

# Marketing in the Grower World

**Marketing is often a concept** that is unfamiliar in the grower world. We're comfortable with keeping things consistent and are often resistant to change. "If it's not broken, don't fix it" has become the universal language, and as long as we are breaking even or maintaining our programs, we view this as successful. That's not to say these aren't successes, but if we are maintaining, are we really evolving?

Let's be honest, unless you're in hard goods, are in a competitive category fighting for market share, or are launching a new product, marketing can be viewed as a foreign concept. Marketing is typically one of the first budgets cut; the value can be cloudy, and it's usually thought of as "money spent or lost," rather than an investment.

In my prior life, I developed advertising campaigns and pitched ideas that would allow customers to extend their reach to growers and retailers, and hopefully make an impact that increased sales.

Stepping into a marketing director position at ColorPoint and living on the grower side allowed me the opportunity to apply my marketing and sales knowledge and experience in a world that has typically been behind the curve.

As a grower, you are the glue that holds this industry together. Without growers, there's no one to finish the crops, nothing to put in a container, fertilize, pinch or regulate; shipping to the big box stores would be non-existent, and consumers wouldn't have the variety of products to choose. Without growers, our industry wouldn't exist. Plants make things go round; they fuel the rest of the supply chain. With that said, how can growers leverage marketing to profitably grow our industry?

**1. Develop an internal communication channel between sales and marketing.** Sales in the grower world is often code for "maintain the programs we are currently supplying," and growing the business takes place when additional stores are added to the supply list. If account reps can embrace their roles as partners with their customers, and work with marketing to discuss current plans, growth opportunities and discover where a void may be, building an internal new product development process can then be externally executed.

Bringing a new product to market can be a lengthy process and, more often than not, a grower's timeline is difficult for buyers to comprehend. This is where you come in — be the educator. Know the buyer's needs, find the void, brainstorm internally, map out a timeline, crunch the numbers, trial the idea, pitch to the buyer, execute the concept, track the product, deliver results and show value. Marketers provide all necessary

team members in new product development with the tools necessary to achieve the directives above. Build a new product template, create a presentation, provide size and input options, include a cost analysis with retails and provide guidance. You can be the internal glue that keeps the pieces together, or at least allows the paths to cross.

**2. Be an innovator!** If there's one thing buyers value, it's having new ideas brought to the table before they're requested. Regardless if the concept is added to the program, the initiative does not go unnoticed. Think of a holiday centerpiece, a cart program at the storefront, change up the inputs, show value with the selected container, add in a specialty tag, create a new pop-up display, research store positioning, or create instant impact with holiday promotions. At the end of the day, all our buyers care about are numbers; they want lower cost items and higher profit margins. While we need to be cognizant of the buyer's wants and needs, we also need to think of the shopper. Have you created a concept that would "jump off the shelf?" What would you pay for the item? Does the retail line up with the store figures? If the columns align, you have nothing to lose in pitching your innovation.

**3. Embrace millennials** — the "know it all" generation, that wants to change everything, doesn't want to keep tradition, but wants to make their own mark. No, this is not every millennial, maybe not even the majority, but it is the connotation that comes with the term. Food for thought: if it's a challenge to step outside the box and we've grown stagnant in our current processes and ideas, why not embrace the creativity of a new generation? The incredible thing about this industry is the multi-generational make-up. We all have an opportunity to mold what was and has been with what could be. With increased creativity and fresh eyes, embrace what's new to build on the footprints already made.

There's no playbook to tell us what moves to make, whether an idea will be a great success or failure, or what drastic move is next when it comes to big box operations. In this day and age, the big box stores run the show. They set the programs, ads, promotions, cost and retail parameters, and as growers, we either oblige or we don't, and that business is awarded elsewhere.

In a small, closely knit industry, the competition is further heightened by the rules we follow. Now what if those roles were reversed and growers were in the driver's seat? If we invest in marketing, whether it's the people, the ideas or tangible items, all contribute to growers setting the stage. Review the cards you're dealt and think wisely about how you'd like to play your hand. After all, you're the glue that holds this industry together. [gpn](#)



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