

Who Has the POWER?

Knowledge is power, and if you have an impressive crop and want to see its success at all levels, that message must be brought to the consumer.

BY AMANDA HUNTINGTON

As a grower, maximizing square footage, maintaining or increasing margins, and simplifying the production process are always top of mind. Strategic thinking runs constant when it comes to container sizes, tray dimensions and low cost inputs — and in an industry where there is no “down time,” supplying instant impact and successful programs is what supports growth. However, if we dive deeper into the world of horticulture, are growers’ decisions being influenced by consumer needs and wants, and current trends, or is this group being neglected?

Every year, growers, breeders, hard goods suppliers and retailers participate in the California Spring Trials. This gives breeders an opportunity to showcase the “newest and greatest” and hopefully grab the attention of growers cycling through. We learn about stronger disease resistance, quicker to bloom varieties, lower cost crops, increased hardiness and possible production challenges we all need to be aware of.

As a grower, these qualities contribute to the success of the crop, but whether they are translating to the consumer world is left to debate. If the plant is disease resistant, quicker to bloom and is sure to be a success to the consumer (though we can’t really guarantee this), growers need to take that knowledge and educate the consumer at retail. If these attributes are important to the grower and retailer, conveying this at the store level should be prioritized properly, by defining the value to the shopper.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONSUMER

California Spring Trials is an incredible event, and while it’s a lot of work, we’re able to see the magnitude of our industry. On the flip side, do we really need to see 15 new red petunias or 10 new varieties of impatiens because they’re “making a comeback”? Honestly, no. At the end of the day, to a consumer, a red petunia is just that — a red petunia. If we are investing the time and money into holding such an extravagant event, let’s bring the growers together, select the top 40 or 50 varieties, and then bring consumers through and see where the common ground is.

Understanding the consumer is key. Male vs. female, urban vs. rural, having a green thumb vs. not, yard vs. patio gardening; this is all demographic information growers need to further explore, which leads me to a small word with big meaning, data. Data is often a “scary” word in our industry, but you can’t plan based on information you don’t know or have.

While growers might not be making the buying decisions, growers do have the power to influence programs, provide new concepts and speak directly to the consumer market. The question is, how do growers do that? How do you get in the minds of consumers and why do you want to? Simple, to sell more product, which at the end of the day, lines up with the store focus as well.

STRATEGIZE RETAIL CONCEPTS

When you walk into a store, what grabs your eye? I don’t know about you, but generally, I want to spend as little time as possible roaming the

aisles, contemplating my purchase. Sure, I may have a vision in mind, but that's not to say it can't change.

Position, position, position. End caps and store fronts are prime real estate to display your programs. Wherever your product may be positioned, shoppers are going to "examine" the product. They're looking for color, in search of a complementary look and, depending on the shopper, is it unique or traditional enough. That plant, regardless of how traditional or unique it might be, needs to fit within their budget, and if it doesn't, you need to give that shopper a reason to spend above their limit.

This is where knowledge comes in. Promote the details, tell the story and reinforce why that plant, your plant, is worth the purchase, especially if it's running at a higher cost.

ASK QUESTIONS

Growers, ask questions; have your own field team, conduct store walks, host consumer focus groups, learn what drives the shopping experience and what leads to the purchase. Knowledge is power! If growers can understand the buying habits of consumers, the power of creation can coincide with the shoppers' buying decisions. By that, I mean: At the end of the day, the consumer has all the power.

Regardless of the details, production time and every other detail growers might focus on, consumers make the decision to buy or not. If you understand the consumer, do your research, limit the selection — as to not overwhelm the shopper and create instant impact — you have a greater opportunity when it comes to buyer collaboration.

Right now, considering what has and is transpiring in the world around us; growers have an opportunity to truly connect with, and support, the consumer. For quite some time, shoppers have been stuck indoors and summoned to online ordering or curbside pick-up. The only real consistency across the country is gardening. In a world, where there are current limitations, now is the time to educate yourselves on this market.

As a consumer, I want color. I want success. I want something nice to look at. I want the pieces of my planting puzzle outlined for me. I want to feel good about what I've planted and see the success as I watch my containers, gardens, and

landscape grow. I want to know my investment was worthwhile. How can you ensure that?

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