

## Mixing Up Your Marketing<sup>®</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

In today's economy you might ask, "how can my business afford marketing?" After all, every expense has been minimized and the pie that is our market has not increased in size. Despite the bleak outlook, what should be asked is "how can my business afford not to market itself?" Nurseries that are increasing sales are doing so by gaining market share. Essentially they are getting a larger piece of the pie while others' pieces are shrinking or going away all together. Market share is gained through successful promotion of products that exceed competitors' quality and are backed by excellent customer service.

### MIXING MARKETING STRATEGIES

Marketing is a strategy that involves communication and development of relationships with customers. The goal is to identify the customer, satisfy their needs, and keep them coming back for more. Not everyone responds to every channel of marketing. To reach the maximum audience for your products you need a mixture of marketing strategies. A person's generation has a lot to do with what type of marketing works for them. Older generations prefer relationship marketing involving face time and personal interaction. Newer generations thrive on technology and immediate information. Keep in mind that there are crossovers between generations. For example, a large portion of older generations has been quick to adapt to new technology. The main idea is that there is no single marketing strategy that will serve all of your potential customers. A multi-faceted approach is necessary to have an impact on your market. That is why there is advertising via TV, radio, print, billboards, and the Internet.

After the economic downturn there was a resounding theme in the seminar circuit. That theme was: Do not cut marketing. That is a hard pill to swallow when everything else is being cut. At Bennett's Creek Nursery we kept our marketing going and actually increased our efforts while keeping a tight budget.

A few years ago, the marketing at Bennett's Creek Nursery consisted of the standard green industry mix. We had a catalog, a website with pictures and availability, we went to tradeshows, and we were offering a simple label to garden centers with their price and logo. We sent out availabilities via email and fax to those who requested it.

In the past few years, many changes have been made to how Bennett's Creek Nursery is marketed. No outside marketing or P.R. firm has been used. All concepts and designs came from our staff and myself. The following information is a summary of what has been utilized during this down economy to maintain sales. The key to justifying marketing expenditures is to track the results of your marketing. With each facet of our marketing I will touch on how we track the results.

## WEBSITE

Our website is aimed to be an information source. It has the basics including locations, directions, hours, personnel, and policies. We have links to PDF versions of all of our print media such as catalogs, posters, and brochures. The site also includes a database of our products updated daily including descriptions and photos. When logged in a customer can view prices and availability. Availability can be viewed online by an individual item, a group of items, or a location. Customers can also choose to download an easy-to-read PDF availability or an editable Excel® availability.

When maintaining a website it is important to keep content fresh. It is disappointing to see old specials and past announcements. Since we are in a seasonal business, parts of a website should change to feature items that go with the season. A big part of keeping things fresh is maintaining a marketing calendar of what should go up and come down from the site at different times. Check for past dates and dead links on a regular basis.

The web content should look professional. The person taking photos should be competent in proper exposure (not too dark or bright), composition (the way the subject is aligned and how it fills the frame), and focus. If you decide to include videos use a tripod and an external microphone. Shaky videos with poor audio are not watched for very long.

## VIDEOS

Videos can be hosted for free on YouTube. Once a video is uploaded you can either link to it or embed it in your web page which allows visitors to view the video without leaving your website. YouTube tracks the number of views and allows viewers to post comments. That data can be used to determine the effectiveness of your video content. Our videos get embedded on our website and links are included in our emails and on our Facebook page. The videos have been plant oriented and focus on what is currently looking good and the basic characteristics of the plants.

## GOOGLE ANALYTICS

To track the effectiveness of your website, Google offers a free service called Google Analytics <<http://www.google.com/analytics/>> that tracks your website's usage. You can see the number of visits, where visitors are from, what search terms brought them to your site, how long they visited, and more. Visit the Google site to learn more.

## CONSTANT CONTACT — TRACKING EMAIL USAGE

Previously, we would only email availability to the customers who requested it. We have since subscribed to Constant Contact <<http://search.constantcontact.com/>> and added our entire email list from our database. We send out weekly availabilities to all of our customers. Constant Contact gives customers a chance to opt out if they choose. We have the ability to track how many emails were opened and what links were clicked all the way down to an individual email address. Constant Contact gives you full control of tracking your email effectiveness. It is an ongoing experiment to include different content and subject lines to see what gets more people to open your email.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA: FACEBOOK AND TWITTER**

To further our online presence we have setup Facebook and Twitter pages. These social media outlets give customers quick access to updates and information about our business. We coordinate specials and announcements that are put on our website along with our social media. It allows our customers to find out information how they want to find out about it. Our twitter page is setup to tweet any posts that go on the Facebook page. Facebook also has advertising opportunities where you pick your spending limit and how much you are willing to pay per exposure or click with the ability to track the results. As with the website you need to keep content fresh.

## **DISPLAYING AT MANTS SHOW**

At the MANTS show in Baltimore each January we setup a 6.1 m × 6.1 m (20 ft × 20 ft) display that reaches 3.7 m (12 ft) tall. The display utilizes larger than life images to catch attention. We have kept the same structure for several years, but we update the graphical look every 2 or 3 years. For smaller shows there is a 3-m-wide (10-ft-wide) backdrop that features our house brand. Tradeshow success is tracked by booked orders. Rather than asking if we should continue to go to tradeshows, the question is typically "Can we afford not to be there?"

At the shows we have some handouts that help us to build visibility in the marketplace. We give out bags with our name and logo on them, note pads, and rulers. The results of these cannot be tracked other than all the show attendees that stop by to pick up a bag resulting in our bags are carried all around the tradeshow.

## **MOBILE SHOWROOM IN A DODGE SPRINTER VAN**

We setup a mobile showroom in a Dodge Sprinter van. The idea came from the Snap-On tool truck that would stop by and visit our mechanic on a regular basis. There is floor space and shelving for the plants. Fluorescent lights are on the ceiling and under the shelves. We used a van instead of a box truck because we can keep the showroom somewhat cool with the air conditioning.

The van travels around our local region and visits retailers showing what is looking good for the week. We make it possible for the buyers, who cannot leave to visit our farm, to see our plants. Customers generally make notes, then they turn in an order to our inside sales staff. The inside sales staff keeps track of orders that are influenced by visits from the van. We have seen a direct correlation between orders and visits from the van with some, but not all, customers.

To increase brand awareness in the local area we have put graphics on a couple of our vehicles. One of our local delivery trucks has our brand name on the side with a photo on the rear door that looks like the door is open and the truck is full of plants. Our mobile showroom van is also a rolling billboard.

## **POINT-OF-PURCHASE MARKETING MATERIALS**

To assist retailers in selling our products we offer an assortment of point-of-purchase (POP) marketing materials. Our first piece of visibility in a garden center is 1.8-m (6-ft) banners that has our brand and lets customers know that our plants are locally grown. When customers enter a garden center we have an A-frame sign that tells them too look for our tag. The sign features a brochure box with pamphlets that tell about our brand.

As retail customers shop they will find our branded tag with a picture of the plants' distinguishing features and descriptive information. The tag also includes a price and a barcode.

We print the tags ourselves using a Xerox color laser printer. The tag media comes from GrowTech Solutions (<<http://www.growtechsolutions.com/>>). We print tags that are six per page with a perforated stub where the price and barcode is printed. The tags are printed on demand, usually the day before the truck is loaded. The order pullers attach the tags with garment guns using a double-tee v-fastener. The tags cost us approximately 11¢ each.

Employees that help customers are instructed to dress professionally to appropriately represent our company. Sales related staff wears collared shirts embroidered with our logo and khaki shorts or pants. Shirt tails are tucked in and a belt is required. We also have all of our employees wear nametags. We order embroidered shirts in the spring and the fall. Half of the cost is shared with the employees.

### **WHAT TO GROW AND WHAT QUANTITY?**

What to grow and how much is the most challenging part of marketing. This is further complicated by the length of time to produce many of our products. Looking to the past can show us where we missed the mark, but it is not the entire basis of our product mix. The quantities sold are analyzed as well as the quantities dumped. If an item is dumped it needs to be looked at to whether it was from overproduction or quality or disease issues. If an item sells out and you could have sold more, then you have lost sales. If you track what you could have sold but did not because your supply ran out, then you have a better idea of what to produce for the future.

It is also important to analyze items that need a lot of care without much of a return. You may not be making as much as you think. We call these items dogs. It is necessary to accept that there are plants out there that we may not be good at growing, and we need to move on to other things. In contrast, there are items that can be grown easily, but have been commoditized to the point that the profitability is not as high as we would like. These items are used as order starters. Customers will first order the commodity items then add on other things to reach a minimum order amount. Product mix is evaluated in meetings that involve both sales and production.

### **SUMMARY**

This has been an overview on marketing strategies implemented by Bennett's Creek Nursery. Marketing varies according to what you grow, who your target customer is, where your target market is, and what your financial abilities are. The important thing is to always be on the lookout for ideas in our industry and outside of the industry. Take ideas and start on a small scale. Experiment, measure the results, and make changes as necessary. For maximum impact keep your marketing mixed with multiple strategies.