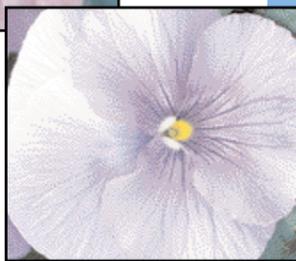
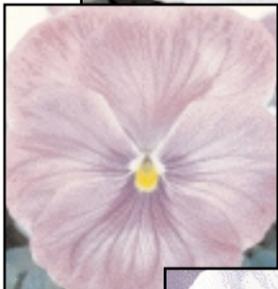




Key Ingredients to Control Your Success



Floral Plant Growers LLC started with an existing plant line, added some strategic merchandising and a little bit of whimsy to produce an award-winning marketing program that received honorable mention in the 2001 GPN/MasterTag Marketing Innovation Award.

By Beth Meneghini



Dean Chaloupka wanted to make it clear that the Second Season Pansy program isn't exclusive to Floral Plant Growers LLC.

"This line's been on the market for four or five years," said Chaloupka, president and sales manager for Floral Plant Growers LLC. "We're not the only ones who can sell it."

Other growers may be able to sell Second Season Pansies, first introduced by S&G Flowers, but for all intents and purposes, Floral Plant Growers made the line its own.

"The product had a great story behind it," said Chaloupka, "it was just being told ineffectively. So we decided to take hold of the program and run with it."

The result was an honorable in the GPN/MasterTag Marketing Innovation Award contest and a program that is a hit with mass merchandisers and consumers alike.

OLD HAT

Believe it or not, it can oftentimes be harder to work with an existing product than to create one from nothing. Chaloupka has some experience with this.

Denmark, Wis.-based Floral Plant Growers LLC was previously Greiling Farms. Floral Plant Growers, which had operations on the East Coast, purchased the Greiling property and greenhouses in 1998. The resulting company was Floral Plant Growers LLC. In its current state, the company is divided into two geographic divisions, Midwest and Mid-Atlantic. The Midwest division, with offices in Iowa, Indiana and Wisconsin, is called Natural Beauty Growers. The Mid-Atlantic division, with offices in Delaware and Maryland, is called Floral Plant Growers. Denmark serves as both the Midwest division headquarters and the corporate offices of Floral Plant Growers LLC.

Seems a bit much to digest, but Chaloupka manages to keep it all straight. "It's all one in my book," he says.

The facilities now grow similar products and even grow product for the other location at certain times of the year. But each division primarily serves the market in which it is located. All product in the Second Season Pansy program is grown in Denmark, but sold through both divisions.

A PRODUCT WITH POTENTIAL

Two things about Second Season Pansies intrigued Chaloupka. The first was that the product came with a guarantee. If planted in the fall,

S&G guaranteed the pansies would be back for more come springtime.

The second thing that piqued Chaloupka's interest was the potential the product line had to break a very old, rather conservative mindset.

"In many of the markets we serve, pansies are a very hot spring item," said Chaloupka. "The problem with this is that consumers simply don't consider pansies for fall. People have a hard enough time thinking they can actually garden at all in the fall, especially on the East coast and in the Midwest. It's a psychological hurdle that is often tough to break."

But Chaloupka was convinced. The Second Season Pansy's guarantee was the clincher; all he needed now was some marketing pizzazz.

"Second Season Pansies are a remarkable product. I truly thought we'd gain sales if we had some really eye-catching, attractive graphics and POP materials to get customers' attention."

Turns out that Chaloupka was right.

HATCHING A PLAN

Floral Plant Growers LLC worked closely with both S&G and MasterTag to create a whimsical POP and packaging program for Second Season Pansies. At the time, Second Season Pansies featured a penguin graphic developed by S&G.

"We took the line to MasterTag in the spring of 2000 to begin working on new POP," said Chaloupka. "We decided that the penguin should stay but be reworked."

Chaloupka stressed the importance

A Quick Look at Floral Plant Growers LLC

Headquarters: Denmark, Wis.

Founded: As Greiling Farms in 1961. Purchased by Floral Plant Growers in 1998. New company called Floral Plant Growers LLC.

Production space: 62 acres of greenhouse production, 8 acres of outdoor production.

Employees: 200 full-time but can increase to 500 or more seasonally.

Products: 85 percent of the business is finished product for the retail market, 15 percent is prefinished plugs and bedding plants for growers.

Crops: Spring and summer bedding plants, summer perennials, fall bedding plants, mums and poinsettias.

Retail customers: Mass market chains in the Mid-Atlantic and Midwestern United States.

For more information: Floral Plant Growers, P.O. Box 790, Denmark, WI 54208; (920) 863-2107; fax (920) 863-8386.



of working with a professional agency to get the right image for Second Season Pansies.

"In most cases, growers think we know what the industry and especially consumers want," he said. "But because we literally live in the industry, we have a somewhat tainted view. I believe it's truly beneficial to seek outside

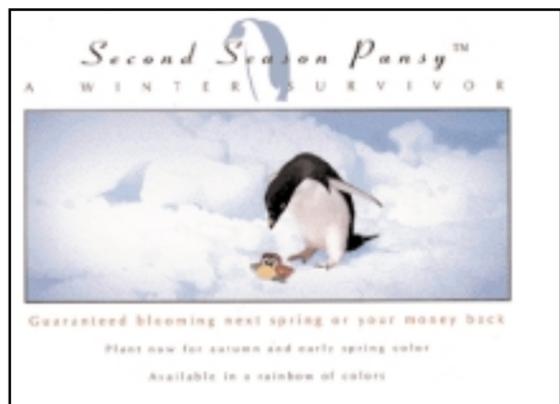
help to understand what will really attract consumers."

The resulting POP materials featured a revamped penguin graphic surrounded by Second Season Pansies poking their heads through the ice. Floral Plant Growers LLC utilizes posters, shelf talkers, tags and handles for 306 and 8 packs.

"Not everything in the program is designed to sell," said Chaloupka. "We want the posters to grab consumers' attention and get them over to the display. After that, the tags, shelf talkers and other pieces feature the guarantee and plant care information."

Chaloupka says he feels the POP

Floral Plant Growers' tray handle and tag (above) and shelf card (below) promoting Second Season Pansies.



materials attract and educate consumers. But he is perhaps most happy with the "fun" of it.

"So often in our industry, POP and promotional materials are plant-oriented. People purchase plants because it makes them happy or because they enjoy gardening. We are allowed to deal with emotions. This program is really just fun."

THE MARKETING DOESN'T STOP HERE

If after one year on the market, Floral Plant Growers LLC stopped here, the Second Season Pansy program would probably do just fine. The POP material is attractive and attention-getting. The plants have a guarantee that helps consumers feel better about purchasing them. But the program would still be missing something. There are, in fact, similar programs on the market — pansy lines guaranteed to bloom again in the spring. So what makes this program any different? Why are Second Season Pansies a success?

It has a little to do with the customers of Floral Plant Growers LLC and a lot to do with how they are treated.

Chaloupka and his company serve the dreaded big box stores. Home Depot, Lowes, Kmart, Walmart, Target and ShopKo are all on the hit list for Floral Plant Growers LLC. While many growers might cringe at the thought of serving these monoliths, Chaloupka rather enjoys it.

"There is a key to selling to the chains," said Chaloupka. "You can't just drop the product off and hope for the best. Marketing your plants has to continue. Merchandising is key."

While in-store merchandising can be a controversial subject with growers, Chaloupka simply sees it as a

way to remain in control. By offering a merchandising program, Floral Plant Growers LLC has not only input, but also control, as to how the product is presented and how it looks in the store.

"All the basic principles of retail that take place inside the store get left in the dust in the garden center," said Chaloupka.

"Our goal is to get that changed."

The merchandising program offered by Floral Plant Growers LLC is soup to nuts: putting up the POP materials, building and installing displays and benches, caring for the plants while in the store, watering plants as needed (although Floral Plant Growers LLC does not accept sole responsibility for watering), refilling shelves as product sells, and the general cleaning and appearance of the product area. Depending on store volume, Floral Plant Growers LLC can provide 20-40 hours of in-store service each week.

"The buyers have been very happy with it," said Chaloupka. "Feedback from stores is positive. I'm assuming that's because the product sells."

A BIT OF ADVICE

Floral Plant Growers LLC plans to continue the Second Season Pansy program next year.

"Despite the fact that other growers can sell the product, we didn't see any significant numbers in our markets," said Chaloupka. "We're excited to continue Second Season Pansies into next year."

Chaloupka says he's learned a thing or two from this marketing experience.

"There are lots of components to a good marketing or branding program," he says. "But what we found most important was having control at the store level. You don't want mislabeled, wilting or dead plants under your name. Money gets wasted when you lose control and your image gets tarnished."

And if a grower doesn't have the manpower or the funds to get somebody into the retail store everyday?

Work with the retailer to get your product displayed consistently, in the same place in the store, says Chaloupka. Do what you can when you are at the store: tidy up, adjust signage and water if you can.

"All the POP signs in the world won't help your annual product if the retailer has vegetables sitting under them."

But even after all the frustrations and hard work, after getting a taste for marketing and POP development, Chaloupka isn't quite finished.

"We fully intend to enter the GPN/MasterTag Marketing Innovator Awards with something

new for next year," said Chaloupka. "Our new program takes things one step further." GPN

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