

Raising Consumer Awareness of Your Nursery's Products[©]

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INTRODUCTION

It takes years of hard work to develop and commercialise new plants but that is just the start — then you have to market them. This paper outlines some of the key ways to get your plants in front of the consumer.

ENTICING CUSTOMERS TO BUY YOUR PLANT

Excite Them

It is crucial when selling any plant — either to the consumer directly, or the retailer in volume, that you pique their interest. Explain how the customer will benefit from owning it. For example, if you are selling a new type of fern (not necessarily the most visually stimulating of plants), explain how there is no better a group of plants than ferns for dealing with those “problem corners.”

Inspire Them

Sell the promise of what the plant will provide, and how it can be grown with other plants. Sticking with ferns as our example, show that they are easy, low maintenance plants, that need minimal care. They are virtually immune to attack from slugs and other pests. They deliver a lot while asking for very little in return.

Plant Stories

The potential fern buyer will be amazed by your simple but graphic description of how ferns were around in the time of dinosaurs and astounded that in reproducing they produce billions of tiny spores. Find stories to make the customer exclaim “Wow!”

OBTAINING PRESS COVERAGE

A simple press release is your way in to editorial coverage in newspapers, magazines, and other media. You don't have to employ expensive PR agencies, but it is worth following a few simple rules if you wish to try producing your own press releases:

- Target your recipients carefully to avoid wasted effort, time, and money.
- Keep it short. Ideally, keep it to a single side of paper.
- Give your full name, address, email, website, and complete contact details.
- Pictures are essential. Nearly every form of media will want to see a photo of your plant or product before they decide whether to use the release or not. Most publishers prefer to use digital images. If you are sending out paper releases, submit a good quality print of the product and state that a high resolution digital image is available on request. If you are emailing the press release, always attach the image.
- Remember lead-times. A monthly or quarterly gardening magazine will work months in advance, so if you want consumers to know about your promotion in the first week of February, then you will need to send your releases out in November. Daily or weekly publications work much closer to their publication dates. Most publications will be happy to tell you when their deadlines are.

ACHIEVING THE BEST ADVERTISING

It is not hard to create a good advertisement. It must connect with its audience, be memorable and easily recalled, provide information quickly and succinctly, not confuse the reader or viewer or make them hunt for the pertinent information, and finally call the potential customer to action.

A good print advertisement has four elements: a provocative image; a strong headline; a paragraph or two of tight, well-written copy; your logo (if you have one); and contact information.

THE VALUE OF SHOWS, EXHIBITIONS AND OTHER EVENTS

Here are 10 reasons why you should invest in taking a stand at trade shows or consumer events:

Cost Effectiveness

With a simple sales stand, some technological accessories and selling charm, shows offer simple, inexpensive ways to get your brand on the market.

Target Market

Shows pull in a highly targeted market that is highly interested in your product. In just a few days, thousands of interested clients will see it.

New Audiences

Those attending will have made a positive decision to travel to learn about new brands, new products, and new lifestyle solutions.

Face Time

Events offer more personal time with your customers. Instead of communicating by phone or email, you can really engage with them.

Relationship Building

The personal interaction offered at shows allows you to establish a direct more effective relationship with your customer. This relationship is valuable in the future as you maintain a connection.

Sales Leads

New relationships and deeper connections open channels for new sales leads. You may find a new market that hasn't been tapped into yet.

Small Business Benefits

Smaller businesses sometimes struggle in establishing themselves in a market. Shows and exhibitions allow them to get their name in front of potential customers.

Year-Round Promotions

A one-time meeting at a show could result in year round marketing for you. Handing out brochures and verbally explaining the offer increases customer awareness.

Sampling

A major selling strategy is to give away product. This provides customers with something new to take away and enhances their awareness of you and your products.

Direct Selling

Probably the biggest reason companies take stands at shows is to directly sell their product, avoiding the complications of mail order, web-based or telephone selling, and enhancing interaction with your customers.

TELEVISION COVERAGE

The power of television cannot be underestimated. Any coverage you can achieve for your plant on, for example, programmes such as BBC Gardeners' World or The Beechgrove Garden, or ITV's Love Your Garden with Alan Titchmarsh, are likely to be

fleeting, though they do reach a very wide audience and appearances are known to have stimulated purchases.

A potentially more predictable and effective approach, however, could be to make use of the TV shopping channels. Over the past 20 years, TV shopping networks have exploded onto the retail scene. QVC, Ideal World, and Bid-Up TV, are a boon to entrepreneurs who can achieve extremely high exposure in a short period of time. Not every product suits the format or marketplace, so there are some questions to ask yourself: Does the plant or product demonstrate well? Does it solve an identifiable garden “problem” (or make gardening easier)? Does it have unique features and benefits? Does it appeal to a mass audience? Is it topical or timely? If you can answer yes to at least some of these, then it is worth approaching a shopping channel.

Your first step should be to look at the channel’s website. There you will find information on making an appointment with a buyer, to whom you will need to present your product. Just as with selling to a retail buyer, it is important to do your homework beforehand. Become familiar with the channel’s programming. Watch the gardening coverage, and note the products and lines so that you can talk with knowledge when making your presentation. And know your own quantities, delivery times, and bottom line. In some cases they will like your product, or plant, but it may not meet their criteria for price (the preferred minimum unit price is usually around £15 so that savings can be passed on to the consumer). But if you are not chosen the first time you try, do persist.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Consumers are using Twitter[®], Facebook[®], and other networks to communicate with each other. Do you or your company have a Facebook page, and if so do you know if it is driving traffic to plant offerings? Do you know how to integrate social media into your current communications? And is your social media integrated into your website? Integration of Facebook, Twitter, and your website, will save you a lot of time.

The people who like you on Facebook or follow you on Twitter are customers who want a relationship and the most successful commercial users of these media are those who engage with their fans. Many use Facebook to get fans excited about a product or brand, and create a place for customers to interact with each other and the company. Coupons, giveaways, and fan-only deals (making offers that are visible only to your Facebook “likers,” for example), when used with some thought and restraint, can be a great reward for your faithful. But it is important not to use social media for “hard selling” as although social media users will buy from brands they trust, trying to give them a hard sell will turn them off fast.

The companies who use social media most effectively are often those who have appointed someone enthusiastic on the staff as “social media champion” responsible for setting it up and running it.

APPENDIX

Some Key Trade Exhibitions

International Trade Fair for Plants (IPM), Essen, January
Garden Centre Association Winter Conference, (different location each year), January
Garden Press Event, London, February
British Plant Fair, Warwickshire, March
The Landscape Show, Olympia, London, March
HTA National Plant Show, Warwickshire, June
Fruit Focus, East Malling, Kent, July
Plantarium, The Netherlands, August
Four Oaks Trade Show, Cheshire, September
GLEE, National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, September
South West Growers Show, Devon, October
National Fruit Show, Kent, November

HortiFair, Holland, November
GroSouth, West Sussex, November

Some Key Consumer Shows

RHS Plant and Design Show, February
The Edible Garden Show, Warwickshire, March
RHS Show, Cardiff, April
Harrogate Spring Flower Show, April
Malvern Spring Gardening Show, May
RHS Chelsea Flower Show, May
Bloom, Dublin, May
Gardening Scotland, Edinburgh, May/June
BBC Gardeners' World Live, National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, June
Hampton Court Palace Flower Show, London, July
RHS Show Tatton Park, Cheshire, July
Shrewsbury Flower Show, August
Southport Flower Show, August
Harrogate Autumn Flower Show, September
Malvern Autumn Show, September

Consider linking your attendance at consumer shows with the specialist plant society most closely reflecting the range of plants you sell.