

Marketing Munchies Podcast Transcript

Episode #45

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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. Today, I want to talk about a trip to Prague that I took back in September with the International Garden Center Association. For about five days in September, we visited 10 garden centers, including one big box store, a production nursery, the *Yankee Candle* factory—the only one outside of the United States—a plastic manufacturer of some really cool composters, the *Budweiser* plant, the Prague Zoo, the Prague Royal Gardens, and several castles. Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic and that is located in Central Europe—some might call it Eastern Europe, but the Czechs prefer to call it Central Europe. We were welcomed every place that we went. Some folks had extensive signs up welcoming us.

I want to talk about some of the things that I saw that we have in common with garden retailers in the Czech Republic and some of the things that were a little bit different. If you do not know much about the Czech Republic, they are fairly famous for their marionettes and also for their gingerbread—which I saw plenty of. If you have never been to Prague, it is probably one of my more favorite cities after Rome and Vienna. It is really beautiful and well worth seeing.

A couple of the trends that I saw in the Czech Republic that are also thriving in the United States: the first one was food. While we did enjoy a lot of food on the tour, also selling food was quite a big theme. One of the garden retailers had a very extensive display of edible flowers on top of desserts, and some of them were almost too pretty to eat. There were a lot of tables. Kitchen settings that were merchandized. Barbeque grills that were merchandized with herbs. Some of those displays would be right at home in most of the garden retailers here in the United States. It was garlic-planting season, and I love garlic. It was interesting to see the garlic bulbs for sale for planting, but I was really impressed with and kind of overwhelmed with the amount of fruit trees that I saw merchandized. Now, September would be a great time to plant those fruit trees, but I saw everything from apples to pears to brambles. Even one gentleman on a motorcycle came in to look at the strawberry plants. I was kind of surprised to see coffee plants being marketed. I was even more surprised to see seed packets and packages of micro-grains being sold.

The food trend is quite alive and well in Central Europe. They market a lot of the food crops as organic, organically produced. A lot of the containers were marketed with zero percent plastic and being compostable. I think one of the coolest things I saw were containers with scissors on

the side that were marketed alongside the herbs, so you did not have to hunt for the pair of scissors in order to harvest some herbs.

Another big theme across the garden retailers in the Czech Republic was pollinators. We saw quite a few displays with bee hotels, but a lot of plant material was located as food for bees or nectar, for pollinators. The pollinator trend is doing quite well.

I saw a really good use of vertical space in merchandizing. One of the retailers had some boots suspended from the ceiling. Another retailer had a, almost like a glass aquarium suspended from the ceiling with some gourds that were nicely merchandized. I think the most creative use of vertical space was a retailer that had a ladder hung horizontally and from that ladder, were containers of orchids. Now, there was not much growing medium in the container, but the orchids were hanging upside down. It really made a beautiful display. It probably is not a long term display, but it certainly was quite eye-catching.

The Czechs love their furry pets just as much as Americans do. I saw quite a few pet-friendly garden retailers, and interestingly enough, some plants that were specifically targeted for animals like cats and rabbits.

I think the most interesting use of merchandizing or the most interesting aspect of merchandizing to me was the creative uses of pallets. Now, I have seen both in the U.S. and in the Czech Republic, pallets used very creatively to make cordoned off rooms when they are positioned vertically. It is interesting, you can use them horizontally as table tops. But, combining the horizontal with the vertical pallets, and then attaching a crate onto that, created almost like a shadow box or highlighting where a plant could be put inside that crate that was mounted on a vertical pallet. There were also some stained pallets that gave it a more upscale look. Some pillows were merchandized on top of that—almost like an outdoor kind of cushion/couch area. I also saw some big electrical cable spools that were used in conjunction with crates and pallets in order to make some really creative desktop merchandizing spaces.

Some of the pallets were painted. There were a couple of places that had a three-tiered, progressively smaller pallet that was painted a bright color that contrasted with the plant material. Then, I think my favorite use was in one of the garden retailers that actually had made furniture from the pallets and spray painted them bright colors. I will try to put a picture of that in the transcript.

In terms of merchandizing, they were very much into color blocking as I have seen some garden retailers use color—especially for the outdoor perennials that we visited in September in the Czech Republic. They went so far as to paint the pallets that were used as end caps and as tabletops. Then, they had very nice decorative banners or flags that helped to highlight which color plant was on which display table.

And, of course, succulents. Succulents are alive and well as a trend in the Czech Republic. We saw some large, fountain-type containers potted up with succulents and multiple-pack succulents which I have not seen a lot of here in the United States. One really interesting retail development was the use of a little hand pull, where you could lift up a small container of a succulent and not

have your fingers poked by the cacti. Bonsai, surprisingly, was a big trend over there also. I saw several very nicely displayed containers of bonsai plants. One of the retailers in particular had some beautiful poster backdrops and had integrated some statuary into their bonsai collection, and placed the bonsai on some lighter colored tabletops. So the plant material really stood out as did the ceramics and the other statuary, and it really was tied in together with the use of some of the backdrops. Probably the most interesting bonsai that I saw was a deep-bulb bowl planted with a cherry tree that actually had fruiting bodies on it—some real beautiful cherry fruit on the top.

I will finish up there with the really great trip that I had to the Czech Republic with the International Garden Center Association. Next year, they plan to be in England. I am really hoping that some folks will have an interest in that—if they want to see some really cool garden retailers in England. You can check on the *American Hort.* website to get some information, because they are an official member to the International Garden Center Association.

Well, that is it for this week. 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.

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