

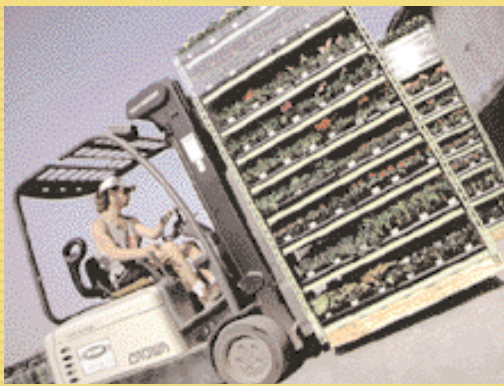
**GUARANTEED
SUCCESS: HOW
FERNLEA
FLOWERS
WON THE HEARTS OF
NORTHERN GARDENERS**



Move over mums! This Canadian-based grower set out to find an alternative fall crop for gardeners in severe winter climates.

What it did was develop an entirely new kind of pansy and win top prize as the 2000 GPN/MasterTag Marketing Innovator of the Year.

By Beth Meneghini



Fernlea took the time to get its marketing program right. Oversized tags with detailed care instructions on the back, eye-catching logos and POP materials, and a tough little plant that could take the cold, combined for a successful consumer marketing campaign.



No Stranger to Growing ...

Fernlea isn't new to the flower business. Established in 1939 as a family-run operation, Fernlea Flowers is still operated as such from Delhi, Ontario. Joe and Virginia Howe have grown Fernlea to become one of the largest suppliers of garden plants in North America. Fernlea has locations in Campbellville and Ottawa in Ontario and in Tallahassee, Apopka and Stuart, Fla. In addition to spring bedding plants and fall pansies, Fernlea produces poinsettias, Christmas cactus, cyclamen, Easter Lilies and Boston Fern Hangers. The company grows on more than 100 acres of greenhouse and 100 acres of field space. Visit www.fernlea.com or www.iciclepansy.com for more information.



Bench cards and buttons (shown above) are just a few of the elements in Fernlea's POP package to support Icicle pansies and violas. The common thread on each element: breathtaking graphics.

Most would agree; icicles aren't something you typically associate with flowers. The frigid stalactites common to harsh northern winters do little to conjure up images of the lush growth and vibrant colors of spring. But thanks to more than a decade of dedication and an impressively beautiful marketing campaign, Fernlea Flowers has turned "Icicles" into the season-extending plant that northern gardeners ask for by name.

The owner/operators of Fernlea Flowers, the Delhi, Ontario-based winner of the GPN/MasterTag Marketing Innovator Award, simply wanted their northern neighbors to enjoy some fall color.

"Planting 'fall' pansies is a common practice in more moderate climates," said Jeff Howe, Fernlea's U.S. operations and co-marketing manager. "But in the North, many pansy varieties simply do not winter reliably."

Instead of marketing a popular pansy line to retailers in a more mild climate zone, Fernlea chose to challenge the cold head-on and develop an entirely new breed of pansy that could withstand harsh northern winters. The project took more than 10 years from idea to market, but when Icicle pansies and violas hit retail shelves in fall 2000, the decade of preparation seemed well worth it.

"We've had seasoned retail buyers tell us this is the most exciting program they've seen in years," said Howe. "Reports are streaming in from happy gardeners enjoying color in the garden before any of their neighbors."

PLANTS SO GOOD THEY'RE GUARANTEED

Developed in conjunction with Goldsmith Seeds, Icicle pansies and violas are weather and disease resistant. Planted in late summer or early fall, these hardy plants defy early frosts. Icicles provide gardeners from Minnesota to the southern parts of Canada

with vibrant blooms for almost nine months. These plants will show color from September or October until the snow flies and then again in the spring.

To make sure they live up to their name, Icicles endure overwintering trials at Michigan State University to ensure that plants can not only survive northern winters but also thrive again in spring, with uniform tidy blooms. "We're very proud of this new breed," said Howe. "We're so sure of their extreme vigor and excellent garden performance we stand behind them with a money-back guarantee."

Indeed, Fernlea prints its guarantee on the back of every plant tag and on each set of consumer care instructions: "This plant will bloom in the fall and again in the spring if proper care instructions are followed." If the plants don't bloom, Fernlea will refund the purchase.

MARKETING BEAUTY AND STRENGTH

When the breeding work was over and Icicles proved they could withstand a strong winter, the company began to think about how to generate excitement for these plants. The most obvious route lead straight to the consumer.

"Fernlea was among the first growers to identify the mass merchant as a significant retail plant channel," said Howe. "Marketing to the consumer goes right along with that."

Offered exclusively in the garden centers of Home Depot and Villager's Hardware throughout the Northern and Midwestern United States, and through independent garden centers in Canada, Fernlea was challenged with the task of spreading the word to northern gardeners that this wasn't your average pansy.

"We decided to create brand awareness on both the retailer and consumer level," said Howe. This strategy allows Fernlea to help its retail customers sell more product and create a buzz for the plants on the home gardening front.

Infused with confidence in their product line, Fernlea's marketing team, made up of Jeff Howe, his sister and Co-Marketing Manager Keri Lynn Howe and Marketing Coordinator Brooke Place, drew on the series' unique combination of beauty and strength.

Using a pull-through marketing approach, Fernlea utilizes an extensive public relations, Web and P.O.P. campaign that targets both retailers and consumers.

The campaign educates gardeners with care information while touting the line's landscape applications and palette of colors. Banners, pennants, posters, consumer tear-off sheets, bench cards and even buttons feature brilliant photos of the pansies or violas in one of the range of available colors. Fernlea's guarantee is prominently displayed on all of the P.O.P. material as well as garden ideas and recipes for the plants. Oversized Icicle plant tags showcase the pansy or viola in bloom and feature care instructions and the Fernlea guarantee on the back. ♦

The GPN/MasterTag 2001 Marketing Innovation Award

MasterTag has enlisted *GPN* as the co-sponsor of a competition designed to show growers that marketing and merchandising plant products through grower-generated marketing programs directly enhances the bottom line. *GPN* profiled the 2000 winner here and the first runner-up in the May issue. Stay tuned for a profile of the second runner-up in the July issue.

To receive an application form or additional details for this year's competition, please contact MasterTag at (800) 253-0439.

Another innovative addition to the marketing fold is Fernlea's retailer video. The company produced the five-minute video to provide sales tips and care information that



retail employees can pass on to consumers.

According to Howe, most shipments of Icicle pansies or violas include these P.O.P. materials free of charge.

A separate and extensive Web site, www.iciclepansy.com, was

launched to target the consumer. The site features a retail locator tool that allows curious consumers to find the Icicle retailer closest to their hometown. The site also gives visitors the option to be notified via e-mail when an Icicle retailer arrives in their area.

To further spark consumer interest in Icicles, Fernlea kicked off a public relations campaign with print ads in magazines such as *Better Homes & Gardens*. Fernlea also developed a clever consumer contest. Gardeners fill out entry forms at their local Icicle retailer or simply visit the Icicle pansy Web site to enter online. The contest awards a \$500 certificate toward an Icicle pansy garden.

UTILIZING EXPERTS WITHIN AND WITHOUT


Fernlea's in-house marketing team put together the unique brand strategy for the Icicle series and an in-house designer created and maintains the Icicle Web site. But the company did seek outside help for the product launch of its new breed of pansy.

"We drew on some outside advertising expertise to assist us with the program," said Howe. "Our in-house team worked closely with

these professionals to create and produce the high-impact visuals and sales materials."

SETTING AN EXAMPLE FOR THE INDUSTRY

Fernlea's mission statement includes a commitment to the industry and to gardening consumers. To achieve its goal of meeting consumer demand for high-quality plant mate-

rial, Fernlea plans on becoming the most effective producer, distributor and marketer in the industry. What better way to recognize a company well on its way to fulfilling its mission than by awarding it the well-deserved position of GPN/MasterTag Marketing Innovator of the Year? 

Beth Meneghini is West Coast editor of GPN.

Fernlea wants home gardeners to be successful with the Icicle series. To help ensure each consumer has a good experience with Icicles, Fernlea is careful to provide detailed care instructions on much of its POP material, as seen on the customer care sheet (below right). The company has such confidence in its line of pansies and violas, it guarantees repeat blooms. Fernlea also captures consumer attention with a consumer giveaway contest.



1/2 Horizontal

UNITED GREENHOUSE SYSTEMS

Ad #

1/6 Vertical

GEOSEED

Ad #