

Adamczak 91

Survey shows poinsettia growers, florists need to talk

STABY

Results of a recent survey indicate more communication is needed between retail florists and poinsettia growers/suppliers.

by Jean Adamczak

"Can we talk?" According to recent survey results, that's a question more retail florists should ask poinsettia growers. The survey was conducted last fall by the Research Department of Florists' Transworld Delivery Association (FTD) at the request of FTD associate member Paul Ecke Jr., president, Paul Ecke Poinsettia Ranch, Encinitas, Calif. For the survey, 1,000 randomly picked U.S. FTD members were mailed questionnaires during the week of Sept. 3, 1990. By the Sept. 24 deadline, 461 FTD florists (46 percent of those who received surveys) returned completed forms. Results of the study were presented by Ecke during the 1991 International Floriculture Industry Short Course.

"I think the survey absolutely confirms the fact that there are many retail florists who do not communicate with their growers or wholesalers who supply them with poinsettia plants," Ecke said to the International Short Course audience. "There is no question in my mind that if there were greater communication between producers and vendors, retail florists could acquire beautiful, high-quality plants that would allow them to service the part of our population that is looking for something better than what's often available in non-retail

florist outlets.

"Growers will produce specialty plants, they will produce larger plants, but they must know about these desires before the growing season commences so that they have time to produce these special plants," he added.

The survey said . . .

Those responding to the survey had a few things in common:

- 60 percent had been FTD members for more than 10 years
- more than 80 percent of the respondents had just one shop
- approximately 70 percent reported annual gross sales of \$100,000 to \$500,000
- respondents generated, on average, approximately \$6,100 from poinsettia sales in 1989.

Survey results Ecke highlighted in his presentation included the following subjects.

Unfamiliar

Only 30 percent of respondents felt they were "very familiar" with the types and varieties of poinsettias available. Ecke identified this disparity as being one of the biggest problems in the relationship between poinsettia growers and retail florists.

"I think this is really the

problem," he said. "I have to say it over and over again, because I think that every time we look at one of these [survey responses] it just suggests that between the retailers and the growers (I'll just say growers rather than wholesalers or whomever else retailers might buy from) there just isn't enough communication about what's on the market."

Selection

Only 34 percent of the respondents felt wholesalers and growers offered a wide selection of poinsettia plants to choose from, while 44 percent said they could choose from a moderate selection. Approximately 21 percent reported they had a limited selection of poinsettias available to them.

One reason for limited plant selection may be that florists wait too long to place orders for the Christmas plants, Ecke noted. Ideally, florists should discuss poinsettia selection and availability with growers in early spring, he said.

"In the spring of the year, growers buy mother plants that produce the cuttings that will produce flowering plants for November and December," Ecke related.

"Many growers have placed *their* orders for spring stock during the previous year. You [retail florists] just have to understand that the growing cycle is such that many decisions are made fairly early in the year and a grower can't just change his mind. If he was talking to his retailer and the retailer was talking to him, they could do something about it [the order] together."

According to survey results,

some florists are placing early orders. Ecke said 10 percent of the survey respondents place their orders in January, February and March, giving growers time to "actually do something about growing the orders." However, one-third of the respondents said they don't place orders until November and December. At that point in the growing cycle, "you'll just have to take what's available," Ecke noted.

"The people that place orders in November and December, I've heard some of them say they want to wait until they check out the crops and see where they can get the best price or to see which are the best crops and I think that's certainly part of the game and you have to understand that," Ecke acknowledged. "But I also believe there are some people who determine that they can do pretty well by communicating with growers early in the season."

Novelties

While most consumers stick with traditional red poinsettias for Christmas, there is some interest in novelty colors such as white, pink, yellow and variegated. Approximately 50 percent of the survey respondents said demand for novelty poinsettias is increasing in their markets. Ecke said that's a trend that will continue to grow.

"The reason I say that is because each year as growers buy their cuttings we're finding that the non-red variety percentage goes up," he explained. "Now, that's more so in some parts of the country than in others, but that trend is there and we believe it will continue."



A survey conducted among FTD florists revealed that most order poinsettias from suppliers in October, which growers feel is too late. Ideally, growers should receive poinsettia orders from retail florists in early spring.

Paul Ecke Jr., president, Paul Ecke Poinsettia Ranch, believes retail florists should communicate more with poinsettia growers and suppliers.

tia sold by retail florists is the 6- to 6½-inch, branched plant, as noted by 50 percent of survey respondents. Ecke pointed out that the small poinsettia is also the most popular among non-retail florist outlets. Intimidated by the power of mass merchandisers, many florists won't even carry the 6-inch plants, he noted.

"We know of many florists who do not even try to compete with the non-florist outlets and have moved away from the one-branch plant market," Ecke said. "In many markets, that size has be-

Availability

Six- to 6½-inch, branched poinsettias seem to be the most popular among surveyed retail florists, with 81 percent of respondents reporting the short plants were widely available from suppliers.

Eight-inch, branched plants were the second most popular type of poinsettia available to retail florists, according to approximately 75 percent of survey respondents. Ten-inch hanging baskets, three-bloom, single-stem plants and 10-inch, branched plants rounded out the top five most widely available poinsettia types, the survey showed.

At the other end of the spectrum, 3½-foot-tall and 4½-

foot-tall giant poinsettia trees were least widely available to retail florists. According to survey results, only 17 percent of respondents said the poinsettia trees were available from suppliers.

When asked to pick which new, improved Eckespoint® poinsettia varieties were available to them, more than 30 percent of survey respondents indicated they weren't familiar with the varieties. "That's the rub," Ecke said. "Thirty percent either didn't know or were not familiar with the listed varieties.

"There are so many good varieties on the market today, and we believe it's time for retailers to find out what's available to them and not just take what they're given."

Overall, 87 percent of survey respondents were satisfied with the sizes, shapes and colors of poinsettias available from suppliers.

Most popular

The most popular poinset-

"There are many retail florists who do not communicate with their growers or wholesalers who supply them with poinsettia plants."

-Paul Ecke Jr., poinsettia grower

come a commodity. Retail florists can set themselves apart from others [mass market outlets] if they have different types of plants to offer consumers."

The 'others'

Poinsettias are probably the most popular Christmas plant available to consumers. Unfortunately, retail florists no longer corner the market on these profitable plants. In proof, two-thirds of the survey

"It's difficult," Ecke noted, "but retail florists can meet the competition if they'll handle products that the chain stores do not." Novelty poinsettias in non-traditional yellow, white, pink and variegated colors can give retail florists a marketing advantage, he suggested. While many growers do not produce large quantities of novelty plants, some timely communication between florists and their growers or suppliers could change that.

According to a recent survey, the most popular type of poinsettia among retail florists and consumers seems to be a 6- to 6½-inch, branched plant.

respondents indicated there were chain stores in their immediate market areas that sold "quality" poinsettias. Ecke admitted non-retail florist outlets were selling more poinsettias every year.

"When a chain store buys good poinsettias and displays them properly, they do sell a lot of them," he said. "And I think we have to acknowledge that many of these vendors are now becoming creative. There are some that are selling red and white combinations in one container." Such efforts to provide different, high-quality poinsettias to consumers were previously practiced only by retail florists.

Survey results revealed retail florists are feeling the effects of increased competition from mass merchandisers. Almost 60 percent of those surveyed said they felt the chain stores in their areas were "very competitive" when it came to selling poinsettias.

"If there is a variety that you like, I think you could go to your growers and talk to them about producing some specialty colors for you," Ecke opined. "I would also say that every grower in America isn't going to be receptive to being told what varieties to grow because oftentimes they grow a variety because in one part of the country, a certain variety sells better than in another. So you've got those limitations, but you still can communicate and discuss varieties and find out whether you can or cannot get something different."

Ecke's final word on the relationship between retail florists and poinsettia growers? Talk!

"I think what we need is more and better communication between the retail florist and the grower. With better and earlier communication, retail florists can have the poinsettias that they want and need to be profitable."

The survey at a glance

- FTD members responding to the survey generated an average of approximately \$6,100 from poinsettia sales in 1989.
- Survey respondents also indicated that on average, 93 percent of their poinsettia inventory is sold between Dec. 1-24.
- 62 percent of the survey respondents indicated they were "somewhat familiar" with the different types of poinsettias available. One-third of the respondents stated they were "very familiar" with the poinsettia types available.
- Most respondents (44 percent) said that wholesalers and growers offer a moderate selection of poinsettias.
- 62 percent said suppliers do not ask them what types and varieties of poinsettias they would like to be offered.
- Approximately 58 percent of the respondents order poinsettias from growers in October, November and December.
- Fewer than 2 percent of those responding to the survey order poinsettias in April and May.
- Approximately 50 percent of the respondents stated there has been an increase in demand for novelty poinsettias, while a slightly smaller percentage (46 percent) felt demand did not increase.
- The most popular type of poinsettia sold by respondents is a 6- to 6½-inch, branched plant.
- 91 percent of the respondents indicated they could not sell poinsettias beyond the Christmas season.
- The majority of respondents (64 percent) have chain stores in their market areas that sell "quality" poinsettias.
- Of those respondents, 57 percent indicated the chain stores were "very competitive" in terms of poinsettia sales.
- Approximately 76 percent of survey respondents indicated they'd like more information regarding poinsettias and their availability.—J.A.