

Marketing Initiatives at Doran Nurseries[©]

Larry Doran

Timahoe, Donadea, Naas, Co. Kildare, Ireland

INTRODUCTION

In 2004 Doran Nurseries celebrated 25 years of growing and wholesaling heathers, mainly in the Irish market. We employ 14 staff, with 10 casuals in the peak season July and August, and the nursery covers 10 ha. We have always specialised in heathers, and have never been tempted to diversify into other crops. Instead we have looked at different means of presenting heathers to both retailers and consumers as a means of increasing sales and profits.

Over the years, we have spent many hours developing our marketing, including ideas from staff, consultants, and other nurseries. This paper shares a few of these ideas and what they have achieved.

TRADE EXHIBITIONS

For many years, the Kildare Growers Show has been a key element in our marketing. This trade show is held every July in County Kildare and is currently run by a committee of Kildare Growers. Other nurseries, outside the county, attend with an increasing number from Holland, the U.K. and Belgium while sundries suppliers also exhibit. It is the main exhibition for Irish garden centre buyers. At present, this is the only show at which we exhibit. The design of our stand is based on a different theme each year, always showing how our heathers can be used in a garden.

PROMOTIONAL LEAFLETS

For each Kildare Growers Show we produce a new promotional full-colour leaflet. The front details the special show offer: for example an "impulse" trolley at a reduced price, containing a range of our promotional lines. The reverse lists our 1-year-old heather cultivars, and other products. It is given to all trade customers who visit our stand and sent to any customers we may have missed.

We produce a similar format flyer for a spring-selection trolley aimed at catching Mothers' Day sales. These seasonal promotion leaflets are mailed to all the known garden centres in Ireland.

We also sell to the landscape trade. For this market we produce a full-colour, glossy four-page A4 leaflet. The front cover is promotional, while the inside shows ideas for using heathers in landscape schemes. The back cover lists products with an order form.

CATALOGUE

Our catalogue is produced every 2 years supported with other promotional materials in the interim. Both the outside and inside of the cover are used to promote heathers generally as well as our own products. Examples of our point-of-sale materials are shown; along with a map to help visiting customers locate the nursery. The latest catalogue includes a colour centre section showing pictures of plant production at the nursery, together with more promotional ideas and a thank you message to our customers for their support over the last 25 years.

POINT-OF-SALE MATERIALS

Point-of-sale materials are a major part of our overall marketing programme. For several years we have run “Autumn Time is Heather Time” and “Spring Time is Heather Time” campaigns.

Recently, we have moved to using “The Magic of Heathers” as our slogan. This material includes a picture of our eldest daughter, Lauren. It has proved very popular with retailers as it appeals to females, who are the biggest spenders in most garden centres. However, the image is becoming rather dated and we are planning to introduce material featuring our younger daughter, Robin, in more modern fashions.

This theme of “The Magic of Heathers” is repeated across our labels, along with repeats of the Lauren photograph or with a theme such as Christmas. We also supply labels featuring a simple photograph of the heather variety in question.

All point-of-sale material carries our logo, except in the case of lines produced under the Kildare Growers brand. However, the emphasis is not on selling our image to the consumer, but to provide a mark of quality heathers to back-up our individual customers’ brand.

SPECIAL PRODUCTS

It has become important to develop the ways in which heathers are presented. We have put the emphasis on enabling our customers to present them as an impulse sale, a multi-buy, or even a “lifestyle addition”, rather than just as a simple plant in a pot.

We have developed several product lines to achieve this. The advent of coloured pots was of great benefit to us. We have used 1-L green pots and the purple 2-L square-round pots, which have helped our customers to dress hot spots with an attractive product, rather than just a block of plants, while the remainder of the range is in the standard black pots.

We also sell four- and six-packs of heathers in carry-trays. Using purple as our image colour for the promotional label text, on a cream background, these stylish carry-trays have enabled our customers to increase their stock-turn of plants while improving consumer convenience.

Ready-planted containers are also very popular lines. We offer 30-cm and 40-cm terracotta planters and a burgundy window box. Retailers use these as impulse lines and lifestyle purchases, as a means of increasing their average “per customer” sale value.

CONCLUSION

Using a range of marketing techniques has helped us to increase our share of the Irish wholesale plant market. This has been achieved by packaging and presenting heathers as desirable garden plants with an appealing image, rather than the more traditional approach of heathers as plants for acid soils.