

PLANT SOMETHING WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT FY 2012

The Massachusetts Flower Growers' Association and the Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association joined together for a multi-year, multi-pronged marketing campaign to change people's views on gardening, the value of plants to our health and happiness, and to promote the horticulture industry. The long term goal is to make Plant Something a national campaign. To date, twelve states, including Massachusetts, have signed-on and more are exploring it. The goal of the campaign is to broaden the customer base by elevating awareness about the benefits of growing plants and trees and by promoting gardening as a fun, family experience.

The campaign is a response to the challenges faced by the horticulture sector due to changing demographics and the economic climate. The Baby Boomer generation was larger than succeeding generations, but marketing strategies need to be adapted to attract new customers, especially as technology and urbanization keep the next generations away from building a relationship with the outdoors and gardening. The housing crash and cuts in government and university building projects have devastated the markets of the green industry in recent years.

The hub of this campaign is a website. The FSMIP project focused on the development plan for the site, specifically testing the website and prospective videos for usability, information, friendliness and motivational impact, and adding professional videos that are engaging and informative to appeal to people who are visual learners. This project was another step in strengthening the campaign to the benefit of the state's entire horticultural sector.

FINAL REPORT

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FSMIP FINAL REPORT

Plant Something MA Website Development – Phase III

September 28, 2013 – December 31, 2013

Outline of Issue or Problem

The Massachusetts Flower Growers' Association (MFGA) and the Massachusetts Nursery and Landscape Association (MNLA) have joined together for a multi-year, multi-pronged marketing campaign to change people's views on gardening, the value of plants to our health and happiness and to promote the horticulture industry. A Task Force of 10, representing the two organizations, was appointed to organize the state campaign. In December 2011, they secured a license to use the name *Plant Something* and the campaign materials that had been developed by Arizona Nursery Association.

The long term goal is to make Plant Something a national campaign. To date, twelve states, including Massachusetts, have signed-on and more are exploring it. The goal of this campaign is to broaden our customer base by elevating awareness about the benefits of growing plants and trees and by promoting gardening as a fun, family experience. The Arizona research has set the direction. We are planning to take the program further.

The hub of this campaign is our website. All of the marketing materials like signs, truck decals and bumper sticks direct consumers there. Phase I was the development of the basic Plant Something MA website. We hired UMass Dartmouth to undertake Massachusetts market research for us (completed May, 2012) for Phase II. This project is Phase III and includes our development plan for the site.

In “the old days” a business would grow some plants, or buy them wholesale, set them on a bench and, whoosh, they would sell. But the overhead costs were lower, there were fewer regulations, there was available land at lower prices, labor issues were few, to say nothing of taxation and local ordinance. The business was a whole lot easier. It took the past few years of poor sales for the industry to catch up with the reality that those days are over and will not likely return soon, if ever. Here's why:

The Baby Boomer generation was larger than succeeding generations. Numbers alone are against us. There will be fewer customers ahead if we don't change our marketing strategy into new customer profiles.

Technology and urbanization keep the next generations away from building a relationship with the outdoors and gardening. Kids live through video games not by playing outside.

The housing crash and cuts in government and university building projects have devastated the markets of the green industry. The US is not out of this building recession yet, so landscapes for new homes and public parks are memories not projections.

The members of the MFGA and MNLA are greenhouse growers, wholesale flower growers, wholesale nurseries, garden centers and other retail outlets, arborists, landscape professionals, landscape designers, and turf growers. Their revenues have suffered dramatically. Some have given up.

Wholesalers are particularly suffering. Their crops outstrip demand. Retailers and landscape professionals have ancillary products and services to sell, making it a bit easier for them to maintain themselves in a downturn, but not the wholesalers. If the wholesale industry shrinks too much, the related industries that sell products and services to them will fail. This could hurt the industry's infrastructure.

The Environmental Horticulture Industry is the number one sector of agriculture in Massachusetts. It generated \$2.6 billion dollars to the state economy in 2007. Between 2004 and 2007, over half of the firms increased their income an average of 31%. Plant sales alone generate over \$1.3 billion dollars, with plant production representing \$632 million. Regarding employment, at least 68,000 people find work in the industry across the Commonwealth.

Oversight for the Plant Something MA program is provided by members of the Task Force. Individuals represent the membership of both parent organizations, MNLA and MFGA, as well as professional staff and contractors. Members include: Jason Hutchins, Bart King, Tina Bemis, Jim Stucchi, Chris Kenney, Susan Burgeron-West, Bob Luzcai, Rena Sumner and Kim LaFleur. The goal of the Task Force is to provide guidance and direction to current and future Plant Something MA events and activities.

As wholesaler Jason Hutchins, a member of the Task Force, puts it, "As a whole, consumer interest is waning, and based on today's economy, people easily cut gardening and landscaping from their budgets. There's a generational gap; those values of gardening did not translate from one generation to another. Now we have to create an awareness of the benefits of gardening and landscaping to show how they make living areas healthier, more pleasurable and more valuable."

Project Approach

Using the objectives and action items below, we created an end product that highlights the health, environmental and economic benefits of plants. Members of the Task Force met to decide the content of the videos. Footage was provided to us by a local TV station, WGGB. Editing was completed by Photobydangould.com. Topics were chosen based on common consumer questions received by local green industry professionals. There are many common topics that consumers ask regularly about. Our goal was to cover the topics on a seasonal basis, so we could create a yearlong series of videos.

Objective - To test the website and prospective videos for usability, information, friendliness and motivational impact.

Action - Task Force members participated in a variety of personal and teleconference meetings to review and provide feedback for the Plant Something MA website. The final product was created after compiling and incorporating their input.

Objective - To add professional videos that are engaging and informative to appeal to people who are visual learners.

Action – A total of eleven videos were created as a result of the project. Two were produced to provide generic promotion for the campaign. Nine are part of a “how to” series. The topics were decided based on input from members of the Plant Something Task Force.

Objective – To instill a sense of humor and lightness to the website.

Action – One of the generic promotion videos features an original song for the Plant Something campaign. Designed to be lighthearted and friendly for all ages, the video encourages consumers to get out in the garden. Doing so is fun, easy and is great for your health. All of the videos include a playful “splat” of the Plant Something stake sign as a way to insert lightness into the promotion and create a lasting visual impression on consumers.

Objective - To have the Task Force participate throughout this process and guide the content and make final decisions to ensure that the entire campaign is cohesive. They will maintain contact with the national efforts to assure coordination there as well.

Action – Task Force members played in integral role in all facets of this project. Through a series of conference calls, in person meetings and sharing of electronic documents, all aspects of the program were under the review and subsequent approval of the entire Task Force.

Contribution of Partners

MNLA and MFGA each provide staffing support, grant management responsibilities to the project.

Results, Conclusions, and Lessons Learned

We have learned that consumers are eager for plant related information. The buy local movement is spilling over into the green industry. The burden is now upon us to capture that momentum.

Video projects are complex. Selection of topic material that is brief, yet informative enough to engage consumers is a challenge. While our original plan called for 4 longer segments, we quickly realized the value of keeping the entire segment under three minutes. In the age of You Tube videos, we learned that the key is to keep the segments short, visually appealing and leaving the consumer wanting a bit more information to continue to drive visitors to our website.

For the period ending March 16, 2014, traffic on the PlantSomethingMA.org had 83.27% new visitors in 3,820 visits. That also represents over 13,000 page views. For the same period last year, the total number of visitors was 468.

Current or Future Benefits

Our campaign strives to create a change in people’s understanding and appreciation of the environment – and that the macro environment is affected by small changes in and outside their homes. Plant Something is not just about selling – it’s about changing people in the same way that anti-smoking and buy local campaigns changed behaviors.

The videos are posted on the Plant Something MA website, and have been shared on our social media sites, Facebook and Twitter. Copies of the videos have been made available to each association executive for use at trade association meetings and events. The Plant Something MA campaign will also use them at trade

show events where our exhibit is being displayed. Individual businesses can also request a copy of the series.

Recommendations for Future Research

Completion of this project has enabled Plant Something MA to increase its profile among consumers in Massachusetts. Moving forward, it would be beneficial to research the spending habits of the consumers who were reached by the campaign. Potential data collection points include:

- Has your perception of the quality of locally produced materials changed?
- Have your purchase habits changed?
- Have you increased the amount of green space in your landscape?
- Did you or will you buy any of the plants featured in the videos?

Project Beneficiaries

There are more than 5,100 horticulture-related businesses within this state, most of which control and preserve significant open space. The industry employs over 68,000 people. In the long run, all segments of the industry will benefit from this campaign since it will elevate consumers' awareness about the value of green plants for the air we breathe, the food we grow, the flowers we love.

The other states in Plant Something will benefit from our work too, because they have access to anything we produce. Even if the national campaign fails to get full traction, there will be some states that make it work for them (despite tight budgets) by sharing resources and information.

Links to the Videos

Nine "how to" videos, plus two Plant Something promotional videos, were created as part of the grant project. They can be viewed on the Plant Something MA website at the following links:

How To Series - <http://www.plantsomethingma.org/plant-something-videos/>

Music Video - <http://www.plantsomethingma.org/videos/PlantSomethingMA.m4v>

Generic Promotion - <http://vimeo.com/55623494>

FSMIP credit language is included at the end of each How To video. Language is included on the website for the music and generic promotion video. Those were done in cooperation with the Arizona Nursery Association as part of the national Plant Something campaign.

Contact Person for this Project

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