

Did Somebody Say PARTY?

In 2013, Sheridan Nurseries celebrated its 100th year in business. The yearlong celebration went off without a hitch thanks to years of planning.

Is your garden center celebrating a big milestone this year? Maybe next year? How about five years from now?

The more time you give yourself to plan, the better the results, says Karl Stensson, president and director of brand integrity at Sheridan Nurseries, Georgetown, Ontario. Stensson and his Sheridan staff have just come off of a year celebrating the company's 100th year in business.

In the following interview with Sheridan's president, we'll learn what kind of planning, festivities and motivations go into an anniversary of this magnitude.

LGR: Why was it important for you to celebrate this anniversary on such a large scale?

Karl Stensson: Very few companies get to be 100 years. Even fewer get to be 100 years within the same family — especially in our industry.

More than anything else, it was for our staff. We have a very dedicated, loyal, long-serving staff.

We looked at the approaching (anniversary) and said, "Here's our chance to celebrate and also bring some awareness to our business."

LGR: One hundred years is a huge milestone. How much lead time did you give yourself to get things in order as 2013 approached?

Stensson: We started thinking about this and planning this five years before the actual anniversary. And even before that, we started talking about developing special plants to launch during our anniversary year that are exclusive to Sheridan Nurseries. (Employee and public contests were held to name the plants, which garnered good publicity and participation.)

We also set up a committee four years in advance to start coming up with a budget and plans for what to do during that year.

The more you want to do, the more you plan ahead. It's as simple as that.

We went out and enlisted corporate sponsors. These sponsors, for a certain amount of money, would be mentioned everywhere we advertised. We collected just less than \$200,000 in sponsorships that helped us do more things.

We got more support than we thought we would get, and I think that's because we were working so far in advance.

Many of these companies set their budgets at

least a year in advance. We went to sponsors two years in advance and said, "For 2013, we would like your support and here's how you can do it."

LGR: Can you give us a quick rundown of what Sheridan Nurseries did in 2013 to celebrate 100 years in business?

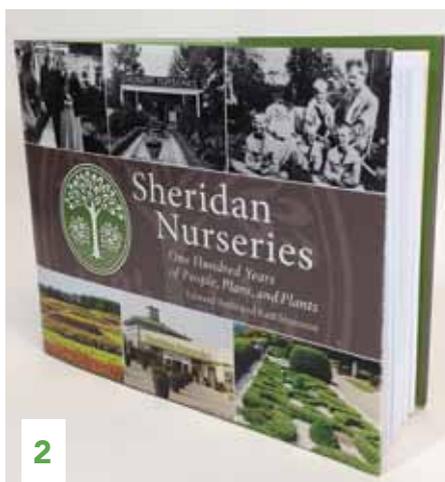
Stensson: There's so much heritage. We have archives that reach back right up to the beginning — letters of employment, building plans, catalogs. We decided to put together a traveling history display, which had a special booth at Canada Blooms (*image 1*). We also sent it to our own stores and in public places like area malls. Archives and history disappear so easily, we really wanted to get the word out about our heritage.

We hired a ghostwriter and wrote a 260-page book (*2*) called "Sheridan Nurseries: 100 years of People, Plans and Plants." It didn't make the New York Times Best Sellers list, but it did allow us to put the record down and honor the people that built the business.

And as we got closer to 2013, we had our own internal marketing department change everything to the 100th — a subtle change to the logo,



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MANAGEMENT

changes to marketing materials, fliers, our garden guide and staff shirts, and we added a “100 years” decal to our trucks (3).

LGR: What stood out as the biggest highlight of the year?

Stensson: We had a couple really big events. The first was an open house here at the farm. We put an ad in the newspaper inviting the public to a big open house. Fifteen hundred people turned out. The other big event was for our employees and trade guests. The theme of the whole night was about celebrating our staff. Our three barns were totally transformed; a winery labeled a special “Sheridan” wine for us. We also had a private performance by Gordon Lightfoot (4).

I think we did it right. Everything clicked. Our staff was pleased. You will always remember a private performance, no matter who is the performer.

LGR: Was it a goal to have something anniversary-related happening throughout 2013?

Stensson: We did make it a point to have something going on. But we didn’t necessarily change what we do; we just changed it to the 100th — and maybe embellished it a little more. There’s no sense in advertising in February when there’s no business. Our main marketing

campaign is April, May and June — so that was just embellished and expanded upon.

LGR: For those retailers approaching their own significant milestones, where might you suggest they start to ensure success?

Stensson: Put together a planning committee of various backgrounds and ages within your company. It gives you a much more well-rounded look at what is going to turn people on and off. If you have a bunch of 60-year-old men doing it, the end result is going to look a lot differently than it would if you had people in their sixties and twenties, men and women working together to plan an anniversary.

Consider all of your garden center’s departments and where they fit in, or how they will be involved.

For 2013, we had way more items planned than we actually did. We sat back and said, “Let’s not dilute this. Let’s do this right.” Otherwise you’ll get a bunch of things that are mediocre.

Of course, it all depends on your budget too. We were fortunate. But when you look at some of the changes we made — to our logo and adding decals to our truck — those costs weren’t exorbitant. And getting on the phone (with local media) to spread the word doesn’t cost you anything either.

LGR: Lastly, did you have any regrets or expectations that were not met?

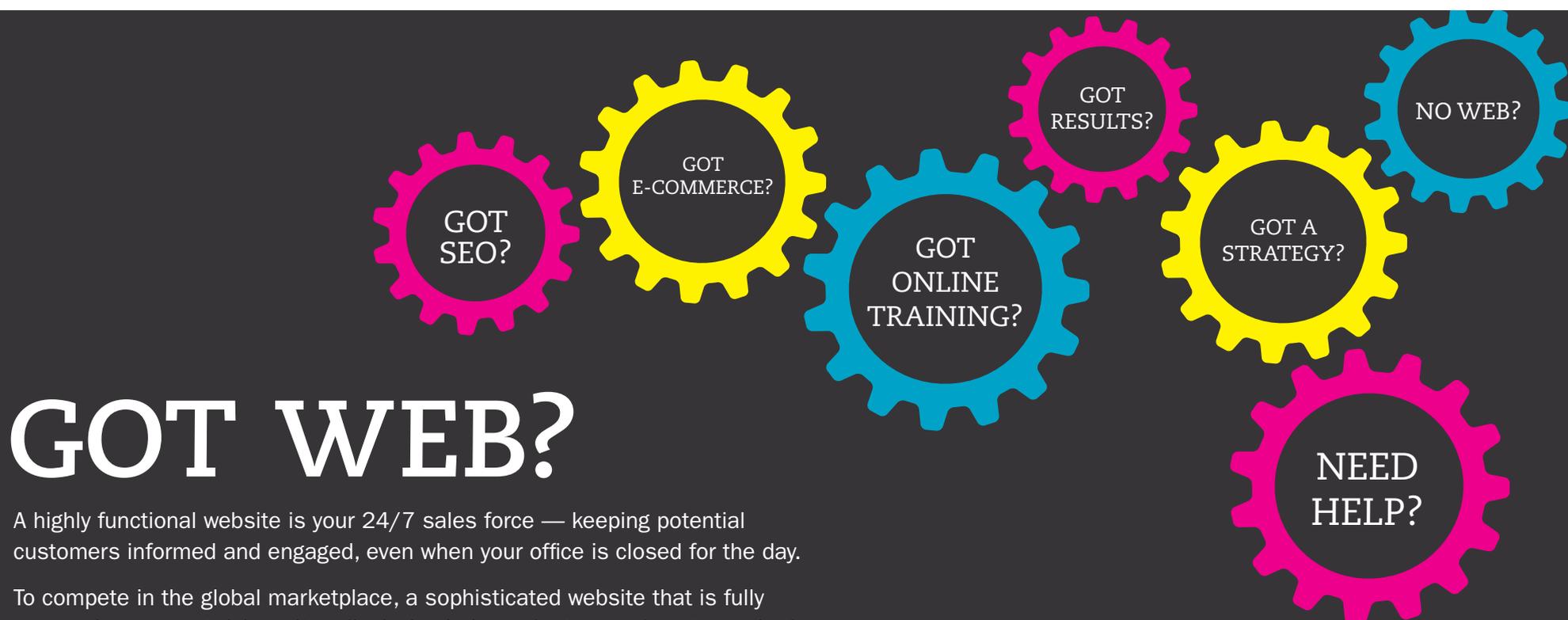
Stensson: Absolutely no regrets. But don’t go into it expecting that because you’re 50 or 100 years old that it’s going to make you one more dime. People might be more aware of you and they might appreciate the company more, but it’s not going to have a major effect on your sales.

Sometimes you might wonder, “Does anybody look? Does anybody care?” In the end, for us, it was amazing how many people acknowledged (our anniversary).



To learn more about Sheridan Nurseries’ 100th anniversary celebration, visit the company’s microsite celebrating its history:

www.sheridannurseries.com/100th_anniversary_homepage



GOT WEB?

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