

Why We Brand®

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What is another name for the green industry? I say it is a mature consumer products industry. We have become a mature consumer products industry, and that means today if we want to grow our business we need: (1) new products, (2) category management, and (3) production differentiation.

MARKETING AND BRANDING

They are all about:

- The consumer.
- Steak and sizzle.
- Strong plant brands enhance and sharpen the retail store's own brand.
- Added value leads to added margins and added turns.
- Branding provides the retailer with power and profit without the huge investment.

It's All About the Consumer. Since plant heads make up 5% to 10% of independent garden center customers, a sea of black pots intimidates and confuses most consumers. Now think outside the garden center; how do people buy everything else in their lives? Most consumers want differentiation, and brands provide differentiation.

How do people buy everything else in their lives? Co-branding is what they see. So, give the consumer what they want and:

- Make it easy!
- Make it important!
- Make it fun!
- Make it convenient!
- Make it a destination!

To quote Jim Bradley of MidUlster Garden Centre, "We expect too much from our consumers and cause them too much stress, and I'd probably go so far as to say we're embarrassing them."

Steak and Sizzle.

- Great garden plants that show well in the landscape.
- Plants that make it easy for the consumer to be successful.
- The steak has to sizzle not fizzle.
- Easy to read and understand packaging.

However, bad things can happen to good brands from poor display and sales.

Strong Plant Brands Enhance and Sharpen the Retail Store's Own Brand.

Strong plant brands become the retail store brand; for example, Dunkin' Donuts does enhance the grocery store's brand. Effective brands increase the perceived value of the plant, which allows you to charge a higher price per plant. This leads to increased margins!

If the garden center has branded itself well—consumers expect the garden center to have the best brands. Also, if consumers walk into the garden center and see great brands they'll think it is a great garden center. This further leads to branded products enhancing the generic "black pot" products. For example, Endless Summer® hydrangea enhances the sale of all black pot hydrangeas and provides more excitement for the customer, which leads to greater sales and more visits by customers.

Added Value Leads to Added Margins and Added Turns. Branded plants create displays that become focal points in garden centers leading to added:

- Importance.
- Visibility.
- Traffic.

Branded plants distinguish themselves so completely that the price competitiveness with similar "generic" black-potted plants is non-existent. Table 1 below illustrates a comparison between unbranded and branded plants. As shown in Table 1 the branded advantage is 84.6%.

Table 1. Comparison of the income from unbranded and branded plants.

Unbranded plants	Branded plants
Retail price = \$1.99	Retail price = \$2.49
Whole sale price – \$0.95	Whole sale price – \$1.20
Gross margin = \$1.04	Gross margin = \$1.29
Units sold × 1,409	Units sold × 2,097
Income = \$1,465.36	Income = \$ 2,705.13

Branding Provides the Retailer With Power and Profit Without the Huge Investment. This provides added importance in an overwhelming environment of choice. In addition, brands can provide information and an interesting story to motivate consumers to open their wallets and purchase plants. Results have shown that when growers invest just pennies per plant in a well crafted marketing campaign, consumers responded by paying nearly 30% higher prices! Also, good brands get your plants noticed, which encourages the impulse sales that make up 65% of all plants sold!

FINAL THOUGHTS

Ten to twenty years ago consumers had more time and less choice of what plants to purchase; think carefully about that! This means that branding our plants is vitally important to us, to the garden center, and to the consumer!

LITERATURE CITED

Bradley, J. MidUlster Garden Centre. Maghera, Co. Derry, N. Ireland. Pers. commun.