

The Challenges of Live Plant Exporting

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The Australia business sector is frequently being enticed to reap the financial rewards of product export to international destinations. However many potential “exporters” hesitate at the first phase of marketing due to the unforeseen complexity of the challenge. Following is a summary, from personal experience, of the steps which were taken to develop a market for Australian-produced nursery products. Our number one marketing goal was to: BUILD GLOBAL RELATIONSHIPS BY GIVING CUSTOMERS WHAT THEY WANT

STEP 1: MARKET IDENTIFICATION

Potential markets were initially targeted from information provided from the following sources:

- Austrade
- Department of Economic Development and Trade
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- State Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Department of Tourism, Small Business and Industry
- Internet
- Allied multinational companies (i.e., landscape design companies)

From the initial market information, a program of regular visits to the potential market place by the directors and key employees was undertaken to gather background information on the “local” market, identify possible products for that market and company introduction to possible customers. The markets with the best potential for Australia nursery products were identified as:

- Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Philippines
- Japan, Taiwan, China
- New Caledonia, Tahiti, France
- United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia

STEP 2: MARKET DEVELOPMENT

The following strategies in sequence were employed:

- 1) Establishment of a dedicated export division:
Export services coordinator;
Export manager.
This shows a professional commitment to your customers.
- 2) Build a network of suppliers (Australian and international) and influencers:
Designed around customer requirements;
With a reputation for timely delivery and continuity of supply.
- 3) Obtain Quality Assurance Accreditation to ISO 9002 standard. This standard is internationally recognised by the most desirable clients.

- 4) Promotion and advertising: Best results have been obtained through the latest multimedia technology, i.e., Internet and CD ROM.
- 5) Invite overseas clients to Australia:
 - To visit your business facilities;
 - To visit appropriate suppliers within your network who can supply your client requirements.

It is very important to provide hospitality to an international standard, be patient and take the time to fully explain all questions. This provides a solid foundation to building those long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships. Many of the potential customers for live plant products are from emerging third world countries and they may not be familiar with the technology.

- Training our customers' and suppliers' staff — overseas and in Australia. Plants are highly perishable items so all steps in the supply chain are very important for maintaining product quality for the end user. This step is most critical in the continuation of a business relationship.
- Meeting challenging requests. A common request from potential customers, "We would like something different". Australia is in a unique position of having an extensive variety of different plant products. The challenge is being able to fulfil these requests. It often requires the adoption of basic plant production procedures, careful but thorough logistics planning, and the confidence to succeed. Success in meeting requests builds company reputation and generally leads to an expanding market as "happy customers spread the word".

The marketing of plants internationally should be viewed as an extension of your marketing program for your existing customers. Servicing this market will require patience and tenacity but the returns both financially and culturally are worth the effort.