

Keeping the Interest in Gardening Alive!

Final Report to Flowers Canada Ontario

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Summary

Keeping the interest in gardening alive will be a challenge into the coming years of the 21st century as growers, wholesalers, and retailers strive to connect with a changing, aging, and distracted consumer. Flowers Canada! Ontario contracted with Bridget Behe and Carol Miller to engage in a two-part study to conduct original research about the attitudes, perceptions, and behavior of individuals ages 18-49 have about the horticulture industry, translate those findings into actionable marketing programs, and document the implementation of the findings/programs by garden retailers. We conducted the work from 2015-2016. The consumer research revealed that younger potential consumers are interested in food, fun, friends, and fitness. Plants can, and do, have a role in their lives. However, these individuals generally lack an awareness of the horticulture industry and the products and benefits that the industry offers. Marketing programs that foster future connections with these potential consumers will need to be made outside the retail garden space. New connections with future consumers may be achieved by having horticultural professionals meet potential consumers where they are: coffee shops, farmer's markets, and restaurant/bars where food and fun (social) intersect. Future communication efforts will need to be more electronic and less print as more persons under age 49 are, at best, skeptical of and, at worst, reject traditional forms of business-to-consumer communication (e.g. television, radio, newspaper) in favor of faster, personalized, electronic communications (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, etc.) The implementation of the research findings showed that retail operations that focused on food and fun, both in and out of the garden retail space, were successful in reaching a new, younger age cohort of consumers.

Introduction

This report summarizes the consumer input, synthesis of that input, and development of marketing campaigns as a result of the consumer research contracted by Flowers Canada! Ontario Growers and the work of Dr. Bridget K. Behe and Carol Miller. The report was commissioned in order to gain a better understanding of younger aged (potential) consumers and their perspective about the horticulture industry and the products we sell, in order to stimulate more purchases.

Key Changes in the North American Consumer

Canadian consumers have changed in fundamental ways, influencing their attitudes and purchases overall, not just plant purchases. Five key changes set the stage for the research and field studies because these trends have affected purchases of horticultural crops as well.

1. **The North American consumer base is the aging.** One of the core market segment for the horticulture industry is the Baby Boomers. Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964. Most grew up with a parent at home most of the time were entertained by playing games with friends outside. The lifestyle that Boomers established as children of

WWII era parents was, in many ways, far different from the childhood they gave their own children. Gen Y (as well as Millennials) have grown up in a very different world.

Gen Y (born between 1977 and 1994) had mothers and fathers both of who worked outside the home. These children were socialized in daycare facilities, starting in infancy, and continued to have planned social and physical activities. Unlike their parents, Gen Y grew up not knowing life without computers, cell phones, and the Internet.

2. **The Internet was launched on August 6, 1991, and forever changed our lives.**

Although it was at least a decade before widespread use became prevalent, the Internet has changed how and where we communicate, learn, and shop. The advent of online shopping and overnight delivery for a multitude of items has profoundly affected how Baby Boomers and others chose to shop. While some online horticulture shopping does occur, it will remain a challenge for the more traditional garden retailer to get new and younger customers in the store.

Advertisers long contended that word-of-mouth was some of the most compelling communication in the marketplace because it came, not from the business, but from buyers and was considered objective and unbiased. One of the larger online trends affecting companies today is online communication. Sharing online information with friends and strangers is a commonplace occurrence in the 21st century. Whether through social media or other online channels, electronic communication has usurped traditional media communications (e.g. television, radio, and print).

3. **Sustainability and environmentalism concerns began to spread in the 1990's and began to affect consumerism.**

Global warming and climate change have become an important concern for many in North America. Carbon emissions come from many aspects of the manufacturing and transporting of many products used in daily life. This concern likely has spurred at least some of the interest in local and/or organic food production. Consumers today will shop and do business with companies that not only take steps to do no further harm to the environment, but take the additional steps to restore or revive the local community. Causal marketing has become more common among many types of firms. Marketing the steps companies are taking to improve the environment will not go unnoticed.

4. **Focus on food quality, source, and nutrition.** The aging Baby Boomer and Millennial are both concerned about their food. They are concerned about how their food is grown and where it comes from. These topics are increasingly more concerning as more consumers strive to live a longer, better quality of life. Organic food production has tripled in Canada since 2006, far outpacing any other food sector's growth with Canadian-grown products capturing nearly 50% of the market (MacKinnon, Canada Organic Trade Association, 2013). While not a mainstream concept in ornamental horticulture, organic food production absolutely affects the horticulture industry.

5. **Fitness and health.** Along with the aging Baby Boomer's desire to have a long and active life comes the Gen Y and the Millennial's desire to do the same. Sitting has attained the negative health stigma that smoking did decades earlier. Activities, especially

outdoors in and around nature, are undertaken by people of all ages. While horticulture itself could be considered a healthy activity (pulling weeds and planting flowers can burn 200-400 calories per hour) engaging in outdoor activities contributes to the satisfaction derived from them. Horticulture and gardening can contribute to overall physical and mental health.

Given these and other important trends affecting businesses, Dr. Bridget Behe and Carol Miller were retained to investigate possible tactics and strategies to “Keep the Interest in Gardening Alive!” contracted by the Flowers Canada Ontario Growers.

Phase 1: Consumer Research (2015)

The consumer research was the first phase of two conducted to investigate the thoughts, attitudes, and perceptions of three age groups of Ontario residents. The team worked with GutCheck (<http://www.gutcheckit.com/>) to conduct three separate online focus groups. The groups were Gen Y (ages 18-29), Gen X (ages 30-49) and parents of children ages 2-12. The first one held was with parents (both fathers and mothers) of children ages 2-12 which took 5 days to collect 21 responses (February 20-24, 2015). The second group was collected for the Gen X (ages 30-49) which took 6 days to collect 25 responses (from Feb. 3 to 8, 2015). The third group was Gen Y (ages 18-29) which was collected from February 10 to Feb. 22, 2015 (12 days) during which we collected only 15 responses.

Both GutCheck and the team were perplexed as to why this youngest group was so extremely difficult to fill; it took twice as long as the other two groups and was filled to 10 short of our request. They asked their supplier (who send individuals to the focus group) to push potential participants four separate times. We were eventually both satisfied that we had captured sufficient responses and done all we could to capture those respondents. We believe this may be indicative of two things. First, the lack of interest in plants and gardening by the youngest age cohort manifested itself here. Secondly, this may also be indicative of their lack of interest in interacting about the product line.

It is important to note that not everyone answered every question and, in some instances, multiple responses were recorded. While this summary is not meant to be a statistical summary of the entire sample, response totals may add to more or less than 61 persons, depending on responses. We prodded and asked for additional information. Also, some participants commented on other’s responses and those comments were “counted” in some of the information presented below. Quotes are direct quotes from participants with minimal corrections of spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Respondent Profiles

Our total sample was 61 individuals (37 female, 24 male) who were nearly all educated beyond high school (11 had some college, 9 earned an associate degree, 23 had B.S. degrees, 6 had advanced degrees). The average age was 35.5 years and about a third were married (21), never married (26) and in other relationship statuses (2 divorced, 10 living with partner, 2 separated). Most (56) were Caucasian, but other ethnic heritages were represented in the samples.

The *Parents Group* was comprised of 16 females and 5 males, 17 of whom were Caucasian and 4 were Asian. The average age was 37.9 years and all had children in the home. Most had 1-2 children; only one had 3 children. Their average level of interest in gardening (on a 1-5 scale) was 2.7. In terms of gardening spaces available to them (and they were permitted more than one space) were porch/balcony (10), front yard (13), and backyard (13). There were 6 from an urban region, 7 from a suburban region, and 8 from a rural region.

The *Gen X Group* was comprised of 15 men and 10 women, 20 of whom were Caucasian. The average age was 40 years and 2 had children in the home. Their average level of interest in gardening (on a 1-5 scale) was 2.68. In terms of gardening spaces available to them (and they were permitted more than one space) were porch/balcony (6), front yard (16), and backyard (18). There were 10 from an urban region, 5 from a suburban region, and 8 from a rural region.

The *Gen Y Group* was comprised of 12 females and 3 males, 10 of whom were Caucasian. The average age was 24 years and 3 had children in the home. Their average level of interest in gardening (on a 1-5 scale) was 2.4. In terms of gardening spaces available to them (and they were permitted more than one space) were porch/balcony (6), front yard (9), backyard (12). There were 3 from an urban region, 6 from a suburban region, and 6 from a rural region.

Insights: The high percentage or majority of women is consistent with what we would expect to see in terms of gardeners or potential gardeners. However, we were able to recruit a significant number of men, which should help the diversity of the profile. While a majority of participants were Caucasian, we again, see some diversity in ethnic heritage of the small samples. It was of interest to note that more Parents had access to a balcony/patio than Gen X or Gen Y. We might have hypothesized that to be the opposite. Some children were present in at least some of the homes in all three samples, again helping the diversity of the samples. Gardening interest was rater lower, on average, in the Gen Y group, not surprising.

Results

Plant Purchase History

More than half (56%) indicated they had purchased a flowering plant or seed while 33% had purchased a food producing plant or seed in the six-months prior to data collection (September 2014-February 2015). So the preponderance of their experience was with flowering plants,

mainly outdoors. Several mentioned indoor plants as the data collection time period was in winter.

Rachel S. said, “The flowers/plants/flowering plants I purchase are almost always a selfish purchase for myself - I simply love having them in the home, they boost my mood. The herbs were bought as a gift for my mother. She grew some outside in the summer, so I thought she would enjoy being able to do that inside the house in the winter too.” Jenny C. wrote, “Inside my home, I have potted geranium and orchids. It's winter now, so the only thing I have outdoor is a bare Japanese red maple tree. Once spring and summer come up though, tulips and hydrangeas will sprout out and colour my yards.”

In telling us *how* they decide to make their purchases, a variety of sources were cited. Ten of the 61 indicated some degree of impulse purchases (that they liked the color or plant itself) which indicates a great degree of influence for plants and displays at the point of purchase. This was exemplified in what Jeff B. said, “I just buy what I think looks nice and isn't too expensive and won't die if I forget to water it for a few days.” The family had a surprisingly important role in requests or suggestions for plant purchases (cited by 13) which included mother and children. 9 mentioned plant health. 8 mentioned doing some research or looking online for recommendations. Edibles were mentioned 5 times. Other influences stated were staff (3), price (7), tag (2), and maintenance (4). Jen C. wrote, “I just purchase plants that I like the look of mainly, and also for some of their uses. The aloe plant that I gave to my boyfriend and his family was partly for their sunburns. I look online for advice.”

First Gardening Experiences

Immediate family influenced nearly all of the participants in our study, primarily the mother (22 mentions). Second was the father with 13 mentions; these would include both respondents that listed either parent or said “parents.” The other family members who influenced the first gardening experiences of our panel were grandmother (5), grandfather (3), sister (1), wife (2), children (2), and brother (1). Clearly, the female influence was substantially larger than the male influence.

Cheryl H. wrote, “When I was a kid, Dad built raised garden plots and grew tomatoes, peppers and corn. My grandparents had rhubarb, raspberries and apple trees in their backyard. The first thing I ever grew on my own were tomatoes, in pots on the deck of my apartment. I chose them because I like tomatoes and they're easy to grow. They turned out tasting like tomatoes. Neighbourhood squirrels would occasionally try them and spit them out.”

The third greatest influence (11 reported) on the earliest gardening experiences was the house/home they had as a young adult. Sokol D.'s comment was typical of those 11 responses. He said, “We always had flowers in our apartment. With gardening started after we bought the house in 2007. We decided what to plant in the back yard and did everything ourselves. It wasn't easy the first time but it turned out really good. Especially the tomatoes, the lettuce and the leeks and onion which we didn't have to plant next year since they came out again.”

Those experiences have evolved, especially toward growing more food. For example, Minh L. said, "I generally like to know how to do...Well, everything, so being able to grow my own food and become more self-sufficient has made me look more deeply into gardening. I like to experiment with different seeds to see what grows even if I have no idea what I'm doing." and Michele D. said, "Now I do more research into what plants I can grow myself so that I can control what goes into the foods that I eat. It has led to a healthier lifestyle." Mike M. said, "Yes, they have evolved because I am more conscious of the food I put in my body, and if I grow it I know exactly where it's coming from and how it was grown, which is very important for me."

About a third of the sample said they haven't evolved in their gardening interests. Mike M. summed up many of their sentiments: "They haven't. I'm horrible with plants. I like dogs. Dogs are so much better, even though they poop." and S.N. said, "Unfortunately I don't have lots of time to invest in maintaining a decent garden. Having a dog also makes gardening a challenge. However, having the vegetable garden is a great pleasure that we look forward to planting every summer." The pet theme comes back again as a limitation of doing more gardening. Surprisingly, some/most people would rather deal with a pet than a plant.

How do they rate themselves as gardeners? Slightly more than half (33) saw themselves as novices while 22 viewed themselves as average. The comparison was made to friends and neighbors, which was primarily the reason so many of them indicated they were average. We might tend to think of consumers who classified themselves as novices like Monica M. who said, "I consider myself a novice gardener. I know many aspects of gardening and plant maintenance but I do not particularly enjoy it and I often have trouble growing flowers of any kind." The more insightful comment came from Rachel S. who said she was average because, "I know all the basics, and have had experience gardening all my life, but would not really be able to give anyone tips or anything, I don't have any gardening secrets. I don't know the small details that can help a gardener, but I know enough to have a successful garden."

The Best of Gardening

When they discussed their gardening positive experiences or victories, notice the emotion that many are conveying with the words they use. Monica M. said, "My most successful gardening experience was the first year I ever planted tulip buds. They were given to me as a gift and I was not sure what to expect. The colours were beautiful and it was



Figure 1. Word cloud of responses from three focus groups on the benefits of gardening.

memorable because they were the only flowers I had ever planted that successfully grew for me.” Kevin R. said, “I ate the peas and carrots we grew last year, as well as the potatoes. If you can eat what you grow, it is a major success.” Most poignantly, Barbara L wrote, “I would have to say an aloe Vera plant, it grew so beautiful and at the time my mother was very ill with her illness she had a lot of pain, we used this plant for her and she actually felt better when we used it on her. This was one of my mom’s favorite plants, it sticks in my head every day remembering her soft soul. That is what this plant does to me every time I see it.”

Beauty and food were the two key themes that emerged in the focus group with regard to the best aspects of gardening. Beauty was mentioned 27 times while food was mentioned 19 times. But, the real richness of their gardening experiences came from the words mentioned less often. Peace, calm, relax was mentioned 11 times. This is a passive aspect to gardening, but clearly an enjoyable attribute to doing the ‘work’ or having someone else do it. Satisfaction/happiness/accomplishment were mentioned 7 times and show a different but powerfully positive emotional side to the benefits of our industry. Some other notable terms were watch (3), welcome (3), air (6), pride (3), nature/environment (4), nurture (3), family (3), home value (3), and mood boosting (3).

Monica M. said, “I find plants make homes feel more welcoming and fresh. I like having plants in all public areas and my office. Gardening gives me a sense of accomplishment because if your plants grow, you feel like you successfully created and maintained life.” Justin J. commented, “Plants to me represents life, new beginning, and you appreciate nature more. It makes the house and yard more appealing and full of life!”

Gardening Positives

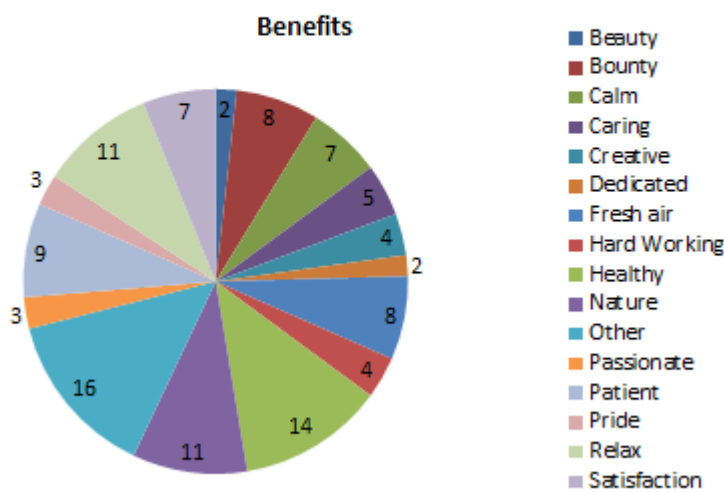


Figure 2. Gardening positives, with multiple responses permitted.

What are some of the positive aspects of gardening? Some of these responses related to the gardener’s personality, some related to what was gained through gardening. The diversity of benefits gives marketers lots of options to connect the industry’s products with positive feelings and outcomes. Many see working with plants as a healthy (9) way to connect with

removing them and replacing them with new ones which fared much better. It was frustrating because it was expensive and time consuming to replace them.” Frank T. said, “I planted a Japanese maple tree about 5 years ago. After the ice storm last year, the maple tree was dead. I felt so sad as this was the first major purchase I made on tree. It was so beautiful for the last 5 years. I miss my tree.” Elizabeth D. even said the plants hated her. This is pretty strong emotional language. She wrote, “Every time I buy a Cyclamen it dies. It doesn't matter how big or small, young or established. It is one of my favorite plants but they definitely hate me.” And Melissa R. doesn't like to spend the money if the plant dies, “Hate spending money on plants/flowers for them to just die a few days later.”

This quote, from Rachel S., summarizes many of the negative aspects our panel perceived about gardening. “I don't like that it can be unpredictable. Like you can do everything right and it's not guaranteed that a plant will survive or thrive. I am also not very patient, so it is difficult for me to wait the long time it takes for most plants to grow to fruition. I get so excited and want to check on them at least twice a day, only to find no change. I also don't have too much time on my hands to properly care for plants, which is why I have been resorting to lower-maintenance plants in the last few years - house plants I can water every so often, leave on a good shelf in view and in sunlight, and just enjoy them being there. I don't think I can minimize any of these aspects because they are least-liked by me only because they are out of my control. I can't do anything to change them and that's what frustrates me.”

Kevin R. made an insightful comment, “It is a lot of work. Watering, weeding, digging the garden beds, etc. It takes up a lot of time and effort. As for what is the limiting factor, we have used pretty much all the space we can for our garden. No more space, no more plants. And if I had any suggestions on how to get around these aspects, I would be doing them, not talking about them.”

The negative side was dominated by how much time (15) and work (12) gardening was and that plants required a lot of care (10). Weather (9) and water (3) were similar and mentioned, when combined, almost as often as the other top three concerns. Dying plants (7) and weeding plants (7) appeared in the middle tier of negative concerns. Other negatives mentioned were pets (3), allergies (1), impatience (3), unpredictable (1), cost (5), being tired (1), space/conditions (3) and one of our panelists found gardening “boring and tedious” {Melissa R.} because it was “just another job to do.”

What keeps you from gardening more?

What prevents you from gardening more? Time, especially time already committed to other obligations, including raising children and the weather. Time was a much bigger factor, cited by 40 of 61 persons and for nearly all of them, it was the very first issue. As Gladys K. said, “The basic daily routine. Life, and the fast lane. Gardening is a responsibility, and harsh weather is not helping when you desire to plant. But if you wish to plant isn't impossible indoors. You can always manage to care for one plant or two.” So there is a perception that our industry is more

time demanding than most of these young people would like to commit. Still, there are ways to reduce the perception of gardening being a big time consumer. Cheryl H. added, “Laziness. Really. Lack of knowledge. Then there's the time thing.” Time was cited by 40 of the panelists as the single thing that keeps them from gardening. This was followed by space (15), money (9), short season (8), knowledge (8), weather (7), health (4), interest (3), and (single citation) pests, access, dirt, selection, failure, pets, and selection. To a lesser extent space, knowledge, and money were mentioned. This indicates, to us, that conquering the time perception could go a long way to improving gardening participation.

How can we get children more involved?

Jenny C. commented, “Parents should involve their children in these activities because most kids don't grow up enjoying gardening, which is mostly because they weren't exposed to it in their childhood. If they grow up learning up gardening, chances are they will partake in these activities too when they grow up.” And Vanessa M. added, “It gives children a hobby and gets them outside instead of sitting inside watching TV. It also gives you time to bond with them when you teach them how to garden.” S.N. said, “As I mentioned before, when we have our vegetable garden, it's a family affair. We always start the plants from seeds, so from the get-go our daughter is actively involved in the process. Doing veggies also gives kids more opportunities to be involved in looking after the plants, and in terms of finished product, there's nothing better than being able to eat what you've grown.” Elizabeth D. said, “Last summer we started teaching them to garden. They water the plants, help put the weeds in the wheelbarrow and rake up the grass cuttings. They are very young so they mostly get in the way and slow things down but its family time and we are having fun so it doesn't matter.”

Stores and the places they shop for plants
 Most respondents mentioned more than one location where they buy plants. The number of times a store name was mentioned is shown in the figure below. Some of the reasons for store selections were close proximity, inexpensive, and selection. It does appear as though most of the respondents

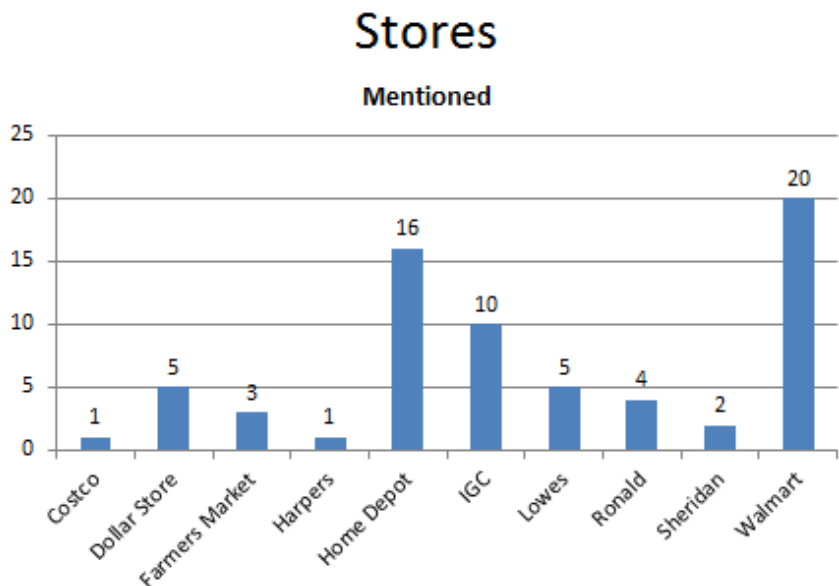


Figure 4. Stores and the locations at which people shop for plants.

believe that the box stores are less expensive or offer less expensive products. There was no mention of product quality at either location. If the participant was looking for something “special” s/he went to the IGC (Independent Retail Garden Center). Vanessa M. said, “Local community garden centres because it is close and convenient to get to and helps support local farmers.” Jenny C. stated, “Costco has a good selection in the spring and summer time, as well as Home Depot. These are close to my home and are reasonably priced.” There is some opportunity to influence where products are purchased. Mitch M. commented, “I have no idea which stores to go to. There are some plant/flower stores that I have been to but wouldn't actively go on my own with a plan in my head on what to buy. If I were to choose I would just choose a local store that sells plants and flowers. There are a few that are close by.” The service and product guarantee offered by Home Depot appealed to Krysta T. who said, “Home Depot because they are very helpful with choosing the products you need as well as they have a 5 year guarantee.”

When investigating the reasons for store selection, selection (22 mentions) and price (20 mentions) were the top two reasons. While quality was mentioned five times, only once was quality mentioned with price.

What would it take to get them to shop in the local retail garden center? For some, like Melissa R. would never go. She said, “Doesn't apply. I don't garden enough to make the long drive to a nursery.” The respondents do find that the staff is more knowledgeable (16 mentions) and used the word “expert” several times. There is no doubt that the staff at the local retail garden center is as good as or more knowledgeable



Figure 5. Reasons for store selection.

than the store they currently shop. However, the main negative was the perception of higher prices. There were 16 mentions of higher prices (as many as knowledgeable). The opportunities to lure them to the independents were deals (4 mentions) and specialty items (8 mentions). So, the panel seems relatively happy with the selection and price at the store they currently shop. There were two mentions of a more limited selection being a benefit. Francine T. said, “I like Supermarket because you do not have to choose from too many varieties of plants.” And Minah

L. said, "Price and convenience, mostly. There's not a horrid selection in these stores, either." In his book, *The Paradox of Choice*, Barry Schwartz said that having fewer choices in jams leads to greater sales. Considering the numerous mentions of selection at the box stores and the relative satisfaction with that selection, perhaps that is the phenomenon we are seeing. The consumers perceive the limited selection at the box store as sufficient for them and not overwhelming. Thus, they accept the options there and, in combination with the lower prices, perceive that combination to be ideal for them. This is not to suggest that the IGC should limit the selection, but consider an area where selections (and even prices) may be limited for the novice gardener.

What kind of plant store would you design? The responses to the question were largely in two camps: adjacent to another store or stand alone. Both groups of response described what would be recognized as box stores (adjacent to another store) or independent retailer (stand-alone). Unlike the Ohio focus group, this group mentioned having non-GMO plants for sale. Organic plants were mentioned once as were hydroponic production methods/systems. A few of the more interesting comments related to some specific dimensions. For example, Monica M. said, "If I had a plant store, I would also include fake plants in the store. These are especially useful for people that are not looking for long term maintenance, who may get tired of a certain decor very often, or who simply have no green thumb whatsoever." Chrystal A. said, "It'd be a stand-alone store where you can buy everything from seeds to fully-grown plants, all the accessories you need to grow pretty flowers or vegetables, cut flower arrangements and a plant triage where people can bring in their dying houseplants and learn how to better care for them. I'd have flower arranging workshops, a community garden in the back and would donate what I can't sell to food banks and assisted living facilities." Mitch D. described an open concept store in his comment, "I think it would be a stand-alone with access to an outside area that is big and has lots of different kinds of plants. The inside would be simple and open concept. Being able to see everything at once would be beneficial when comparing." S.N. had no idea as he said, "That's a really tough question since I have no expertise in business or gardening! If I wanted it to be viable, it would be located close to other businesses - maybe even a Tim Horton's or Starbucks! Perhaps close to home decor types of stores, so when people are buying things to spruce up their homes, they might consider plants, too..." nor did Kevin R. who said, "I have no idea. I wouldn't even think of starting my own plant store. The only thing I would suggest would be to have a "Idiots Guide to Growing ..." beside each plant so that those of us who don't know what we are doing might have a chance."

Who is a typical gardener?

Jenny C. summed up the majority opinion about who a gardener is, "The typical gardener to me, based on my personal experiences, is a middle-aged man living in a single house with a front and backyard. They would be very sensitive, hardworking, and disciplined. This typical gardener may be a blue-collar worker who wakes up earlier in the morning every day to maintain his gardens, or retired with the free time." Megan C. said, "I generally think of a gardener as someone older, usually female. Soft spoken, kind, and full of knowledge. From the gardeners I've met, they all tended to fall into this category. Probably because they've had time of this earth

to perfect their gardens.” And, Francine T. said, “A typical gardener would be someone with a “green thumb.” The gardener would be in dirt almost every day, and has to wash clothes a lot of time. The gardener would be between 25 to 70 years old. Talks about growth and pruning a lot. The gardener would have a shed behind the house for storing gardening items. Personality is hard to describe, because the background of the person is unknown. A typical gardener might have a pleasant attitude. They like beautiful colors, and bright outlook on life.”

Did the participant see him/herself as a gardener? Of the 60 who answered this question, most (48) did not. Jason S. said, “I don’t fit this description, I’m young, I don’t have time for gardening and I am not creative” and Chrystal A. said, “I’m very much that way except that I’m 28 :)” and Frank T. said, “Not really, maybe another 10 years :)” The happy faces were added by those respondents. Brad M. expressed a sentiment in between yes and no by saying, “yes and no when I’m stressed out I enjoy doing things, planted is very relaxing, peaceful, not something I do as much as my wife does, it’s different.” There were 12 who did see themselves as a gardener. Laura W. said, “Yes, I do. I like my house to look nice, but I want gardening to be easy, and it is not number one on my list of things I want to do outside.”

Clearly, gardening and gardeners have a problematic outdated image. The ability or capacity for free-time was the overwhelming attribute of a gardener. Time was mentioned 24 times in relation to a gardener. This need for free time is a misconception that can be addressed through multiple means and strategies. Age was most often mentioned as either older (18 times) or middle-aged (16 times) but not youthful or young. While 15 times, the gender of the gardener could be either male or female, most (15 times) respondents believed a gardener was female and there were three mentions of a gardener being male. One respondent indicated that gardeners are female while landscapers are male. What were some other gardener attributes? A love of plants or a passion for plants was mentioned 11 times. Here, again, a misperception that one must love plants to be a gardener can be addressed. Some positive attributes were patient (2), organized and detail oriented (2), concerned about property appearance (4), fit (1), able to take a risk with new plants (1), green thumb (2), love of outdoors and nature (4), active (2), healthy (1), calmer (4), and wanting to relax (1).

In what other activities does a gardener engage? We asked this question to gauge what other activities might be related to gardening. This would provide an avenue to approach individuals who were engaged in what was perceived to be a related activity to encourage them to purchase more plants. The most often cited activity was something done outdoors like camping, fishing, and hiking. Outdoor activities were mentioned 17 times. There was a general perception that gardeners would engage in time-consuming activities like crafts, especially knitting (4 mentions). The DIY or crafting was mentioned 16 times and reading was mentioned 15 times. These were the two second and third most often mentioned related activities. The other responses related to a wide variety of activities. Among the lesser mentioned related activities were cooking (10), followed by caring for pets (6), fitness (8), entertaining (4), gambling (2), golf (2), volunteering (1), wine-making (1), and cross-word puzzles (1).

Can we increase gardening or activities related to plants?

Many diverse opinions emerged in this question. Gladys K. was most pragmatic by saying, “Anything is possible as long as you have a reasonable budget, and a suitable plan. The perfect theory to increase the number of gardeners is to show them the significance of planting in our lives.” Angela L. expressed a similar sentiment, “It’s a great idea, but people are so busy nowadays, they might not want the work of a garden. We need to make it easier!” Jason S., summed up the diverse opinions quite well by saying, “possible, yes. likely, no. people are too busy and want to put their time and effort into things that last and don’t need to be maintained on a weekly basis.” Some, like Diedre S., were more optimistic. She said, “Yes, by marketing certain plants as being able to “clean” the home of bad air, or advertise them as something people NEED, then there may be a change.” And, Jackie M. added, “Yes I do. But people need to see it as affordable and beneficial. It helps to show them the health benefits of gardening and producing one’s own food.” Laura W. was also pragmatic by saying, “I’m not sure it’s possible. Depends on the reason why it has decreased. I know that new houses are being built with smaller and smaller yards, and more and more condos with no yard. People’s priorities and interests have changed. Gardening and plants take work, and the need for 'instant gratification' and lack of work ethic/laziness seem to be more and more common these days.” Chrystal A. wasn’t as optimistic by saying, “People in general are far too busy for a leisurely hobby such as gardening - technology is partially to blame. Gardening will become popular again once there’s an app. for that :)” Frank T. agreed by saying, “I believe it would be difficult to make it happen. As the house and the yard is getting smaller, people live farther away from work, which means more time on the road and less time on the house.” Jeff B. said, “Either people want to take the time to look after them or they don’t. I don’t think too many people have the free time to worry about caring for plants these days.” Francine T. also agreed by saying, “I believe it is the situation that people have happening in life. It is hard to bring about. Technology, fewer jobs, and moving away from a community has caused the low participation. A community would need a sign made that reaches out to plant related people.”

What might help you want to garden more?

Jackie M. began by saying, “Money to purchase them, time to plant them and for the plants to flourish more fully.” Her quote captured most of the key themes or reasons to encourage people to garden more. Time was mentioned most often (27 times) which was far beyond the other reasons. Space was mentioned 19 times and money was mentioned 12 times. So, it would appear from the conversations that price isn’t they key barrier. Beneath some of the time concerns and outright mentioned in other instances was success (5 specific mentions). This indicates to us that desiring success in a shorter time might be one way to increase participation and/or purchases. Especially since the short growing season or weather was mentioned 8 times, having fruit set on plants may give some of the potential consumers some of the more time and success they are seeking. Knowledge was mentioned by 7 participants, food by 4, and interest by 2. Some, like

Francine T., feel they need more passion to be engaged more, “To have me want to have more plants or gardening I would have to have a deep passion. Having a passion for planting and gardening, I would desire having a lot of plants, and ideas of shaping my garden. And also with that passion, comes the determination to maintain it no matter what happens.” Most of the participants listed more than one reason and it was more about having something (time, space, etc.) than needing some of the benefits. We need to find more benefits that can be delivered more reliably and in a shorter time period. The short growing season needs to be addressed.

How can parents and others get more children involved in gardening?

Nearly everyone agreed that it is a good idea to get children involved in gardening. Only one individual said that their children had no interest (a few others without children declined to offer any input). Michael R. said, “I let my kids help out by pulling weeds and picking plants by getting them to get the leaves closer to the ground. It is a good way to spend time with the kids and get them away from the Xbox and Playstation.” The activity offered most was growing (21 mentions) but that letting children help with watering (6), picking/harvesting (4), and digging (3) were also specifically mentioned. Five people mentioned that they wanted to use the garden to inspire their children and two mentioned teaching responsibility. Eating the bounty was a popular benefit for kids, mentioned by 10 participants. A few (3) mentioned that it was dirty (which may appeal to some children) or that children could be helpful in weeding (2) while a few others (3) said it was a good way to get their children outdoors. S.N mentioned, “As I mentioned before, when we have our vegetable garden, it's a family affair. We always start the plants from seeds, so from the get-go our daughter is actively involved in the process. Doing veggies also gives kids more opportunities to be involved in looking after the plants, and in terms of finished product, there's nothing better than being able to eat what you've grown.” Elizabeth D. said, “Last summer we started teaching them to garden. They water the plants, help put the weeds in the wheelbarrow and rake up the grass cuttings. They are very young so they mostly get in the way and slow things down but its family time and we are having fun so it doesn't matter.”

How do we get a community to garden more?

Molly K. summed up the 27 mentions of how to get a community gardening more by saying, “Every town or city should have a community place where people can gather as a group and plant their favourite veggies or herbs or just grow plants in the park to keep the environment green. The parks or even the condo community space hardly have any trees. Residents should be encouraged to grow more in their own community.” This far exceeded the remainder of the responses. Only six mentions of a game/competition. Josh C. suggested, “Some suggestions that i have for increasing plant activities within the population is to play games while gardening like the first one to water it gets another plant seed or if they grow a plant correctly then they will get 5 dollars.” Reducing the cost was also mentioned six times. Other suggestions included the use of Pinterest, clean air, better for the environment, use of window boxes, rewards (2), and viral videos.

How would you like to have retailers contact you?

We asked the participants how they would prefer that retailers help connect them to the information and plants they sell. Flyers (15), email (10), better price (8), mail (5), website (4) were the most often cited ways for retailers to reach new customers. Margaret D. said, “By offering a guarantee that the plants that are sold a plant retailer will last the whole summer, then I would be more inclined to go and shop at this garden store. If I get an E-mail from these store in my junk mail, I will ignore them.” Freda M. added, “I live in the urban core. My issue is having a plant retailer that I like, in the vicinity. Most nurseries or garden centers are too far to travel to by foot, and if you don't drive, it can be an issue. A need for inner city nurseries is there.”

What other types of project or activities do you like to do?

In terms of other activities, the participants liked to engage in, the highest mentioned was sports (14), followed closely by reading (13), computer (12), and then crafts (9) social activities (9), kids (8), exercise (8), pets (5), movies (4), and music (4). Other activities mentioned were education/science, shopping, cooking (2), travel, and art. Kevin R. said, “Write software, theatre performances, chauffeur my daughter to various lessons/clubs/etc., spend time with friends and family.”

The Six Most Important Things You Need to Know from This Research

What are the six key take-home messages from all of this focus group input?

1. It's Uncomfortable Feeling Ignorant.

Most people see themselves as novices when it comes to plant knowledge. Even those who see themselves as average are insecure. There is an arcane feel about plant knowledge, making it mysterious and intimidating.

Slightly more than half (33 out of 61) saw themselves as novices, while 22 viewed themselves as average. The comparison was made to friends and neighbors, which was primarily the reason so many of them indicated they were average.

That sense of ignorance undermines younger consumers' sense of ownership when it comes to gardening. They are not typical gardeners, because that group of people is older and has had lots of time to understand the mysteries of plants. Even those who rate themselves as having average skill levels at gardening do not think they know enough to advise anyone. They only know enough to keep most of their own plants alive.

There is a tone of the plants being threatened with death at all times, and their meager knowledge does just barely enough to hold off a yard full of brown, brittle shrubs and vegetables.

“I know all the basics, and have had experience gardening all my life,” says one participant, Rachel S., who is in the 18-29 year-old group, “but would not really be able to give anyone tips or anything. I don’t have any gardening secrets. I don’t know the small details that can help a gardener, but I know enough to have a successful garden.”

Jeff B., who’s in the 30-49 year-old group, sums up the effect this sense of ignorance has: “I just buy what I think looks nice and isn’t too expensive and won’t die if I forget to water it for a few days.”

2. Yes, Online Research Is a Big Deal. But, So Is Trusted Real-World Advice.

The conventional wisdom that today’s customers are researching everything online was born out by our group of consumers. Yet the internet isn’t the last word. Many turn to older relatives for advice about as often as they turn to the internet.

Understanding this generational mix will be an important key to attracting new customers to local garden stores.

Even when a family member offers advice, online research is standard. The family member’s advice is trusted, but our participants want to learn more about what they are about to take on.

Immediate family influenced nearly all of the participants in our study, primarily the mother (22 mentions). Second was the father with 13 mentions; these would include both respondents that listed either parent or said “parents.” The other family members who influenced the first gardening experiences of our panel were grandmother (5), grandfather (3), sister (1), wife (2), children (2) and brother (1). Clearly, the female influence was substantially larger than the male influence.

Cheryl H. wrote, “When I was a kid, Dad built raised garden plots and grew tomatoes, peppers and corn. My grandparents had rhubarb, raspberries and apple trees in their backyard. The first things I ever grew on my own were tomatoes, in pots on the deck of my apartment. I chose them because I like tomatoes and they’re easy to grow.”

3. Food Gardening Is Almost as Common as Flower Gardening.

It’s no surprise that our group said food is a big reason gardening holds any attraction for them. (But don’t rule out beauty as a motivator just yet — it still outpaced food as why they buy the plants they do. Beauty was mentioned 27 times while food was mentioned 19 times.)

One reason food holds appeal is that it gives younger gardeners a sense of accomplishment.

Here’s what Minh L., a Gen Y participant, said about food gardening: “I generally like to know how to do ... well, everything. So being able to grow my own food and become more self-sufficient has made me look more deeply into gardening. I like to experiment with different seeds to see what grows, even if I have no idea what I’m doing.”

One mom, Angela L., was even more enthusiastic about what she saw as the payoff to food gardening: “The glory of the harvest and enjoying the fruits of your labor!”

As expected, health concerns are another driver of food gardening.

“Now I do more research into what plants I can grow myself so that I can control what goes into the foods that I eat. It has led to a healthier lifestyle,” another 18-29 year old, Michele D. said.

The same sentiment was expressed by those belonging to the Gen X and parents groups, so the need for knowing where healthy food comes from is widely held.

Beauty and food were the two key themes that emerged in the focus group with regard to the best aspects of gardening. Kevin R. said, “I ate the peas and carrots we grew last year, as well as the potatoes. If you can eat what you grow, it is a major success.”

4. Outdoor Tasks Are Annoying.

Our 2015 focus group sees gardening as time consuming and hard work, which is a repeat of what we learned with our 2014 groups in Ohio.

For most, gardening is seen as a chore, and many assume that those who like doing it have the luxury of time, space and income.

That said, the same people also see gardening as healthy and as a way to connect with nature.

S.N., a parent, summed up many of their sentiments: “Unfortunately, I don’t have lots of time to invest in maintaining a decent garden. Having a dog also makes gardening a challenge. However, having the vegetable garden is a great pleasure that we look forward to planting every summer.”

The culprit? The appeal of modern technology.

“People my age can’t pry their eyes from their cellphones for a meal, let alone long enough to tend a garden,” said a Gen Y participant, Megan C. “Others generally feel it is way too much work, and not worth the reward. Or lack thereof if it fails.”

Lack of time (12), hard work (9) and dirt/dirty (7) were the most often cited downsides. Some found gardening boring (4), for hippies (2) or those who were/are obsessed (1) or older (1). The problems were the weather (2), pests (3), frustration in general (2), weeding (2), expensive (2), caused one to be scheduled/tied-down (2) or gave the person too much sun (3) or aches/pains (3).

That can have a major impact on how plants and gardening are viewed if something goes wrong. If you love a task, the occasional failure is only a hiccup. But if you approach a task with a sense of uncertainty and thinking it’s a chore, failure has an outsized impact.

“I once helped plant shrubs at my grandmother’s, but after a month or so, some of the shrubs started to die for no apparent reason. We ended up removing them and replacing them with new

ones which fared much better. It was frustrating because it was expensive and time consuming to replace them,” said Jason S., who was in the 18-29 year-old group.

A parent, Frank T., told a similar story, with more emotion: “I planted a Japanese maple tree about five years ago. After the ice storm last year, the maple tree was dead. I felt so sad, as this was the first major purchase I made on a tree. It was so beautiful for the last five years. I miss my tree.”

In the video game era, when fun activities have a predictable — and fast — outcome, the variable results of gardening can come as an affront.

“I don’t like that it can be unpredictable,” said Rachel S., a Gen Y participant. “Like, you can do everything right and it’s not guaranteed that a plant will survive or thrive. I am also not very patient, so it is difficult for me to wait the long time it takes for most plants to grow to fruition. I get so excited and want to check on them at least twice a day, only to find no change.

“I also don’t have too much time on my hands to properly care for plants, which is why I have been resorting to lower-maintenance plants in the last few years — house plants I can water every so often, leave on a good shelf in view and in sunlight and just enjoy them being there. I don’t think I can minimize any of these aspects because they are least-liked by me only because they are out of my control. I can’t do anything to change them and that’s what frustrates me.”

Kevin R. made an insightful comment: “It is a lot of work. Watering, weeding, digging the garden beds, etc. It takes up a lot of time and effort. And if I had any suggestions on how to get around these aspects, I would be doing them, not talking about them.”

5. Adults Want Kids to Experience Gardening as a Life Lesson.

Ironically, despite the negative feedback many participants gave on their own gardening habits and attitudes, nearly everyone agreed that it is a good idea to get children involved in gardening.

“Parents should involve their children in these activities because most kids don’t grow up enjoying gardening, which is mostly because they weren’t exposed to it in their childhood,” said Jenny C., a Gen Y participant. “If they grow up learning up gardening, chances are they will partake in these activities too when they grow up.”

Vanessa M. added: “It gives children a hobby and gets them outside instead of sitting inside watching TV. It also gives you time to bond with them when you teach them how to garden.”

The gardening activity for kids mentioned most often was growing (21 mentions), but letting children help with watering (6), picking/harvesting (4) and digging (3) were also specifically mentioned. Five people mentioned that they wanted to use the garden to inspire their children, and two mentioned teaching responsibility.

Eating the bounty was a popular benefit for kids, mentioned by 10 participants. A few (3) mentioned that it was dirty (which may appeal to some children) or that children could be helpful in weeding (2) while a few others (3) said it was a good way to get their children outdoors.

“It is a good way to spend time with the kids and get them away from the Xbox and Playstation,” Michael R. said.

S.N said it’s important her children experience the full cycle of growth and harvest: “When we have our vegetable garden, it’s a family affair. We always start the plants from seeds, so from the get-go our daughter is actively involved in the process. Doing veggies also gives kids more opportunities to be involved in looking after the plants, and in terms of finished product, there’s nothing better than being able to eat what you’ve grown.”

6. Gardening is an Emotional Activity.

We gathered the comments that revealed our participants’ most heartfelt thoughts on gardening.

“Plants to me represent life, new beginning, and you appreciate nature more. It makes the house and yard more appealing and full of life!” Justin J.

“Best gardening experience? I would have to say an aloe vera plant. It grew so beautiful and at the time my mother was very ill with her illness she had a lot of pain, we used this plant for her and she actually felt better when we used it on her. This was one of my mom’s favorite plants. It sticks in my head every day remembering her soft soul. That is what this plant does to me every time I see it.” Barbara L.

“I find plants make homes feel more welcoming and fresh. I like having plants in all public areas and my office. Gardening gives me a sense of accomplishment because if your plants grow, you feel like you successfully created and maintained life.” Monica M.

Turning Input into Marketing Campaigns

We sought the input and advice of the public relations firm Eberly and Collard. We provided them with the data and synthesis of that data and asked them to identify some marketing campaigns that would put the findings into action. The campaigns are listed here and information will be communicated to collaborating retailers to give them the foundation for adapting the campaigns to their own stores in 2016.

Considerations retailers should have before they implement any campaigns

There were several points that emerged from the consumer input that serve as a launch board for the campaigns. These are a product of what we saw from the consumer input combined with an understanding of other retail successes in the marketplace.

1. Give customers a personalized encounter.

In a highly competitive marketplace where the consumer's ignorance is tough for them to handle and their limited time is quite precious, a personal interaction may win the sale, especially for the independent garden center. Higher-end brands are doing this to market their businesses. Higher end retailers, such as Neiman Marcus, are striving for this personal interaction compared to Target or Walmart. When a consumer is thinking about clothing, they have options from brands in both high and lower brand perception positions. However, the high-end brands have distinguished themselves as being *worthy* of those higher price points. They have cultivated this "better" image and are perceived to be "worth more." These upscale brands/stores have enticed customers to drive just a bit further to reach their destination and spend just a bit more. Higher end retailers develop this more personalized experience not just with products, but with their staff. Some garden centers have personal shoppers or concierge programs that offer some ways to serve their customers. We suggest that some of those programs may need to be reimaged to suit today's time-crunched, novice customers. Furthermore, customers often associate their impressions of the brand/store with what they see online. The online presence gives the retailer a third opportunity to create a more upscale, personalized experience like Amazon Prime.

Some IGCs may consider adapting the Amazon Prime Model. Customers could sign up for a members-only program (fee or for free). Retailers could develop a page and dedicate that page on their site to allow them an online connection to permit the subscribers to search for special benefits, discounts, events just for them. Some IGCs have offered these VIP programs and it may speak well to the members-only club. Communicate with them in the way they would like to get this information. People are very busy and don't always know what and how to plant. Pricing models (\$49 to \$199) would give them some cost-effective benefits. One of those benefits might be one hour in the spring season of consulting for an at-home gardener. For every order placed that is over \$100, they would get free delivery. This may be a bit like personalized grocery shopping, and Publix's is starting to launch their own service. Subscribers could receive coupons or sales that were exclusive to them, but they also get special assistance. Retailers may even consider something like Instacart app for grocery shopping, which may have some potential especially for the first time home buyer. A fee of approximately \$9.99 a month might give them access to their own portal for information.

One adaptation of this might be for them to build that cart online Saturday morning before they get in the car. Customers would then drive to pick up and pay for the cart. They can be in their

pajamas the night before and do their research then just pick up the plants and accessories just driving by. The paying part is relatively easy but showing the cart is a bit more cost prohibitive.

2. Embrace and use the internet; your customers are.

Today, every business that fails to have an online presence is invisible to most customers. Most firms grasp the notion that they must have an update, captivating, changing online presence. It is essential that the website be mobile ready since nearly all customers are searching for product information and/or retailers from their mobile devices. Not being mobile ready is as bad as not having an updated website. However, many retailers fail to go beyond the updated website, and they should. Social media is emerging as an important retailing mechanism because it provides the online mechanism for the most trusted form of communication: word of mouth.

Social media is an online mechanism for word of mouth communications. People still trust other people more than they trust a store/retailer/brand. Putting that type of content online, in social media, can be a powerful stimulus for shopping at the IGC. Remember, social media should be a conversation stimulus/mechanism, not a high pressure sales environment. Social media can be used to post photos of successes and as a place where customers can give each other advice. If a consumer has a problem, they can talk about what happened and ask each other questions. At the IGC level, there are sales people who could help offer advice and help market those fora. The key to success using social media is to keep the business and products as a core part of the conversation. Business that facilitate the conversation among customers and interested customers-to-be will be the ones who prevail.

One creative way to engage some customers in an online dialog may be to invite a younger person to be the model customer. In this age of reality television and redesigning meals, homes, personal appearances, and kitchens, a retailer who renovates a space for one younger customer could be an inspiring model for others. A retailer could then help them with one small area. The garden center would give them the help to get them through the process and achieve success. The IGC could ask the model customer to sign a simple release and agree to post their experiences and reviews online. They could be encouraged to post videos and blog about their success.

Many IGCs offer some classes and these could be featured in social media. Retailers could facilitate a class with a tighter curriculum (more concise topics, shorter sessions) and have younger staff members teach the classes, which enhances the welcoming nature of the event for a younger demographic. These class topics should be geared toward quick gardening, fast landscaping, and solutions to get customers in and out of the garden center quickly. These should be classes that motivate people to attend to learn just enough of what they need to know in an efficient and quick way. This perspective makes faster and easier work for the customer. Consider two instructors or simultaneous instructors. Pair a younger with an older person to team teach. Use social media or prizes to motivate potential customers to attend. Maybe there is a practical how-to at the end of class where there is an Instagram posting and video tape so the

course could be used on social media. Campaigns must be marketed before, during, and after the event. Social media, publicity, signage, paid advertising can be good investments.

In addition to their website and social media interactions, retailers should promote the use of existing applications (apps) and develop new apps, where possible. While it may take some time for smaller IGCs to create their own app, finding and encouraging the use of existing apps may be their best short term solution. The younger generation is motivated to use apps to seek out other products (what should I wear to the party this weekend?) and solutions (what should I eat for dinner this evening and where can I find it?). Could there be an IGC retailer/grower supported app that could be developed? Open Table is a model. Open Table helps competing restaurants close to each other. The app may help customers find plant availability and give them information about the plants.

Another online mechanism potential customers use is the online review. Customers read and make purchase decisions based on the reviews of other customers. Many research products by looking at photos on social media, and searching the web for types of products they want to buy. They want to see what their friends, and even strangers, are buying or where they are shopping or what they are eating. A high percentage of customers do research online before they ever visit the store. If independent garden centers embrace and encourage online reviews, they will increase their odds of connecting with younger customers.

3. Meet potential customers where they are.

People are emotional about their plants, especially when the plants die, and they are very uncomfortable acknowledging what they don't know. Asking a question shows ignorance, but most customers don't even know what to ask. Given this situation, retailers need to put a greater emphasis on meeting potential customers where they are. Helping potential customers develop an easier, faster way to grow their plants will help them feel better and be more successful. Often, retailers are striving to get new customers to try *something*. The goal is for them to be successful and enjoy it. Research is clear that delighted customers are the ones to return again and become loyal customers. Garden retailers need to help coach customers to success from where they are starting, not from where they expect them to be. Coaching could be through subscription or for an additional fee. Most likely that coaching will come electronically, given how most younger potential customers feel about their limited time and knowledge.

Garden retailers need more imagery to connect with future customers. Right now, the industry lacks a cool person (whose opinion could influence many others) of that age who is into plants. Our spokespeople, our opinion leaders, our models are not cool or trendy and they should be. Consider the imagery used in in-store and online communications and be sure it includes persons of diverse, especially younger ages. Don't emphasize the plants in that imagery, emphasize the people.

Retailers also need to put greater emphasis on creating projects that fit the lifestyle of younger aged consumers; not simply selling plants but selling solutions. One online focus group participant, Carol, was restricted to a balcony and high heat and others face equally challenging limitations. Retailers need to be more “up front” about easy solutions to some of those big problems. For instance, retailers might highlight vertical gardens with LED lights that have water proof containers that won’t mess a floor or the downstairs balcony. Garden retailers also need smaller solutions as some on the market, like Aerogrow, take up too much counter space. The industry needs to come up with some creative watering solutions for indoors and the balcony.

The container sizes and cultivars need to be adapted to their smaller space lifestyle, also. IGCs often have finished products (e.g. flowering plants) but so many young customers are interested in foodscaping. Having a variety of smaller-scale fruits, vegetables, and herbs in addition to flowering plants may entice the younger crowd to make a purchase. If garden retailers market more products that are closer to the “finish line” the risk is reduced, they are more likely to have success, and probably can relate faster to the products that a plant that is 10 or more weeks away from harvest.

Marketing Campaigns

The team developed five marketing campaigns that independent garden retailers can adapt for their own use to recruit new and younger consumers.

1. Discover Life at Your Doorstep

Two key findings showed that consumers feel “outdoor tasks are annoying” and “all adults believe all children should experience horticulture and gardening.” This marketing campaign aims to counter these attitudes. An effective tagline would be: “Need a place to recharge and enjoy life? It’s as close as your own garden.” To implement this campaign, images of outdoor living areas and children playing could be helpful. Discover Life at Your Doorstep would emphasize the nurturing act of planting and growing flowers and edibles, connecting many consumers and potential consumers to both the edible and ornamental aspects of the industry. Imagery congruent with their own self-image would be especially critical in this campaign. Potential consumers will need to see images like themselves and their children engaging in these activities.

2. Plug Into Nature

Using the key findings that food gardening was important and that adults want children to experience gardening, this marketing campaign emerged. An effective tagline would be: “Give kids memories to last a lifetime. And the skills to live life fully.” To implement this campaign, retailers could use images of children planting and harvesting vegetables. Children’s activities with plants could be highlighted and the fun dimensions of taste and fragrance, as well as the beauty of the bounty, would need to be emphasized.

3. Plant The Best Tasting Meals You'll Ever Have

Using the key finding that food gardening is important, we developed this marketing campaign. An effective tagline might be: Taste the best locally-grown herb, fruit and vegetables you can find! Our initial thoughts were to promote the local plant growers supplying the store with photographs and names. This helps to humanize the farmer/grower, making him/her more relatable to the customer. The team would recommend that the garden retailer ask a great photographer to use farm-to-table themes when photographing suppliers.

4. Helping You Grow a Healthy World

With an emphasis on easy projects that will fit today's lifestyle, like indoor herb gardens, attractive privacy screens ideas, and colorful window boxes, we identified this potential marketing campaign. An effective tagline might be: We'll show you how to green up your house, your garden and your lifestyle. One concept to implement this marketing campaign would be to offer 24/7 advice via email, online FAQs, online videos, and in person workshops. This campaign would address the key finding that it's uncomfortable feeling ignorant and real world advice is valued.

Phase 2: Field Implementation by Retailers (2016)

The team took the focus group research findings, marketing campaigns and considerations and sought out retail garden stores in Ontario that would be willing to work with us to implement the campaigns. One key point was to monitor success (or lack thereof) of the campaigns so that other garden retailers adopting the campaigns might have a better starting point. We recruited five companies in Ontario and four of them produced helpful information. The team very much wanted Sheridan's multiple location garden retail company to be a part of the study. However, the death of marketing director Mary Beth Brown affected that collaboration. Repeated telephone and electronic communications were not fruitful in persuading them to become part of the field study.

No funds were expended to help host events. The collaborators planned and funded their own events. The team mainly helped with impact assessment and provided imagery to help more fully implement the campaigns. We present their insights by collaborator, below.

DeGroot Nurseries, Sarnia, ON

Contact: Diane Visser

DeGroot used primarily Campaign 3 (Plant the Best Tasting Meals You'll Ever Have) and 4 (Helping You Grow a Healthy World), and made some changes to key programs in 2017.

The most successful marketing activity was what Diane Visser referred to as the “cheap flyer,” which promoted DeGroot’s seminars. In 2015, attendance was problematic. Many seminars did not have sufficient registration, and so many classes were cancelled.

In 2016, using the imagery and suggestions included in Campaigns 3 and 4, Diane created inexpensive flyers to promote the classes. The cost was only \$0.02 to copy and only \$0.04 to insert into the newspaper, hence her name of “cheap flyer.”

The campaigns seemed to have an impact: Every workshop was full, and all had a waiting list long enough to fill another class.

Diane was quite helpful in sharing information about adaptation of those campaigns into DeGroot Nurseries marketing efforts. For example, Diane worked with Carol Miller to further develop a three-fold Veggie Flyer the store distributed in April, with Meister providing imagery. They were able to make changes in this, but not in some other advertising that had already gone to press. The imagery included more people in their 20s and 30s, and more children. These fliers were mailed every two weeks prior to and during the busy spring season, with an emphasis on food.

Diane reported that 2016 was a very good year; their sales were up significantly: 13% overall above 2015. The food oriented themes performed especially well, with the veggie flyer being highly effective. Hot peppers were their top selling item, and so DeGroot added the Skoville Heat Chart (<http://www.pepperscale.com/hot-pepper-list/>), and people really responded well to having the chart visible.

Additionally, DeGroots hosted an Easter Egg Hunt (March 26) and Dog Fair (March 19). Diane reported that they had nearly 1,000 dogs at the Dog Fair in this, the fourth year of the event. The team discussed whether DeGroot captured any new business as a result of the event. Diane reported that one woman returned (commented to the staff about returning) and spent \$400 on seven pieces of clothing. The clothing line is new to DeGroot this year.

They host a wide variety of philanthropic events (John DeGroot won Citizen of the Year last year for the fundraising that the nursery does on behalf of other entities). Their Open House was April 15-16. They distributed their postcard for free grass seed, which featured the anti-selfie (bare feet only in the grass). They hosted three dog runs in the winter, where they opened the greenhouses to dogs to have their run of the place. They also hosted a Pigeon and Poultry event in January. In the summer, they hosted an art show (Art Under Glass) and a Wine and Fusion event.

By mid-June, the majority of spring sales were over, but Diane reported that they were still very busy at DeGroot.

They have no major plans for changing fall/winter offerings. Most of the winter workshops focus on making centerpieces and wreaths, swags, and urn inserts. They will continue to offer workshops on fairy gardening and houseplants and herbs.

Bridget asked about digital media and social media changes. Diane reported they had not increased or really changed their presence. Facebook and their newsletter seem to be very effective. John DeGroot writes an article once per week.

Other events hosted in 2016:

- July – Friends and Family Day (by invitation only). However, sales for this event were down from prior years.
- September- Fall festival and parking lot sale; sales were down from prior years.
- October – Fiery Faces (A Halloween event) Store sales were up (Note: the weather was better in 2016 than it had been in prior years).
- November - International Men’s Day. This was the first year for this event and DeGroots was satisfied with the sales.
- IODE Christmas Home Tour and 2016 sales were about the same as years past.
- Craft Sale – DeGroots rented 100 tables in the greenhouse to vendors to sell their wares. Sales were up for the store over previous years.
- Christmas with my Friends. This event was limited to 100 participants. Sales were up from 2015.
- Shop Local Day (Black Friday) Sales were approximately the same as 2015.
- Winterwonderland-KIDS- Hospital fund raiser with sales about the same as 2015.
- Winter Market –ADULTS- Hospital fund raiser (New this year) Sales were poor.
- Mommy Monday (New in 2016) DeGroots offered a babysitter and goodies and discount. The event was not successful.
- Seniors Tuesday (New in 2016) Offered Coffee and cookies and discount. The event was not successful.
- Fashion Day for Ladies (New in 2016) Offered sales on Fashion Department. Sales were okay.
- International Poinsettia Day (New in 2016) Offered sales on Poinsettias. Sales were okay.
- Grinch’s Dash to Christmas (25% off all Christmas) Sales were great.
- Ebenezer’s Delight (50% off all Christmas) Sales were great.
- International Caroling Day! (New in 2016). DeGroots offered a free ornament to anyone who sang a carol. Reception was poor.

Diane said the biggest success was their Winter workshops. She hosted 28 workshops, most of which were full to capacity. The workshops offered centerpieces, swags, hanging baskets, urns, miniatures, and a kids club. Private workshops were very popular. They ran out of days for the classroom or Diane would have been able hold do more.

Griffin Greenhouses, Peterborough, ON

Contact: Vikki Whitney

Griffin focused on campaigns 1 (Discover Life at Your Doorstop) and 2 (Plug into Nature). They have a strong presence with workshops and education (Vikki is a non-practicing high school teacher). They promote these through e-newsletters and have several children's workshops. It was important to Griffin to promote the health benefits of houseplants in 2016 and they also want to do a better job with marketing herbs and vegetables. Vikki said this was brought about due to the research results. The efforts improved the bottom line and customer diversity in 2016, Griffin reports, although she did not share numbers.

Sheridan Nurseries, Greater Toronto, ON

Contact: Jesse Taedo

When we contacted Sheridan Nurseries in the spring, they had their spring campaigns in place. Much of their focus was campaign 4 (Helping You Grow a Healthy World). Many events were being targeted toward novice gardener; gardening 101; attendance increased over 2015. Employees were inviting novice gardener personally to attend the series and gain some confidence. Sheridan's focus was to help the novice gardener with terminology and giving them some confidence. Using "gardening made easy" in their communications. This approach seemed to resonate with people of all ages. Sheridan Nurseries was promoting that term (novice gardener) in digital and print campaigns. Quite a few customers said "that was easier than I thought". The team looked at some of the copy Sheridan Nurseries used and how they worked to avoid using some other terms. For example, they tried to demystify gardening by showing some steps to success which also helped take out some of the "work". They used terms that helped potential customers who were looking for "ideas" and base knowledge or "here's how to do this at your place" or the word "hack". They looked to some of the cooking websites for terms to adopt. Sheridan Nurseries felt that specifics resonated better than broad terms. "5 easy ideas for vegetable gardening."

Sheridan Nurseries was looking at campaign 3 (Plant the Best Tasting Meals You'll Ever Have) for a summer vegetable campaign called "Grow Your Own." They have a Little Diggers Club, through which they work with children. The Sheridan team wanted to enhance that program and encourage parents and children to unplug from their devices. Sheridan Nurseries has hired some of the former little diggers as young adults to teach at Sheridan's. They hold some different customized classes (all for a fee) at different stores and promote that in the store and in e-blasts. Sheridan Nurseries does the marketing for their classes primarily online. Their classes are primarily "make and take" classes and attendance averages 10.

They had a Canada Day and promote some of the grow-your-own and bring in a chef. Grow-your-own and being a foodie really appeals to their customers. Oven mitts, aprons, and other similar accessories were something they sold. Some of the plants had fruit on them like tomatoes and blueberries and gogi berries. They hold some parent child activities in the little diggers classes and also in some of the make and take (centerpiece with your mom). Some of the larger

events are promoted online (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) invites since customer seem to always be on their smartphones. It saves them from reading if they can watch a 1-minute video.

It is their culture of sales; knowing what to say and dealing with the guest and help them feel welcome and become part of their family. In 2016, they continued a strong emphasis on serving the guest. Sheridan Nurseries strived to reduce consumers' time investment with telephone calls and emails and interacting as much as possible on the sales floor.

What type of efforts were in place to get new customers? They had flyers that were distributed in the local paper and sent to some postal codes they identified. They can customize coupons and know where it originated. They have no plans to do anything offsite; everything is in the store.

They do have a landscape design service that was offered on site or off site and included smaller projects. The customer can bring a picture in and the in store designer will help them select plants. The customer gets a Sheridan plus card which gives them 10% off; promoted online (social media and email as well as flyers). They have their custom design service and these provide inspiration; a lot of different designs that they can do at home.

Glasshouse Nursery, Chatham, ON

Contact: Erin Van Raay

Glasshouse Nursery adapted Campaign 3 (Plant the Best Tasting Meals You'll Ever Have) by hosting gardening celebrity and grow-your-own-food proponent Frankie Flowers in the store on April 15 (<http://www.frankieflowers.com/>) to talk about food to grow. Reacting to the research, Glasshouse also changed the cover of their magazine to include a young child to target a younger audience. This magazine was distributed to ~ 60,000 people, most of whom were not current customers.

To attend the event, customers must have telephoned (no online registration) and pay \$15. The team discussed some metrics and she is interested in having a four-question survey. Bridget offered to put the survey online so that participants could complete it through their smart phones, but Erin said there was not sufficient Wi-Fi to make this happen. They asked if participants were born before or after 1976 (making them older/younger than age 40 years), if this is their first time to The Glass House, if they have children and plan to get them involved in food gardening this year, and how they heard about the event.

On Facebook, when they highlighted Frankie Flowers, they started an event on Facebook. When someone says they were interested, it shows up on other's accounts. They also tried this for other promotions. Brittany is the person responsible for the digital media content and this comprises 70% of her job responsibilities.

There were 13 Facebook events overall in 2016, six of which were held in April 2016. Of the six events, the only two to online interactions were the two related to food: the Frankie Flowers and an event called "Open House Party + Free BBQ." The Flowers event garnered 45 interested

people, with 10 coming back to the page and say they attended. The Free barbeque event, not surprisingly, attracted a lot of interest, with 74 showing interest and 19 saying they attended.

The previous year, Glasshouse Nursery held two Facebook events in April, one on shrubs and perennials, and the other on trees, shrubs, and evergreens. Both events had one person say they attended, and zero people saying they were interested.

Frankie Flowers came April 15 and Erin said they had 110-115 people (after hour's event). Unfortunately, since they operate in such a small market, most/all of their attendees were already current customers. However, all attendees agreed that getting children involved in food gardening was a good idea. It was also too early to plant most vegetable plants outside, but it was the only time Frankie Flowers was available, so they offered the program. If they were to do it again next year, they would schedule the event later so that a spike in sales might occur. The owner did not want to provide any incentive for participants to return to make a purchase at a later date.

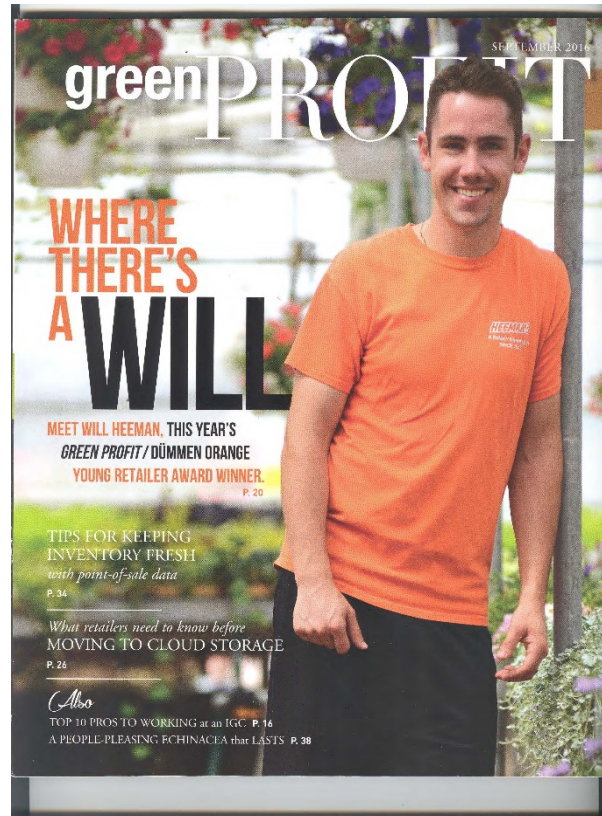
Getting the younger staff to interact with customers is helpful to getting a younger demographic. Brittany was talking with a male friend who started a vegetable garden after the Frankie Flowers event. He wants to make salsa. His girlfriend is also starting a vegetable garden. Another way they enacted the research findings was to provide an opportunity to "Try a new plant," and if that fails, the plant will be replaced. This was for first time customers only who are trying something new. They plan to keep the price point low (\$1.50 to \$2.99) and see how many try something new and are returned. In the past, when a person has returned an item, they have seen them buy more plants than just take the replacement item.

The retailer is mainly using Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, and Twitter. It doesn't have a budget for targeted ads. The posts reach whomever they reach. Brittany's data shows that 89% of the reach is to women, ages 45-54. In order to get the younger folks to like the pages, videos are more effective. They feature a specific department or product. They have a younger demographic on Instagram, and this really opens them up to this group through the use of hashtags. Glasshouse Nursery has about 13,000 Twitter followers in the past two years. In 2016, they use it regularly after not having used it regularly. Glasshouse puts photos and links to videos on Twitter. They also have a YouTube channel. They surpassed 3,000 Facebook fans in 2016.

Heeman's, London, ON
Contact: Will Heeman

By far, the most interactive collaborator was Will Heeman. He was open, sharing, and thoughtful in all of our interactions. If we could reproduce his “mindset” our industry would not have as many future challenges as we face today. He is a person to watch for future successes in the retail horticulture industry, especially with people under age 30.

His “mindset” and accomplishments are the reasons why he was the recipient of Green Profit/Dümmen Orange Young Retailer of the Year in 2016 (see cover image, right). When we first approached Will about collaborating, he was confident and positive about implementing some of the research findings. The Heeman's team planned a half-page article going into their magazine to target younger gardeners, using some of Meister's images designed to appeal to this demographic. Heeman's planned a post-card campaign in mid-April, which was new in 2016, inviting potential customers to come to the store and plant some plants with their children.



Will primarily used two campaigns: “Plant the Best Tasting Meals You’ll Ever Have” and “Plug Into Nature.” Canadian children did not have school on April 15, so that was an ideal time for Growing Chefs Ontario to have an event at the garden center. The emphasis of this program is to grow plants. The Growing Chefs organization has never held a side-by-side event with adults and children. Children grow herbs in eggshells. The program ran approximately 90 minutes. They expected about 100 people and had their coffee bar open. The registration was \$35 for adults, \$20 for children, but \$50 if they came together. The participants left with a \$10 gift card. The event was exclusively promoted on social media (Facebook and Instagram) and 100% of the registration proceeds went to Growing Chefs. They hoped it would be a big event for their town of 380,000. They planned to capture telephone numbers (to see how many were new customers). They also planned to capture herb sales and total sales. They promoted the event with a hash-tag for the group, and measured how many times it was used.

His event with Growing Chefs was posted on their website and pushed through an email. He did not pursue having Meister assist with the graphic design, but chose instead to use the person they have used in the past, largely due to time constraints. Registration was online and the team discussed ways to capture whether the customer was new or established. He cross-checked email addresses to see if they were new or not.

Overall it was a success, and Heeman's was happy with the results. This was the fundraising event for a food literacy program that is in operation in classrooms across the region. They hosted in the greenhouse cooking classes with an herb and veggie seminar for adults. They paid \$35 for the class, education, and received a very good meal, plus \$10 gift card and hand-outs. Kids planted herbs and a dwarf tomato in eggshells, read Green Eggs and Ham, and then cooked (with herbs) in the greenhouse and ate their meal, with a cost was \$20 for kids. The event was on a Friday in April (15th), which was a PD day to give parents an option to enroll their kids in a fun and educational event on a day off school. 100% of the money raised from workshop attendance was donated to their community partner (Growing Chefs! Ontario). Heeman's will be getting a charity tax receipt and moving into a higher level of sponsorship with greater profile in their printed material and website.

Heeman's promoted the event via social media, its website, local school newsletters, and email. The event also received a free article in the local newspaper. The results were good, but Will felt they could have been better if it wasn't a first time event.

- Total registered: 30 kids, 19 adults
- In total, 21 different families attended
- 6 families identified as being new to Heeman's
- 5 families had visited before, but not in more than a few years (mostly people who moved to the opposite end of town, but felt the event was worth the extra drive)
- Several others were regular strawberry visitors, but not garden centre shoppers. (Heeman's is also the largest strawberry farm/grower in the area)
- Sales for the Thursday through Saturday overall (event day and day before/after) were higher in 2016 vs. 2015
- Sales on the event day were 67.3% higher, or 41.5% higher when registration fees for event were excluded
- Compared with sales from 2015, they were even on the Thursday and down some on the Saturday vs. previous year

The social media response and feedback from the community was great. The event had many mentions that it was a great idea. Andrea W. wrote "this is what kids need to be learning" and Jennifer G (who attended) wrote "I hope this becomes a regular event! Amazing food and lots of great tips. The kids also had a great time. Thanks Heeman's :)"

Heeman's identified that approximately 40% of the people who dropped off kids or attended were under age 40. Will estimated that it would have been higher had they done the event on a weekend when people weren't working, but it would have been too busy for them to dedicate the space the space on the weekend.

His final comment on the event was that their cashiers recognized the people who attended for the event and said almost all were customers for plants and product that day, many using the gift card. Heeman's had hoped attendees would come back to use it, but at least they got them spending.

Overall, Heeman's gross sales were up 80% over the past 5 years, up 10% over 2015, but up 25% from 2014 when they tripled their winter program.

Their next big new event was a Strawberry Brunch on August 21st. It was three weeks after a long holiday and two weeks before their Food Truck event. Heeman's is known as the place to buy strawberries and one of the largest retailers of strawberries.

Heeman's has parking for 250 cars and brought in seating into the greenhouse. The team felt they could handle 600 to 1200 people. This new event was held in an empty greenhouse with wall to wall seating and plants for sale around the perimeter. The plant focus was on perennials and shrubs. This was in addition to the succulent headquarters as one of the featured products. Succulent sales have quadrupled over the last year, but air plant sales increased 20x since they began selling them in 2015. Heeman's sells so many that they have not been able to do more than display them (they sell so quickly).

Will invited five top award-winning chefs from high-end restaurants (foodies and friends of his) to create different brunch items. Each chef had a station and Will coordinated the menu so that each chef offered from 1-3 different strawberry featured brunch items. In their own café, for example, they hosted a beverage location. Another chef is from a vegan restaurant, and he featured vegan items. Tickets were for \$1 admission and an additional (to be determined) \$2 to \$6 for each chef's station, with the option to purchase tickets for more stations. Heeman's will handle all the money so the chefs will not need to. They also took a percentage of sales to help pay for table rental, ticket printing, and promotion.

Marketing for the event was solely online. The chefs assisted in the online promotion through their networks, and Heeman's pushed digital content to their customers. In this way, they hoped to capture new customers, as well as offer another interaction with the business for existing customers. Heeman's was happy with the turnout for the event but not as happy with the sales.

One additional social media promotion that worked really well was a feature on Facebook about mint water. Heeman's sells many types of mints, and this feature was their all-time second most popular Facebook post. The first most popular was a post on 'Night Sky' petunia, which had sales "off the charts" selling several hundred four-inch units and 200 hanging baskets by Mother's Day. Another highly successful Facebook post was the Cucamelon (<http://homesteadandprepper.com/cucamelons-growing-this-strange-and-wonderful-fruit/>). This was shared 124 times and had 166 likes which was correlated with selling out of the product. Typically for Heeman's, a poor post response would be 30-80 likes and only a few shares. They would see or expect 50-120 likes for a good plant post and 150-300 for a berry post. Often, recipe and garden guides get 10-30 shares. In addition, they used Instagram to push a promotion to their subscribers to come in to buy the melon with a cage and many came in just to buy the cucamelon. The cage is similar to what they market mandevilla with. Next year, they plan to feature kalette (a Brussels sprout and kale cross: <http://www.kalettes.com/>). Their focus has been, and continues to be, novel edibles, succulents, and other food plants. They also had a customer use the hashtag #adulting, which meant (to that person) "being an adult and planting a garden."

2016 was the third Food Truck event, scheduled for September 10. Will says this event is “like Christmas for Heeman’s.” In a city of 380,000 people, it was a challenge to find more than three food trucks (one will drive two hours to participate in this year’s event). The food truck event was a “roaring” success with 6 trucks visiting in total. There were 1500 people attending and the weather cooperated. Will believes they had a full array of ages, but it leaned toward the younger crowd. Two of the trucks sold out completely while the others ran out of popular items. They were busiest from 11-1 but there from 10-3. One truck was a one-woman gourmet mini-doughnut truck and she sold 300 dozen mini-doughnuts that day. All of the trucks agreed to return in 2017. Marketing was exclusively on Twitter and Facebook and Heeman’s spent no dollars on additional marketing channels.

He classified the food truck event as a “must attend” event for many young people in the area. For 2017, they are considering moving to two days and not having all the same food trucks on the same day. Parking is a limitation. The event did increase sales in the garden center. Heeman’s set up tables inside for people to eat their food; this did encourage garden center entry and sales were up 40% over the previous year (the food truck event was the same weekend) and 52% over the year prior. This event is a good start to their selling 100 bins of pumpkins in 2017 (attributing the start of many sales to this event) where five years ago they may have sold 3 bins.

They are considering a terrarium & cocktails plant night at a local restaurant that has a liquor license. They would commit two staff to the event at one of the best restaurants in London.

We asked Will for some parting comments to share (as we did with other collaborators, but he gave us four):

1. Events need to be special and huge. If they are huge, Millennials (and many people in general) will feel that by not going, they are missing something special. Is a big event (done well) worth the effort? YES! Fear of missing out or FOMO is a real phenomenon. Will says the team invests a lot of time to plan and host these events but they are worthwhile. The event, “needs to be good not just for a garden centre, but when compared to events across industries, it needs to be very good” to get people to come.
2. Once Millennials find (you) their spot, it is their spot. It is considered a secret gem. The garden center needs to keep the core business in focus, but build the event around a topic and make it easy for them to take it home.
3. Execution is essential to success. It needs to be fun for them. It needs to be fun for people to attend.
4. Garden centers need to create emotional, personal connections. How did the event make the person feel? If it is the right place, the event will make them feel special, feel good. Businesses need to think not just about selling product, but how they make the customer (or person) feel.

Project Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Implementation

The findings in the research project confirmed some well-grounded concerns about the future of horticulture, plant buying, and keeping the interest in gardening alive. Consumers have new opportunities for how, where, and when they shop for many things. Retailers of all types are striving for success in this hyper-competitive market; garden retailers are not alone in their concerns. Thinking differently about approaching the market, embracing some new alternative communication forms, and considering approaching potential consumers outside the retail center may help revive the customer base. Younger consumers are keenly interested in the environment, what they eat, and how they experience life with their friends and/or family. Those topics need to be better emphasized by the industry.

How garden retailers interact with potential consumers is an important transition that needs to develop faster and more thoroughly. Most garden retailers have been pleased with consumer communication through more traditional means (e.g. radio, newspaper, television, etc.). The next generation of potential consumers does not utilize these communication methods and they use and prefer online communication methods. For many retailers, the lack of an effective online presence (primarily social media) is hindering their ability to connect to many people under age 40. The Internet has forever changed information exchange, shopping, and other human interactions. It is only beginning to permeate the horticulture industry. Growers, wholesalers, and retailers will benefit from forging ahead with social media and gaining comfort, success, and adeptness in communicating online with current and potential consumers. Most of the successful garden retailers we worked with are primarily (some exclusively) communicating, promoting, and garnering new potential consumers through online mechanisms. While not all traditional communication forms should be immediately abandoned, garden retailers need to begin to move faster and more thoroughly in the adoption of online communication methods. These online methods are often easier to track and measure, but it will some take time to recruit additional clientele.

Where garden retailers interact with potential consumers is another transition that needs to be made. If retailers want to invite new customers to patronize the store, going to places they congregate and making an effort to host fun events may help bring them in. Coffee shops, local restaurants, bars, and farmers' markets are but a few examples of places where Gen Y and Millennials congregate *if they consider the spot something fun and special*. Garden retailers seeking to revitalize their customer base need to think more like a more youthful person and reimagine their store, their offerings, and their activities to appeal to a younger crowd. Since most people think of themselves as youthful, this new mindset may appeal to some existing customers as well. But first, going to the places where younger consumer congregate and the retailers they patronize may be an enlightening 'field trip' to better understand what appeals to this enigma of gardening.

Acknowledgements

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