping experience – the personality, and they believe the garden center staff will provide good product selection and information – the promise.

I would even suggest that part of the promise the consumer interprets from the independent garden center is an implicit guaran-

tee of product quality, whatever the written policy may be. Certainly, putting that guarantee into simple straightforward language is one of the most viable choices an independent retailer can make.

So, if the store is the brand, what are all these vendor-supported programs? Simply put, they are merchandising programs that may or may not become brands. Programs that meet the demand of fulfilling both the personality and promise of the product positioning will over time become brands. Those choices will be made by the consumer.

Are branding programs – store and product – good for the green industry? Yes! The objective of all market-

ing is to add perceived value to the product. That's another way of saying, "Take a commodity and add personality and promise." If a product or a store delivers the personality and the promise the consumer wants, that product and that store are in the transition from commodity to brand with all the inherent value ascribed by the customer to a branded product. For our industry, this transition represents a joint venture opportunity for retailers and suppliers.

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