



**MARKETING  
FORUM**

## Dare to be *Different!*

### Top tips from the HTA Marketing Forum

The importance of brand, appealing to mature customers, data protection, direct mail and loyalty schemes were just a few of the topics on the agenda at the sell-out HTA Marketing Forum.

This annual one-day event, aimed at all those involved in marketing and public relations in the garden industry, took place at Horticulture House, Oxfordshire on 15 November.

Kevin Lavery from the Mature Marketing Association started off the day by encouraging all to future proof their business by viewing through mature eyes. In a youth centric advertising world, the growing mature market is of huge importance to the garden industry.

However, is not a homogenous market, there are many shades of grey, and with that in mind it is important to make age irrelevant. Mature people do not want to be labelled old nor do they want products for old people – they simply want solutions.

Robin Moore of Robin Moore Consultancy spoke about the importance of brand and what it says about you demonstrating how it is so much more than a logo. There has been a shift – brand is no longer about what you tell the customer it is about what your customers tell each other about you. Robin spoke of the need to create a narrative around your brand and use your story to make your customers journey simple.

Demonstrating a strong brand in practice Horticulture Week's Matthew Appleby spoke to Simon McArdle and Jo Wilkinson from Westland Horticulture about their integrated marketing approach. As one of the only brands in the sector to undertake TV advertising they explained how next year they are tying this in more closely with social media and use of video and encouraging garden centre retailers to make use of the content and help spread the messaging. Looking at trends for 2018 'indoor' was felt to have



continued potential and there is a massive opportunity to capitalise on this as a 'gateway to gardening'.

With the new General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) coming into force on 25 May 2018 Catherine Ripley from Field Seymour Parkes was on hand to talk through how this impacts on marketing activity. Whilst this is a supplement to the existing regulations it is very much designed to put data protection higher up the business agenda rather than treating it as an afterthought. Businesses need to ensure that they have a legitimate reason and consent for using data – giving individuals more control over their personal data.

In this ever digital world Mark Davies from Whistl spoke about the role that door drop and targeted mail can have in this. As well as being able to target specific postcodes direct mail has the advantage of being highly measurable and, with no contact details featured on it, is exempt from GDPR. With a good track record of helping to drive sales it forms an important part of an integrated marketing mix.

With smart phone ownership and mobile transactions on the increase Simon Phillips from NetXtra spoke about the importance of 'Mobile First'. In a highly competitive market place people are less likely to return once they have abandoned a transaction. For this reason alone, it is vital to make their journey as frictionless as possible.

Joe Aldworth from Old Railway Line Garden Centre spoke about how they have to go the extra mile in rural Wales to attract customers from a fairly wide catchment. They have had good success in using geo-marketing to focus on specific areas to help grow their 'Railway Reward' card loyalty scheme. This activity, combined with social media and ad word campaigns has resulted in 19% growth in number of their scheme members. Given their location their other focus is very much on the lifetime value of their existing customers they are using a variety of methods to increase visits and spend and build loyalty.

In their session on the Power of PR Graham Paskett and Holly Daulby from Paskett PR spoke about the successes they have had with various companies within the industry. One notable example was the PR around Hilliers' exhibit at the Chelsea Flower Show. They created a 'most treasured garden memory' tree which was populated throughout the week with individual leaves, filled in by

visitors including a number of high profile celebrities. Hilliers' are following this through in their Christmas experience with a 'Christmas traditions tree' in each of their 12 stores – simple but effective.

The brand at Millbrook Garden Company is all about 'Growing Smiles' and Liz Dowling and Tammy Woodhouse brought this to life talking about the initiatives than run under their Millbrook Family loyalty scheme. The free to join non-points based scheme is all about adding value and changing behaviour. They operate a series of initiatives including spend drivers, 'just because' rewards and random acts of kindness. This could be anything from a delivered plant to the top ten customers, a hand written thank you card or a voucher for free cake which staff have to give out where they see fit. Taking this to a new level the Millbrook team took to the streets in their brightly branded lorry delivering planted containers to an area of new housing. As you can imagine this caused quite a stir in the neighbourhood and as well as their free pot the surprised homeowners also received a welcome to your new home card and voucher for a half price plant. What a great way of making an impact and attracting new customers – for a relatively small investment.

Neil Grant from Ferndale Garden Centre encouraged all to put National Childrens' Gardening Week in the calendar. Now in its 4th year this event runs from 26 May to 3 June 2018 (May half term for most). Aimed at the under 12's this week provides a great focus for running events such as pot planting, tomato planting, GYO popcorn, treasure hunts and so on. Free to join in

with the campaign provides a vehicle to link events to, along with supporting logo and pr.

HTA's David Denny provide an update on the HTA's Gifting schemes showing how marketing plans for 2018 focus on getting more people into gardening. By curating inspiration content members will be encouraged to share materials and dovetail them into their existing activities.

With a timely seasonal topic Simon Davenport from BPOA and Colin Edwards from Woodlark Nurseries spoke about the Stars for Europe Poinsettia campaign and the work that was going on to make poinsettias the key Christmas plant. National Poinsettia Day on 12 December is the focus of the PR around the work.

Anita Bates from Perennial looked at partnership marketing and the mutual benefits of working with a charity whether through involvement in an event, joint products or making donations. Using examples from across the industry it is the partnerships that include a mix of activity that prove to be the most successful and build relationships.

Finally, Trevor Pfeiffer from Garden Trade News took a whistle stop tour through some of the great examples of innovative marketing activity from garden centres across the UK all helping to create memorable experiences for customers. From the intriguing Buddha's in the plant area at Walkers Nurseries, the simple bird feeder on the window of the restaurant at Woodside Plant Centre to a pop up Butterfly house at Aylett Nurseries and inspirational plant border at Timmermans Garden Centres.

## MANY THANKS

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