

all mixes. And because most of our potting operations require small batches (10 to 12 ft³) of mix at any given time, we mix most of our soils by hand using an exacting “landslide” technique. In short, we get our hands dirty making soil.

THE FACILITY: “FUTURE GLASS”

Our present greenhouse facility, “7-ft gutters and overhead clutter” along with regular, complimentary glass showers from vents stuttering shut, has served us over 40 years. Few tears will be shed, however, when the place is “deconstructed” next year. This final major adjustment has been a full 3½ years in coming. Happily, 1 month ago, we broke ground on our new 43,000-ft² propagation facility, the Nolen Glasshouses for Living Collections. Designed in-house, by a team of architects, engineers, and myself, it will feature all glass, open-roof construction with gutter heights of 22 ft, radiant floor heating, rolling production benches, retractable shade and thermal curtains, evaporative and high pressure fog cooling systems, and “wide-body” plant transportation corridors. In addition, there will be a separate glasshouse zone, open to the public, dedicated to educational displays of propagation and production techniques along with glasshouse management practices. Needless to say, the entire staff eagerly waits the commissioning of our “Future Glass”. Let me know if you’d like to drop in for a tour in Spring 2005, after we’ve moved in and got the bugs out.

If Walt Disney Was A Propagator, How Would He Have Reached His Customers?®

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INTRODUCTION

Propagation is one of the oldest skills, it has been practised since man stopped roaming the earth and started settling in one spot. Seeds or cuttings were germinated or rooted, plants sold or grown on, and eventually a finished plant became a valuable commodity in the economy.

It has always been the way of doing things, should it be the way of the future?

The world is changing rapidly. One hundred years ago the entrepreneur was the farmer or grower, during the last century it became the manufacturer, and in the new century it is the idea maker who is changing the world.

Entrepreneurs, such as Walt Disney, Richard Branson (Virgin), Howard Schultz (Starbucks), and Anita Roddick (Body Shop) have challenged the way things are done in their respective industries; none of them saw the opportunities in horticulture. If they had, would they have done things differently?

Alas, these personalities are not with us for this presentation, all we can offer is conjecture on how they would have developed the propagation industry.

These are my thoughts and I hope they stimulate some ideas.

START WITH THE END IN MIND

The most important person in this process is the end user, the consumer. Disney, Branson, Schultz, or Roddick would have analysed the end user’s needs and wants

and designed a process that met their requirements. Too often we start with propagation material, put roots on it, and present it to a grower who we hope will eventually sell it. Marketing starts with the first stage of the process and is part of an ongoing cycle. We are all part of the marketing chain.

WORK “ON” YOUR BUSINESS, NOT “IN” YOUR BUSINESS

Successful business people, in any industry, divide their time between working on their business and working in their business. They stand back from the day-to-day process and look at the whole picture before making critical business decisions.

I believe we are all guilty of spending too much time in our business, growing plants, and too little time looking at the big picture and how we can build a successful long-term enterprise.

SELL THE STORY NOT THE PRODUCT

Walt Disney was the ultimate storyteller. He knew that we buy stories not product.

We deal with a product that is full of the opportunities to sell a story, but we too often miss the potential to sell the magic.

Products are either classified as known value (KV) products sold on price, or non-known value (NKV) products sold on their value.

In the plant industry some bedding plants and red roses are becoming commodity products. The remainder will sell if you tell the story. For example: You could sell the “Ducks Foot Tree” for \$25.00 with a sign. You can imagine how many you would sell. Or, you could build a story around the “Ducks Foot Tree” telling the consumer that its seeds were the original roasted peanut of ancient China, that it is one of the world’s oldest trees and that it has brilliant autumn color. All of a sudden “*Ginkgo biloba*” becomes a desired object.

Alternatively, you could sell the “Chinese Paper Tree” for \$25.00, again sales would be weak. But, tell consumers it’s the original paper tree, has unique fruit, and is an ideal garden tree and amazingly the “mulberry tree” becomes a sought-after plant.

Stories sell plants, not price!

EXTEND THE RANGE, DON’T NARROW IT

We have an affluent consumer who wants to promote the fact they are an individual, they want to show off their uniqueness. In the home they may collect rare pictures, antiques, and unusual ethnic ornaments. They are prepared to pay big bucks to exhibit their uniqueness. They have the same desire to show their uniqueness outside in their yard. They will spend their dollars on unique “plant” rarities.

Walt Disney would look on this as an opportunity — he would be extending his plant width and asking for better prices for rarer items.

The concern is we are narrowing the range of product on offer. Why, we do not believe the consumer will pay for rarity. A marketer in other industries would find our stance very confusing.

IDEAS, WE ALL HAVE THEM

Walt Disney has a business culture that has lasted 37 years after his death. The organisation is still developing based on Walt’s beliefs. Does your team understand your culture? Do they know what you believe in and share your company vision?

We all know businesses with a strong business culture; they have fewer negative unwritten ground rules (UGRs). Those with a weak culture have more negative UGRs. Walt Disney, Richard Branson, and company ensure negative UGRs do not creep into their business.

IMPLEMENT CHANGE

According to books such as, 'Unleashing The Killer Apps' by Larry Downes, Chunka Mui, Nicholas Negroponte (ISBN: 087584801X), the world is changing rapidly at present, if your team doesn't grasp the changes your business will die. But, people resist change. For example:

1926: Inventor of the Television Tube

"Commercially and financially I consider television an impossibility, a development of which we need waste little time dreaming".

1945: Famous American Naval Officer

"That is the biggest fool thing we've ever done. The atomic bomb will never go off, and I speak as an expert on explosives".

1948: Respected Science Magazine

"Landing and moving around the moon offers so many serious problems for human beings that it may take science another two hundred years to lick them".

You need to introduce a culture of change when people resist change.

Why do people resist change? The common reasons are:

- We've always done it that way
- Fear
- It's not my job
- It'll never work
- What do they know
- Age

What can we do? Introduce a policy of change; the following techniques will help you:

Seven Step Plan.

- 1) Think about your people: will they respond to emotional or rational benefits?
- 2) Ask, don't tell.
- 3) Let them think the idea was theirs.
- 4) Aim to progress positively, get an easy agreement to build on it. i.e., use your most acceptable idea first.
- 5) Use "YOU" appeal.
- 6) Support your ideas with facts.
- 7) Have your ideas summarised onto paper for them to use back home (they have to persuade others).