

Watch What You Say... and SIMPLIFY!



What can we learn from consumers? The more we listen, the greater the opportunities.

BY MARSHALL DIRKS

I've long been a proponent of following trends through the eyes of the consumer. In Paco Underhill's groundbreaking book called "Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping," and a later edition called "What Women Want: The Science of Female Shopping," he stresses the importance of getting the details right. To not make assumptions, and to be quick to ask feedback.

At Proven Winners, we've tried to implement many of his practices, including regular surveying of the end user — the gardener. Regardless

of their experience, their candid responses to our activities are greatly needed for decision making and development of our programs.

FOCUS ON THE END PRODUCT

One such example recently occurred when we set out to name our new line of vegetables, berries and a basil. After analyzing data for these products, including the National Gardening Report, we learned that millennials were an ideal target, and that compared to our traditional 90+



Which explains all the pictures on Pinterest with handfuls and wagons full of homegrown vegetables! Making connections and then applying them has always been a hallmark of successful people and organizations.

Another example of using the right language is when talking about the longevity of a product. We often label our products with “all-season flowering” or “long lasting”, but according to The Verge, a popular group of journalists that “covers the

intersection of technology, science, art and culture,” they say 68 percent of millennials said they’d be more likely to purchase products that are labeled durable and brands that stand for performance — think Patagonia, The North Face and Birkenstock.

percent audience of females, that perhaps 46 percent of those buying vegetables were male.

While we brainstormed many names internally, a favorite that rose to the top was Proven Edibles. While not preferred by everyone on our team, it was a solid name. So, while attending the National Collegiate Landscape Competition this past spring, I had the opportunity to also ask young folks about the name Proven Edibles — they immediately asked if we had a new strain of marijuana they could use in cooking. I was taken aback a bit as they explained the following definition from the popular online Urban Dictionary:

Short for marijuana edible: Any edible product that contains THC. Some of the most common edibles include brownies, cookies, space cake and firecrackers.

So, we nixed the name Proven Edibles and began focusing on a key trait which lead us to the selection of each of these items, flavor and taste. After playing around with a handful of names, we decided to ask consumers to pick their favorite between these:

True Foods

Proven Flavors

Proven TasteFULL

And for chuckles, Proven Harvest.

We all thought they’d select a name based on flavor, but we were quite surprised when we received over 8,900 responses and 62 percent of them preferred Proven Harvest. It was a resounding moment of clarity that the customers were more concerned with the end product — the results — than even the taste. Apparently, the satisfaction of growing something that had a “proven harvest” would be even more rewarding than something that tastes great!

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CONSUMER TRENDS

SIMPLIFICATION IS KEY

We've also taken great strides to simplify our marketing strategies, as all segments of the industry, including consumers want to receive guidance. Decision making takes time, and when we focus our energies on key plants,

programs, customers, etc., it becomes much easier to establish goals and measure success.

A couple years ago we introduced our National Plant of the Year program. After consulting with both industry and home gardeners, we selected

our first plant — 'Supertunia Vista Bubblegum'. It was a hit, and many retailers did not have enough product. We then extended the program into our national recipe lines for combinations, and this year after gathering feedback from our

Retailer Advisory Board, we decided to add designations for key retail categories — roses, hydrangeas and hostas.



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We recognize this idea is not new, case in point the long-standing and popular Perennial Association's Perennial Plant of the Year. However, we felt that our customers might be served well with a targeted Proven Winners' marketing campaign. Our customers oftentimes expressed frustration of not knowing what plants are going to be advertised or used within editorial pieces, and many times this occurred during the heat of spring when it was nearly impossible to meet customer's expectations.

To that end, we spend time as a team figuring out which plants would be most suitable for such a designation, oftentimes engaging customers and consumers via surveys. Then we announce our new plants a full season ahead of their expected public selling season, allowing all segments of the industry, including the press, to promote, inform, grow and sell these outstanding selections.

As Mr. Underhill notes, our customers are continually sending us messages — whether they are physical letters (yes, people write to Proven Winners nearly every week and use stamps too), emails, purchases, body language or words — when given the opportunity to enlighten us as growers, retailers, marketers, etc. They have a powerful message to deliver, and while it may be subtle, it's important to take the time to listen and create opportunities for expression. gpn

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