

Change Creates Opportunities

Our industry is going through major changes year after year, and while these changes can be challenging to keep up with, I see them as presenting major opportunities for our industry's sustainability in elevating our perceived value to our existing consumer base as well as finding completely new consumers to service. Our current retailers are getting much more methodical to new product introductions and making their stores feel like local markets with seminars and classes on gardening within the community. It's really helping those people, that want to be gardeners, get off to a fun start on their new hobby. But what about the millions of potential consumers in North America that don't want to be gardeners?

It is safe to say that growers looking to increase market share and profitability know that we need to diversify our business focuses from just producing plants to selling consumer packaged products with the plants as one widget within that product. For the everyday consumer that doesn't consider himself or herself a plant

person, many of our current products lack imagination. For these consumers, we're not offering them a consumer-ready product, rather a widget or a supply for a project that they have no interest in completing.

When we launched BlueSkye Creative, it was to help growers and retailers develop increased profits and build sustained value within the horticulture industry. It's about taking our industry's existing products — plants — and making them an element into something more for this non-gardening, yet plant-loving, consumer. And why do you want to create products for this consumer? Because no one else is yet, and having no competition is a great strategy for growth.

DEVELOPING NEW PRODUCTS

The development of these products can't rely on one person, or even one department within your company. Thinking of a cool, quirky product is fun but useless if you can't successfully get it to market. Products need to be developed with your full team to make sure that they fulfill a consumer need, can be profitably produced and can logistically make their way to a retailer.

As we look to fulfill our new consumers' needs, steer away from the standard container that continually fail to inspire them. There is an incredible crafts movement out there with millennial through boomer consumer generations. Yes, it's probably some watered down version of the hipsters, but the Whole Foods, West Elms and Anthropologies are going strong by promoting artisan products with personality. Plants are a living luxury product and these consumers don't want something that looks like it came off a machine. Rather, push yourself out of your current cost restrictions, because you're targeting a new consumer that will have a higher perceived value if you hit his/her needs.

These new consumers aren't going to be high-volume customers like our traditional gardeners, but they will be high-margin ones. These individuals are looking for a statement piece for their homes.



Open up lifestyle retailers' catalogs, and see how many plants appear in their sets.

Design your products toward a more global and feminine aesthetic, using unique reclaimed pieces of glass or wood to make these pieces. And by creating new statement pieces on a regular basis, you're eliminating the current price pressures you face when you're just producing an alternative to an existing product.

The other piece of selling to this new consumer base is finding where your product will be best purchased. While expanding your product line with your existing retail outlets is the easiest path for your product launch, don't dismiss new retailers for long-term, more sustainable growth. Open up other lifestyle retailers' catalogs like West Elm, Crate & Barrel or Anthropologie and see how many plants appear in their sets. Their customer is obviously reacting positively to seeing plants in these photos, so why not target those retailers as your next source of sustainable growth? Remember, it wasn't that long ago that the Home Depot only sold nuts and bolts.

DESIGN MATTERS

Whether it's a catalog, a product package or an advertisement, it costs the same to print a bad design as it does a good one. If you want to maintain a higher profit long term, invest up front in the product imaging to make your product elevate itself above all others. Great photo shoots and packaging design take a lot of time and effort, but if you want your product to end up in someone's personal lifestyle, you need to portray that product as being worthy of that lifestyle.

Find an agency that understands your products and the consumer you want to market to and get it designed right from the beginning. And then communicate to your consumer as an individual, not as a crowd. Make them feel that your product will make a positive impact on their life.

So take these new potential markets as opportunities to expand your long-term business. It is not fast to change our way of thinking to get into these new arenas, but if we can successfully find a way to sell to this current non-purchaser, it will add sustainability for our industry for many more years to come. [gpn](http://gpn.com)



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