

house industry.

"The nursery of the future will be an important component of profitable diversified agricultural production systems providing fresh, locally grown flowers, decorative plants, and vegetables at competitive prices (1).

LITERATURE CITED

1. Kutz, L. J., G. E. Miles, G. W. Krutz and P. A. Hammer. 1986. Robots in the Greenhouse. *Greenhouse Grower* 4(9):14-17.

MARKETING NURSERY CROPS

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Marketing is defined in various ways, but I will define it as the process of promoting sales and presenting the value and use of a product to potential consumers. It sounds simple enough. Everyone is deluged with a vast assortment of marketing ploys every day on television, radio, through newspapers, magazines, and billboards. Many of the products we buy are designed to enhance marketing of the same product in the future. Repeat purchases are encouraged by labels, colors, designs, and other information that we see every time we use the product. The toothpaste you use every morning is in a brightly-colored container to remind you of the brand you purchased and to increase the likelihood of getting you to purchase it again. The manufacturer of the toothpaste advertises it in an assortment of ways to try to retain you as a customer, but you must make your purchase at a local outlet.

Contrast these techniques with the practices most used in the nursery business. The wholesale grower produces a dynamic, attractive, growing and useful product and sells it to a retail nurseryman, garden center operator, or landscape contractor. Once the plants leave the wholesale nursery, little or no further thought, planning, or promotion of the product occurs. In essence, the wholesale nurseryman is turning over the future of the product entirely to the purchaser. In the past, the purchasers eventually came back and made additional purchases, so it was assumed that all was well.

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The nursery industry creates an assortment of attractive, useful, interesting, intriguing, imaginative, colorful, fruitful, energy-conserving, privacy-enhancing, shade-providing, dynamic products that increase in value with time and generally function for many years. Who else offers a product that increases in value? Maybe a stockbroker if the consumer is lucky, but there is moderate to substantial risk. If the various trees and shrubs are selected carefully to fit the site, planted properly and given reasonable care, an increase in value of the nursery product as well as the surrounding buildings and grounds is nearly assured. Yet the consuming public purchases clothes, appliances, automobiles, and a myriad of other products worth billions and billions of dollars that drastically decrease in value as soon as the transaction is completed. If the nursery product is so dynamic and generally increases in value, why is it 10 laps behind in the race for the consumer's dollars?

I believe the answer lies in the marketing techniques used. Does the manufacturer of Crest toothpaste sell his product to the grocer, discount or drug store in your neighborhood unidentified as to its origin, function, and effectiveness and leave it up to the local retailer to market the product? Does General Motors sell the local Chevrolet dealer new cars with no further input or aid in marketing those vehicles? *Certainly not!* Does McDonald's sell you a hamburger so that the next time you want a hamburger you go to any store that sells a hamburger? They sell you a Big Mac, not a hamburger, and where can you get another Big Mac? Only at McDonald's!

I do not know of anyone in the wholesale nursery industry, at the present time, that is effectively marketing their products to the consumer. They sell only to the intermediary and ignore any responsibility to market their product further. Most of the larger nurseries do tag their plants as to name, using a tag with the wholesale nursery logo, but is this of any value in the marketing of the product to the consumer? Very little. Since the consumer has never heard of B-Bob Wholesale Nursery, there is no tie, identity, association, or allegiance. And what was the name of that new plant just off the patio that is growing so well and has such beautiful flowers? "I am sorry, Neighbor Smith, but I just cannot remember, and the tag is lost or no longer legible. Maybe the fellow at Q-tip Garden Center will remember if you describe it to him." Slim chance! The customer is delighted with the product and would share with others if only the product could be identified. Why does your car say Chevrolet on the hood, trunk and dash as well as the specific model of Chevrolet on several locations? In addition, a fairly detailed booklet came with this product of declining value when it was originally purchased. An unfair analogy? Then what about that tube of toothpaste you use every morning, or the razor, or the can of coffee, or . . . ?

If nursery markets are to expand, I feel there are several steps that must be taken:

1. The wholesale producer must become involved in marketing the product beyond the intermediate retail nursery, garden center, or landscape contractor. The Nursery Marketing Council is fine, but promotion needs to be more specific and localized.

2. Attractive labels that carry key information about the product must be attached to the product at the wholesale or producer level. These labels should be sufficiently durable to remain legible and attractive for the life of the product. You can still read "Crest" when the toothpaste tube is empty.

3. A recognition or identity must be established, creating a link between consumer and producer through the intermediary retail nursery or garden center, to create an allegiance. A wholesale nursery of any size can do this effectively with some imagination and effort.

4. The wholesale nursery must promote its new, more adaptable, larger products to the consumer. Effective promotion will create demand from consumer to intermediate retail nursery or garden center and back to the wholesale nursery. Do you think that Ford would leave to the local dealer the promotion of the new LTD super grand brougham with landau roof, opera windows, radially-tuned suspension and a new fuel-injected engine that is so much fun to own and drive that you simply must have one? Never!

Using the producer to retailer to consumer technique, new species or cultivars of trees or shrubs can be introduced quickly and effectively. The wholesale nursery has resisted growing any new species or cultivars for years because, "We cannot get the retail nurseries to buy them." The flip side of the record is also frequently heard at the retail nurseries and garden centers, "We can't get the wholesale nurseries to grow them."

The consuming public is interested in new plants but is continually fed the same old diet because of poor marketing techniques. If a wholesale nursery, or group of nurseries, grew a sizable quantity of a new cultivar and, in cooperation with the retail nurseries and garden centers in a region, promoted the unique qualities of this new introduction to the general public, an immediate demand would be created. If the retail nurseries and garden centers do not want to cooperate in the venture, the wholesale nurseries should do it alone.

I am not proposing that a wholesale nursery immediately go into the retail business as I feel you can do only one thing well. Rather, the nursery should create a demand for its product at the retail level. If consumers ask for a new product by name and it is possible for the retail nurseryman to get it, he will, and quickly. If the product is good and the customer is satisfied and returns to the retail nursery, the process is enhanced. On the other hand, if the

wholesale nursery promotes a new plant or cultivar with little or no testing and the new product performs poorly, the retail nursery will be hesitant to participate in the future. High quality products are essential if the system is to work.

5. The interest in horticultural products in general and landscape plants in particular is tremendous. The better the product, the greater the demand. When speaking to non-horticultural groups about various plants, invariably someone laments, "I planted one of those once and it died." To some degree they are "turned off" to buying more because the product did not perform as expected.

Perhaps the wholesale nursery should share some responsibility with the retail nursery or garden center if the product does not perform. There is a clear relationship between techniques used in producing the product and how it performs. Sears did not get to be the number one retailer of merchandise by saying, "sorry", when a product performs poorly. A satisfied customer is relatively quiet, but a dissatisfied customer shares his experience far and wide.

The pessimist notes, "If every plant lived, the market would soon be saturated." My position is just the reverse—if nursery products consistently performed well, almost in spite of the actions of the retailer or consumer, there would be much more interest and willingness to add more or make replacements. We must accentuate the positive, "sell the sizzle", and enhance the image and quality of nursery products in the eyes of the consumer. This can only be done through effective marketing.