

Marketing Munchies Podcast Transcript

Episode #11: Boomer or Bust Part 1

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Announcer: Welcome to the Marketing Munchies Podcast series hosted by Dr. Bridget Behe. Each week Bridget and her guests will share information, insights, research-based findings, and her 30 years of experience to help your horticultural business connect better with current and future customers. Now, let's join our host, Dr. Bridget Behe.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Welcome to this week's podcast. I've entitled this week's and next week's episode "Boomer or Bust," because I want to talk about recruiting that next generation of consumers to the horticulture industry. More specifically, I'd like to talk about ways that we can recruit "Gen X" and "Gen Y" as good horticultural consumers. This week, what I want to do, is talk about some findings that we collected from some online focus groups back in 2015. Dr. Susan Hogan, who was at Emory University at the time, and Carol Miller, who, at the time, was the editor of *Garden Center Magazine*, and I were contracted by *Flowers Canada* to conduct some online focus groups and try to understand how we could better engage the next generation of customers.

As I said, back in 2015, we did some online focus groups with about 70 respondents, and they were in between the ages of 18 and 49. One of the three groups that we talked with were moms, because we wanted to understand their perceptions of how they wanted to have their children engaged in horticulture and working with plants. But, we had one group that was comprised of 20 people ages 18-29 and another group of 26 people who were ages 30-46.

Now what I'd like to do, is talk about some of those key findings from the online focus groups that we did. And, I think these findings are still pertinent today as we try to reach out and include more and younger consumers into the horticulture industry. Some of the key findings: there were a lot of positives related to horticulture. People really felt like this was a way that they could connect with nature—they could get outside; they could get some fresh air. Many of them also saw horticulture as a stress reliever—something that could help calm them, something that could engage them, aesthetically. Really, looking at a beautiful landscape was important. And, so too was the bounty that people got from their gardens. Getting fresh vegetables and growing their own food were cited as other key positives for engaging in horticulture. It was also interesting to note that gardening stirred a lot of family memories. So many people relayed that they had memories of parents or grandparents (quite often it was a mother or a grandmother) who really introduced them to interacting with plants and gardening. It was considered by them to be a really special time.

In our subgroup, the mothers who had children ages 5-13, moms mentioned that interacting with plants gave them a real healthy way to engage in family time—it gave them an opportunity to have some teachable moments and have fun. Amusingly enough, some of the parents cited that having some free labor wasn't too bad either.

On the downside, many people said there were no negatives of horticulture, but two or three of the biggest ones were time and the dirt factor (we'll just call it). Many people said they were too busy to garden, it was too time consuming, and (the other negative aspect) they really didn't like having dirt under their finger nails. Now, some of us enjoy that as a way to connect with nature, but by and large, it was really one of the bigger negatives.

Then, when we asked them to describe a typical gardener, what we heard and what we saw, was, typically, an older female who had white hair—down on her knees with her gardening apron. That was just an image that so many of our participants really could not connect with. They felt like gardening was an outdated term. They wanted to engage in plant projects, but they really didn't see themselves as gardeners. We asked them where they were shopping for their plants and, not surprisingly, by and large, the home improvement store was the first choice—I think they are in there for a lot of other purchases. Secondly, it would be the super market and, third, would be the garden center. A lot of this is because it is convenient—they're already shopping at the box store or the super market. Buying a plant at those two locations was much more convenient.

Another key finding was this notion of being lucky when a plant grows and thrives. I've had a lot of time to think about this particular finding. When you think about it, there are so few products that we attribute success to us being lucky. If we had a good cup of coffee this morning, we didn't say we were lucky—we expect that. If we have a piece of clothing that doesn't fall apart after the first wash, we don't say, "Gosh, I really got lucky!" with that particular pair of pants or that top. But, so many people, particularly ages 30-49, said that luck was a big part of their being successful.

When plants die, people feel horrible—they almost liken it to the death of a pet. I think we can, as an industry, do some things to try to help combat some of those huge, negative perceptions that, especially the younger consumer (but even some of our well-established consumers) are seeing.

Just to summarize, the act of gardening has mostly positive impressions (although they are significant ones)—it's dirty, and it's hard work (we need to work on those). In the focus groups, we found that people have a very distinct idea of who gardens. Perhaps, gardening is not the word that we should continue to use. The next key finding was people are shopping for plants where it's convenient. We need to think about how we can make, especially the independent garden center, just as convenient but perhaps having some other advantages to bring them in. Lastly, I think we need to address this sense of being lucky or that plants are a big risk.

What we'll do next week, is, we'll talk about some of the marketing campaigns that we developed to help address some of these key findings.

Well, I hope you'll tune in again next week for the next episode of the "Marketing Munchie Podcast." Thanks for listening.

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Announcer: Thank you for joining us on this week's Marketing Munchies Podcast. For more information or to download the transcript of this podcast, please visit, connect-2-consumer.org. That's C-O-N-N-E-C-T, dash, the number two, dash, C-O-N-S-U-M-E-R, dot, C-O-M.