

## If Walt Disney Had Been a Propagator: A Look Outside the Box at How Propagators Can Develop Their Business®

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When I started my career as a propagator in the late 1960s the emphasis was on how to get plants to root. We did not consider the eventual consumer and marketing was something we left to those further up the supply chain.

It is now 2010 and we live in a different world. The propagator who does not understand the consumer or how to market could be left with a batch of rooted cuttings and no customers.

Walt Disney started his business career with a vision. He was an entrepreneur who understood the market and knew how to create the excitement with the product he was dealing with.

Today's propagator has to have the same mentality. The first critical question that should be asked is "How am I going to add value to my customer's life?" According to research that key consumer today is a 35-year-old woman. To get your plant to your consumer may mean that the plant has to travel through a number of agencies in the supply chain before it reaches your consumer.

This is a challenge you have to create a Unique Value Proposition. That means creating something unique that your customer wants to enable you to build your business and then ensuring the various agents in the supply chain can communicate the message to the next person in the chain.

To be successful you have to promote:

- Yourself as the propagator.
- Your business.
- The plant.
- The value the plant offers the consumer.
- Why they should buy this plant now.

This is something that is not unique to you or your business. All successful business operators face the same challenge. The challenge is how you tackle them as a propagator.

Walt Disney's approach would be as follows:

- 1) **The Propagator Is the Hero in the Chain.** You should promote yourself as the instigator in the process. Farmers are starting to do this and you can now see their faces being promoted in supermarkets. Dutch plant raisers are starting to do the same on their plant labels.
- 2) **Promote the Business.** It's not the product at this stage in the process that is important — it is your business. Promote its uniqueness, its history, and how it relates to the consumer.

- 3) **Promote the Product.** Allen Armitage, one of the U.S.A.'s plant guru's understands what marketing is all about. His latest book is "Legends in the Garden, Who in the World was Nellie Stevens?" He understands that the customer buys stories. He provides the stories behind the product. This is where the propagator has a huge opportunity. One group of growers in the U.S.A. has started "The Graceland's Collection" celebrating Elvis Presley, "The Kennedy Collection," and "Survival Elm" based on the elm in Oklahoma that survived the bomb terrorism in that city. Why not start the "Steve Irwin" collection or even the "Dame Edna" collection. (If you're wondering, Nellie Stevens is an American holly named after a plants woman.)
- 4) **The Value.** We have recently seen the discount wars across the world as retailers have tried to generate sales. This has been a challenge when prices generally this last decade have increased by 30%. Discounting does work, especially when selling a newspaper, petrol, rice (in some countries), and Coca Cola. These are what are called Known Value products. The consumer believes they know the exact price of the product. When it comes to plants, they are non-known value products. Our job is to sell the benefits if we want to increase sales.
- 5) **Why Buy Now.** "The best time to buy a tree was 10 years ago; the next best time is now." I love this saying as it creates urgency. We need to create these "WOW" urgency messages to get people to buy now.

### SO WHAT WOULD WALT DISNEY DO?

If Walt was alive today and giving this paper, I believe he would be giving us four simple messages:

- Become a hero in the consumer's mind
- Put the story together for the consumer
- Sell the value of the offer
- Create the urgency

Remember, the grower and retailer are "vehicles" to get to your end consumer. They are not your customer. You have to please a 35-year-old woman.