

# CONSUMER INSIGHT

Think outside of the pot. Through market research, learn new ways to innovate and create additional value for consumers.

By Kip Creel

I'm often asked to explain what I do for a living. In short, I specialize in asking questions among consumers and then converting those insights into marketing strategies. Oftentimes, we're guilty of asking the same questions among the same type of consumers and hoping for a different result. In this article, we explain how we "mixed things up" and developed a set of new insights related to adding value to plant purchases.

First, let me describe how this study was different. The key objective was to brainstorm new ideas, and was based on a new methodology from Stand-Point called Creative JamboreesSM. The first session consisted of 10 individuals under the age of 45 who were not necessarily active or even interested in gardening. Each scored in the upper quintile on a validated creative assessment test, and earned at least half of their income from a creative profession such as art, writing, designing or music.

During the ideation session, we hired our own artist who sketched product

and service ideas in real time. A few weeks later, a second discussion group was conducted. This time, we included seven randomly selected individuals age 25 to 44 (to represent a younger gardening consumer). Each owned their own home and had purchased at least one plant (indoor or outdoor) in the past six months. Their task was to evaluate the ideas developed by our creative types and the artist.

Here's what we learned:

## Consumer Value Drivers and Differentiation

In my 10+ years of studying consumer decision making for plants, the value drivers are consistent: plant quality, garden performance, unique colors and varieties, reducing the fear of failure, and new uses for plants. This study was no exception.

The way in which these value drivers manifest themselves to the consumer typically revolve around the following: innovations in packaging, plant uses



and product claims, and the retail experience or special promotions. If you think about it, these are the only levers we have to differentiate one plant from another.

Based on our research, consumers will pay more for a plant

if there is added value or if the product is sufficiently differentiated. Let me be very clear: we are talking about differentiation the consumer can see and understand, not differentiation that only a geneticist can understand. As an

industry, we fall in love with plants too quickly without honestly asking ourselves, "Will the consumer see and value the difference, or is this just another yellow flower?"

Before embarking on any effort to differentiate plant material, you

need to understand the three tiers in which consumers classify plants.

Tier III is easy to explain. These products command premium prices because the consumer can see (and values) their distinct garden performance differences (oftentimes a genetic trait of the plant). The Endless Summer hydrangea, for example, was the first of its kind to repeat bloom. This is of great value to the consumer.

Tier II is hard to implement, but if done correctly, pays dividends. Oftentimes, the plants comprising programs in Tier II are fairly common. The marketers have done a masterful job of highlighting new uses for the plants. In some cases, Tier II is accomplished by calling attention to the product via clever merchandising or creating brand saturation at the point of sale (like Proven Winners).

The ideas generated from this research are suited for repositioning Tier I products into Tier II by adding additional value and differentiating the plants on innovations in packaging, plant uses and product claims, and innovations in the retail experience or special promotions.

In the following, we summarize some of the best ideas. The "best" was judged based on feedback from our second panel. The criteria included uniqueness (not currently aware that the idea is on the market) and whether or not the idea would justify a higher price for a plant (assuming all else was equal).

Keep in mind that these ideas are not finalized. They are based on roundtable discussions and have not been vetted based on actual feasibility and salability. Nevertheless, what we outline below demonstrates that there are many more opportunities to add value to plant purchases.

### Innovations in Packaging

Overall, the ideas around packaging were highly relevant and appeared to be easily implemented:

- Include a watering reminder system with each plant purchase. This could include text or e-mail alerts, stickers for a calendar, or a magnet for the refrigerator.

- Include a "Best if Planted By" date on the pot. This provides

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## INNOVATIONS IN PLANT RETAIL

- Include a watering reminder
- Pots should have "Best if Planted By" date
- Include personalized grower information
- Promote plant's healthy living contributions
- Create line of plants for travelers
- Merchandise companion plants

*\*Suggested by StandPoint consumer focus group*

assurance that a certain number of days can lapse before the plant must be put into the ground or in a container.

- Print a "Shipped On" date on the pot. Consumers shop for plants like produce, and this gives them a reason to buy the "freshest" plants on the bench.

- Consumers also liked the idea of buying nested pots. This gives them a pre-planned system of when to transplant. Each pot could be labeled as the three-month, six-month or one-year pot.

- Consumers were very interested in the actual plant producers. They wanted to know more about the history of the company and how the producer specializes in plants that will thrive in a particular geography. One clever manifestation of this idea was to include a simple message on the pot, "From our home to yours. This plant was inspected by Joe on March 15th, 2011." This communicates that the grower went to extraordinary lengths to guarantee the success of the product and personalize the purchase for the consumer.

### Plant Uses and Product Claims

To us, this is the area of greatest opportunity. Plants could have

purposes beyond the aesthetics and generating oxygen. Consider the following creative suggestions:

- There is a vibrant wellness trend underway in this country, and it is one of the contributing factors to the popularity of vegetable plants. In that same vein, could a line of plants be promoted as "relieving stress?" For example, lavender has always been positioned as a stress reliever and sleep aid. Are there other plants that fit this platform? (This may sound a little "out there" but it is highly relevant to the consumer.)

- There was considerable discussion about scent. This seems to be lacking among today's selections, and consumers find scent a reason to spend more. And in some respects, it didn't matter if the scent was natural or manufactured. With that said, is there some way to combine home fragrance and plants, for example? Can the pot or soil be infused with a long-lasting scent if the plant does not naturally produce one?

- There was little knowledge of what plants would attract wildlife (or beneficial insects) and repel pests. Repelling mosquitoes and squirrels would command a price premium. In addition to butterflies, others were interested in attracting birds and ladybugs. Those more

environmentally conscious were very concerned about the dwindling bee population and would pay more for beneficial plants.

- Another reason consumers grow their own vegetables is that they

assume they are more nutritious. If this is true, why don't we put nutritional comparisons on the package? Here's how your homegrown tomato compares to the same store bought tomato on vitamins, minerals



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and antioxidants. The blueberry industry reversed its fortunes by making simple (yet true) claims about nutrition.

- Create a line of plants for travelers. As one participant summarized, “I love plants but I travel

a lot. I don’t buy many plants because I’m afraid that they will perish. There has to be something other than a cactus that has some longevity. If you told me this plant was carefree for a month, I’d buy a car load.”

### Innovations in the Retail Experience and Promotions

There was considerable discussion around the retail experience and promotions. Here are some promotional ideas we thought were truly unique:

- With certain plants, co-package the seeds, and promote it as a “pass it along” campaign. As one female emphasized, “I’d love to give my best friend a package of seeds from the beautiful plant I just purchased. I’d pay more for that. She’d be flattered by this personal gesture.”

- We know from other research that plants are often given as gifts. One of our creatives suggested a Plant Registry (like a bridal registry). “I’m 33 and many of our friends are buying homes. It seems that weekly we are invited to a housewarming. I think they’d really appreciate some plants. Why can’t I go [to a garden center] and check their landscape registry?”

- Consumers often buy plants to fill a space, and they typically want to buy multiple plants. After they find one plant type suitable for their specific sunlight and soil conditions, we make them hunt for companion plants. The best merchandising idea is to group plants that “go together.” This is more than grouping based on sun and shade. It also includes aesthetics, tall plants for the back of the space and shorter plants for the front, color combinations, and different textures for maximum impact.

All-in-all we were impressed with the caliber and depth of ideas especially considering they were based on two simple roundtable discussions. But, we were very careful to consider what was asked (how to add value) and who we included (The Creatives). In addition to the ideas listed here, we were able to generate more than 50 ideas in our brainstorming session. Our advice: start thinking outside of the pot. There are many new ways to innovate and create additional value for consumers. We’ve just scratched the surface. 🌿

*A thought leader in the home and garden industry, Kip Creel is president of StandPoint, an Atlanta-based market research firm. He can be reached at [kcreel@standpointgroup.com](mailto:kcreel@standpointgroup.com).*

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