

Quality Control: Promote It!

By Gay Smith

MARKETING IS THE SCIENCE OF TRIGGERING AN urge to buy a product whether we need it or not. It sets the stage to turn inclination into action. For example, one of the more effective and memorable marketing concepts is Nike's "Just do it". That palpable message shatters all excuses and scorns tedious whiners into action.

Obviously, marketing plays a big role in flower sales. Love, guilt, praise and congratulations are among the justifications we give consumers for sending flowers. But what about *quality* as a key component of your marketing message? How do you market the quality of your blooms, especially since "fresh" has become a cliché? How do you drive sales under a quality banner?

Who Cares About Quality?

Some folks contend that quality doesn't matter in the U.S. market. Last July, a technology colleague from Holland and I gave a presentation to a group of growers and post-harvest managers in Bogota, Colombia. Our topic was customer expectations: the procedures, demands and best practices that customers expect vendors to fulfill. My European colleague pointed out that buyers in Northern Europe and the

Fresh Focus

Ask five people to give a definition of flower quality and at least two will mention a long vase life. Yet, according to research presented by Dr. George Staby during a Perishables Research Organization (PRO) Institute in 2006, 25 percent of retail florists don't use flower food, 50 percent use it incorrectly, and the remaining 25 percent use it correctly. Those are dreadful statistics for something as simple as using treated water when processing and designing flowers.

Are you guilty of finger-pointing when it comes to quality problems ("It's the wholesaler's/retailer's/grower's fault?") Stop competing with one another and keep in mind that consumers benefit when retail buyers work closely with their suppliers to get the freshest products on display.. 🌿

— G.S.

United Kingdom place a premium on and are willing to pay for quality if it means increased vase life, whereas "in the U.S., we are far more focused on winning low prices rather than winning vase life days for the consumer."

The "D" Word

Why is that? Consumers want quality. And they want to feel confident in their purchases. For food and baked items, date coding is one way to improve consumer confidence in the product's freshness. Can you imagine buying bread without knowing how long it will stay fresh?

In the flower business, date coding performs a similar function. Different flower types are assigned different date codes; for instance, roses have a shorter code than spray carnations. Date coding is more widely used in supermarkets than among traditional retailers — but it's not a general practice. Why not, I wonder? Is there a fear that the consumer will only buy the very freshest, leaving the rest for shrink?

I asked a Miami importer for her insights. She says she thinks flowers are still an impulse item purchased for their color and style but that, properly used, date coding would benefit the entire floral industry. Vase life is important to consumers, so date coding would show that the retailer wants his customers to enjoy the freshest flowers.

Show and Sell Quality

Some still question whether the consumer is willing to pay more for quality. Kerry Herndon of Kerry's Bromeliads, in Homestead, Fla., recently expressed it like this: 10 million people buy a \$4 cup of coffee every day. They like the store, the consistent quality and the barista show. Our floral consumers are asking us to do the same with our products.

And if you're making the investment in buying properly-treated goods and using postharvest solutions, which gives you longer lasting product, then back it up with a guarantee. Surprising customers by guaranteeing quality encourages them to buy floral products more frequently. Offering a five-, seven- or 10-day vase guarantee in the home lowers the "risk" factor in buying flowers and raises the bar for customer satisfaction. Remember: good marketing not only gives reasons your product in the consumer's mind, it also gives reasons to make her confident to buy. 🌿

Gay Smith is the technical consulting manager at Pokon & Chrysal USA in Miami..
E-mail: gaysmith@earthlink.net