

## Marketing Munchies Podcast Transcript

## Episode #39

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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 just super excited to have my good friend and colleague back on the show again this week, Dr. Charlie Hall—Texas A&M, the Ellison Endowed Chair for International Floriculture. Welcome back Charlie!

**Dr. Charles Hall:** Well thanks, Bridget! It's always fun to be here.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** I think the listeners probably have listened to the last couple of podcasts that I had you on as a guest. I want to finish up our series of three this week by talking about the wellbeing benefits. I know you have shared with the listeners before that you are upgrading/updating the big pile of research I think that is there that indicates the many wellbeing benefits that our industry has. You want to share some of the newer key findings with them?

**Dr. Charles Hall:** Absolutely. In many respects, this is overused. In many respects, we kind of left the best for last, because this is something that really resonates with people. In fact, I teach a course called Social Horticulture here at Texas A&M. In that course I talked about the economic, environmental, and health and wellbeing benefits. Today's Millennials, when I start talking about health and wellbeing benefits, they sit up in their chair. They take notice. You would think it would be the environmental benefits that would resonate most, since they are so environmentally conscious.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** That would have been my guess.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** But, no, it is the health and wellbeing benefits.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Wow.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** See, when I tell them that kids (school kids like themselves), when they are in classrooms that have natural views of nature, or they have plants included in the classroom, that they perform better on tests—whether it be standardized tests or otherwise. They retain as much as 20% more information. They are more compassionate towards one another. You remember high school and so forth.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Yeah, we could use a little more compassion in the high schools today.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** I know! Ninety percent of kids start kindergarten with a high self-esteem. Less than 10% of high school-ers graduate with high self-esteem.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Wow. That's a shocking statistic.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** I know. Plants help mitigate that. If you look at school gardens, for example. When kids are outside—they got their hands in the dirt—they are not worried about what each other is wearing or what kind of shoes they got on. And they are not worried about race. They are not worried about social status. They are out there getting their hands dirty—it is a great equalizer.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Ah.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** So many teachers have, and studies have verified that, again that compassion is very evident among kids—particularly when they have school garden programs. And the same thing—even prisons that have prison gardening programs, those horticultural (it is not really therapy programs), but they are horticultural programs where they are generating food (fruits and vegetables) for the prison. There are less incidents of violent crimes within the prison.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Wow.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** Recidivism rates go way down if they have been involved in a horticultural program. That is the chances of employment when they get out are much higher than the likelihood of them going back into incarceration is dramatically reduced.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Wow.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** These are huge societal issues. Go back to school gardens for a second. Obesity rates among kids go way down whenever they have school gardens. Guess what? It is not just the kids—it is the parents. The kid gets fired up about this fruit or vegetable that they grew. They take it home and say, “Mom, I’ve got to have this, This is awesome! We should grow our own carrots. Grow our own onions.” It catches fire with the entire family, and we see obesity rates go down for the parents as well.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** We have got that direct benefit as well as that indirect benefit.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** Yeah, exactly. Kids with ADHD. They take a 20 minute stroll through an improved landscape. Just like the ones that we install and maintain in our industry. It has the same effect, neurologically, as two of their medications.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Oh my goodness!

**Dr. Charles Hall:** Yeah, so stress levels go way down. Their attention deficit, the recovery time, goes way down in the midst of flowers, plants, trees, and grass—everything that we install and maintain. Yet, how many schools have we built that have been these massive gray monstrosities...

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Almost like jails.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** Exactly...because we are going to the lowest bidder. It goes against every single piece of research that we have seen. We limit the natural lighting so it is a big mess. Here is one that is really close to my own heart. Last year my father passed away from dementia. I saw

him, through that disease; become a man I hardly knew. His behaviors were so greatly impacted by that particular disease. It is horrible. That and Alzheimer's are big issues. Alzheimer's clinics and dementia clinics in which they have horticultural programs or healing gardens if you will, that the patients can go out and be in. The behavior of those patients is affected so that they are more compassionate with their caretakers. They are more compassionate with one another. There are less instances of anger and other types of emotional outbursts. They eat better. They sleep better. Being outside in those gardens is a huge improvement in their quality of life. I saw that in my own father as well. It is not only beneficial for the patients it is beneficial for the staff.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** They probably need a break, because that is pretty demanding work.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** They are less stressed. There is less turnover rate. It is really amazing in terms of those benefits.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Even some of those benefits still are imparted even if people cannot be out actively engaged in it. Didn't you tell me that patients in the hospital who can see outside have faster recovery rates?

**Dr. Charles Hall:** Yeah, absolutely. If they have plants in the hospital room, they get better faster. If they have pictures of plants in the hospital room, they get better faster. Even if they don't have flowers or plants in the room, they have a view upon nature, they get better faster. They use fewer pain medications, and we have known that since 1984.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Wow.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** And, yet, how often have you heard that?

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Yeah, that kind of takes me into my next question. What could we as industry professionals do to help the medical profession; to help our community; to help our schools/our educators? What are some things you think that industry professionals might do to try to spread the word about some of these health and wellbeing benefits?

**Dr. Charles Hall:** Number one: know enough to know the difference. If we don't know it, and we don't believe it, how in the world are we going to expect anybody else to know and believe it?

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** They get a copy of your article (the one that has been out), or wait till early next year and get a copy of the more recent one. First of all, read the article.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** On my Ellison Chair page <https://ellisonchair.tamu.edu/> , there is a *Benefits of Plants* section. Not only does it contain that summary article, but it has got a number of other summary articles. I am not the end-all-be-all of knowledge.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** No, but you have collected it, I think, in a really good, usable manner. You have collected this to and put it together in a way that people don't have to go hunting for it. They can find it kind of in one summary article.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** Well that's true. And thank you. You give me a lot of credit there, but there are a number of other resources that I linked to there, because I want it to be a clearinghouse of

this information. People should get on that particular website and visit these other websites I have linked, because then they are going to see the messaging that will really resonate with people. A lot of these factoids that I have been talking about in this series are things that people, they may know this deep down in their heart, but they really didn't know the statistics. They didn't know...maybe some of these things are a big surprise. That is the first thing: they have got to know enough to know the difference.

Then, they have got to know, secondly, the magnitude of why it makes a difference. One other study comes to mind, and this is a neat study. They looked at Emerald Ash Borers in two different areas of the country. Ash trees grow in a monoculture. Emerald Ash Borer that had been in this area wiped out all the Ash trees. There were basically no trees—it was like a bomb hit in that area. There were no trees versus the trees that were still in this other area. Accounting for socioeconomic differences, so we are talking apples and apples, in the area that (I think it even stretched across multiple states) there were no trees, very few trees, there were like 6,000 deaths due to upper respiratory events.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Wow.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** Yeah, and then there were like 15,000 more cardiovascular events. That is another thing that really resonates with me, because I went through quadruple bypass three years ago. Those trees provide a vital function in terms of moving particulates, providing oxygen. It really is a matter of life and death that we incorporate flowers, shrubs, and trees in our lives. We have the research.

So, you know enough to know the difference, you know the magnitude of why it is important, and then, thirdly, you test those messages with your customer base. No matter what part of the supply chain you are in in this green industry, you use those messages in your point-of-purchase advertising—in your email dialogue with your clients or whatever. Every type of instance where you are communicating, you are also including, “Hey, did you know...?” in these messages.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** You know, I think this is probably the best type of benefit information that can be used on social media. When we have got people seeing these messages, and again, pointing customers/pointing Facebook friends back to the research-based information, so that it is not fake news. It is not greenwashing. I think, if you are struggling with social media messages, to me, the health and wellbeing benefits really can be the crux of any horticulture business' social media campaign. You could go through one hundred—you could go through two messages a week and not run out of the research-based information that you could be posting on social media. I just think it is one of the best targets that the industry could use to communicate some of these wellbeing benefits.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** Yeah. One of the best entities that I know who does that very well is the *Children & Nature Network*. They are always posting the advantages of kids being outside in nature. We should call attention/we should share those stories when they come out, and we should share the stories of the Collegiate Plant Initiative that was started at the University of Florida—that was trying to get the college students aware of plants and get them interested.

We don't have to reinvent the wheel.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Exactly.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** We can take this existing knowledge, and we can share it, like you said: infinitum almost. There is so much material there, that we would have enough marketing material for years. For years! Hopefully, in the end, we will affect the elasticity of demand, in such a way, that people start looking at plants as being necessities in their lives rather than mere luxuries that they can cast aside when the economic downturns hit. Right?

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Right.

**Dr. Charles Hall:** That's what we want. Inelastic demand for our product...

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** No substitutes!

**Dr. Charles Hall:** Exactly! That is one way to garner it is that you influence that perceived value. See, right now, people value plants based off the price that we are selling them at.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** Yeah, and that is just wrong!

**Dr. Charles Hall:** Yeah, because even the smartest consumer out there doesn't realize all the benefits they are going to get from our flowers, shrubs, and trees based off the price that they are paying. We have got to influence that perceived value again, so that people see those environmental, health and wellbeing, and economic benefits as necessities. They have got to have that. It doesn't matter if it is raining on a Saturday, I have got to go get these things, because they are integral in the quality of my life.

**Dr. Bridget Behe:** And everybody wants improved quality of life.

Well, Charlie, I really appreciate you being a guest on the podcast. We will look and see how our listeners react to some of the things that we have talked about, and look forward to having you back on the podcast in the near future!

**Dr. Charles Hall:** Thanks, Bridget! I appreciate the invitation. It is always fun to be here!

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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](http://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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