

Marketing Munchies Podcast Transcript

Episode #38

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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: Hi, and welcome back to the Marketing Munchies Podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Bridget Behe. I am delighted to have back my dear friend and colleague, Dr. Charlie Hall. Welcome back, Charlie!

Dr. Charles Hall: Thank you, Bridget! It is always a pleasure to be here. I just can't say how delighted I am to be on your podcast.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Well, I want to pick up where we left off the last time. Listeners may have heard the last podcast where you were a guest where we started to talk about your updating some of the benefit information. Maybe you could refresh the listeners about your plans for updating some of the benefits information.

Dr. Charles Hall: Sure. That particular article that you were referencing was written back in 2012, and it summarized all the research up to 2011. I have another student I have been working with on accumulating all the research that has been conducted since then. We are summarizing all those since publications as we speak. They will be coming out in 2019.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Boy, I am really looking forward to that! I know you have categorized the benefits into economic, environmental, and health and wellbeing. Today, what I want to focus on is the environmental benefits. Of course, the listeners may know that you and I, we work with S10-65: this national team of scientists who do a lot of consumer market research. We have done some environmental benefits type research. Maybe you could give the listeners a more holistic perspective on some of the key findings from the environmental studies that show that plants really benefit our health and wellbeing through environmental benefits.

Dr. Charles Hall: Sure. Absolutely, I am glad this is a two-hour podcast, because it will take about that long to include all those benefits, but I will give you the cliff notes.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Ha-ha!

Dr. Charles Hall: One of the biggest benefits of course is that plants produce oxygen, right, and that is part of photosynthesis. We need that to live. One tree, for example, can provide enough oxygen for two people.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Wow.

Dr. Charles Hall: So, you got a family of four, two trees in their yard can produce enough oxygen for that family.

Dr. Bridget Behe: My goodness. I have read the literature, and I didn't realize that. If any other business on the planet could manufacture oxygen, you know, they would be all over that. It is amazing how silent a lot of our industry is on that particular benefit.

Dr. Charles Hall: Exactly. But not only are they producing oxygen, but they are scrubbing a lot of other particulates out of the air. In fact, there was one study that looked at the amount of ozone and nitrous oxide and sulfur dioxide and the really harmful greenhouse gases as well as the particulate matter. The trees in (I think the city was in California), but for that one city, it provided \$3.8 million worth of impact every year.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Wow.

Dr. Charles Hall: Yeah, it was amazing. I said million. Did I say million?

Dr. Bridget Behe: Yes, you did say million.

Dr. Charles Hall: I meant to say \$3.8 billion worth of impact—in terms of the particulates that are removed by trees.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Oh my goodness.

Dr. Charles Hall: It's an amazing statistic. Particularly in areas where you have a lot of smog and so forth like L.A., it becomes even more important.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Yeah.

Dr. Charles Hall: Right, so you have got a number of other environmental benefits: the reduction of erosion. Of course, you have the heating and cooling facts of plants. When they are positioned properly against buildings, you have lower heating/cooling costs that you incur. Again, another side economic benefit. But the shading, even noise pollution.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Yeah, and that is a big one in urban areas.

Dr. Charles Hall: A two-foot barrier of trees or other plants, just a two-foot barrier, can reduce noise decibels from 62 decibels to 15 decibels. Now, that may not sound like a lot, but if you ride in a car, it is about 62 decibels of sound for your average midsize car. If you increase that by 6, all of a sudden you are sitting there with your wife, you have been having an enjoyable drive at 62 decibels worth of noise, you increase it to 68 decibels, and all of a sudden you are having to shout at your wife to be heard. That's not going to be a good thing!

Dr. Bridget Behe: No, that's not a good trip!

Dr. Charles Hall: That's not a pleasant car ride. So you have got reduction of noise, reduction of glare, you have got the storm order mitigation. Oh my goodness, this is the really big one, Bridget, because most cities are always combating or they are trading off the gray infrastructure versus green infrastructure. They are having to put in redundant piping to handle these hundred-

year rains that keep happening every 7-8 years. One city I was reading about the other day, they saved \$120 million in gray infrastructure costs by putting in green infrastructure instead.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Oh my.

Dr. Charles Hall: So, instead of using gray infrastructure to mitigate storm water runoff, we were using green infrastructure. Trees hold a lot of rain in their canopy, and they release it a lot slower.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Wow.

Dr. Charles Hall: Whenever you have that canopy cover, then you have less erosion. You have less runoff, and the percolation in the ground is much more likely before it even hits the storm water, sewers, or what have you, the drains or whatever.

Dr. Bridget Behe: That is impressive. What really impresses me is the body of literature that supports these claims. I think that's really important for the listeners to understand. You know, it is not just Charlie saying this or somebody else saying it. That there is substantive data that backs up these claims. The other piece to this, especially for the listeners, I'm trying to keep this a very practical type podcast, what would you advise businesses to do in order to help people understand some of these environmental benefits?

Dr. Charles Hall: Well, I think you put it in terms that they can understand. I think that's true for any of us. When we learn a new subject or a new piece of data or a new fact, when we learn something it is because somebody has made it relevant to our lives. When you start talking about oxygen and the role that it plays, and you say that two trees provides enough for a family of four, that's relevancy.

Dr. Bridget Behe: It's relatable.

Dr. Charles Hall: Yeah. Who hasn't been either inside or outside in areas where it's too noisy to carry on a conversation? That's a relatable benefit. I think you relate these benefits to how people live, work, and play, and it resonates with them all the more.

Dr. Bridget Behe: If a business is partnering with a restaurant and there is a plant on the table, they should be talking about some of those benefits. When a business re-landscapes, I think partnering with the landscape company to say that these two trees would provide enough oxygen over their lifetime for four people over their lifetime. We really need to be posting these facts, as you said, in ways that are relatable. I think also in places that are very conspicuous. While the messages themselves don't have to be long, we know that it takes at least seven impressions before we can get any little factoid to stick. We have got to repeat, repeat, repeat. We don't want to bore people to death. There's enough that if you were scrolling some of these facts on your website that you could go through probably two or three or four days' worth of looking at that website without ever seeing the same fact again.

Dr. Charles Hall: Exactly. To me that's the key. Out of the hundreds of messages and the hundreds of benefits that, just in the environmental category, that plants provide, how do we know which ones are going to resonate the most? It's like when the industry talks about doing a

generic advertising program. One message that's going to affect all people is somewhat unlikely. We have got to come up with messages that resonate, but we have got to test those messages. Having something like that that's continually revolving is a really good idea. Something popped into my brain that's got to come out. This is a very interesting study by the NRDC, National Resources Defense Council. Think what you will politically, about that organization, but they do some very applied, high quality research. They developed a publication a couple years ago in which they looked at green infrastructure. They looked at the use of bio swells, green roofs, permeable pavement—where you actually capture the water underneath that pavement.

Dr. Bridget Behe: So, it's porous—it lets the water come through.

Dr. Charles Hall: Exactly. Like you have a basketball court you build for inner city kids. Underneath that is a cistern that captures all the water that permeates through the basketball court. Then you water the landscape around the court with all that water.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Oh my goodness.

Dr. Charles Hall: Talk about a win-win. They were looking at permeable pavement, green roof, medium-sized trees, rain guards, bio swells, cisterns (to capture the water), and they were looking at the effect on the retail businesses—standard 40,000 square foot retail businesses.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Okay.

Dr. Charles Hall: Now, if you remember from our economic study, we said that people traveled further distances, they shopped longer, they buy more stuff, and they pay higher prices. When you account for that over forty-year time horizon and all the environmental benefits, the energy savings and the avoided costs for roof replacement from the green roof. And the tax credits and the additional retail sales and the storm water fee reductions—all those benefits that are derived from including all those plants in the landscape around that retail business. All of a sudden, over a forty-year time horizon, you discount that using net present value analysis to today's dollars?

Dr. Bridget Behe: Okay...

Dr. Charles Hall: That's \$24 million worth of benefits in today's dollars.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Oh my goodness! That's huge!

Dr. Charles Hall: And the landscape—I don't think it costs \$24 million to install.

Dr. Bridget Behe: I'm sure. You could knock off quite a few zeros.

Dr. Charles Hall: Exactly, but that's forty years' worth of benefits discounted to today's dollars. If you are doing an analysis and that present value analysis says that if it's greater than zero, you pull the trigger and make that investment. And yet, how many businesses are out there that don't invest in their business surroundings? They don't put the landscape in. And yet, because they think it's too expensive. It's not that you can't afford it. You can't afford not to with those kinds of environmental benefits.

Dr. Bridget Behe: So, we have got to encourage businesses to take this research-based information when they are making pitches to clients when they are developing proposals. I mean these pieces of information that help a potential buyer understand that this is not just a sound investment, this is a wildly great investment. That's something that they cannot afford not to do. We just really got to encourage businesses to pick up a lot of these messages, make these messages relatable. Put them on their website. Put them on plans and proposals. Put them on the back of T-shirts for employees. Have it just about anywhere you can think of. But also have that message rotate so that people understand it's not just one type of benefit.

It is not just the environmental benefit, but here's the multidimensions of that environmental benefit. That we're taking harmful things out of the air. We are putting great things back into the air. We're being really good stewards with water, because when we use permeable surfaces not only can we reduce the runoff, but we might be able to collect that rain water to use it for another purpose. We have really got to encourage businesses to pick up a lot of these research based facts and communicate them to their customers and their potential customers.

Dr. Charles Hall: Absolutely and not only customers but councilmen and councilwomen and people making decisions about whether to implement some of this green infrastructure throughout their cities and municipalities throughout the country. It's one thing to do it at the homeowner level, but we need to also do that at the public level.

Dr. Bridget Behe: The community level. A lot of businesses in the industry are active in their community—probably not thinking about being active in this way, but really being bold in taking a step forward in saying, “look at the environmental benefits that our business contributes to the community.

Dr. Charles Hall: Yeah, well said.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Well great, Charlie, I really appreciate you being on the podcast again this week, and I look forward to having you back another time!

Dr. Charles Hall: Thank you, Bridget!

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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.

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