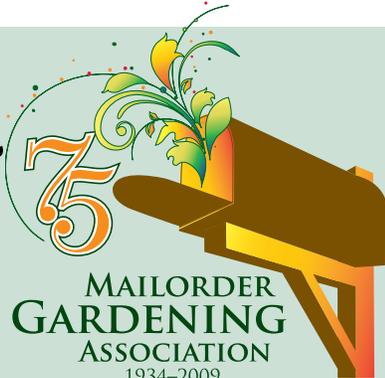


MGA Messenger

Celebrating 75 years as the official source for direct marketing retailers, suppliers and professionals in the mail order gardening industry.

MAILORDER
GARDENING
ASSOCIATION
1934-2009



Summer 2009 Convention Wrap-up, Roberta Simpson-Dolbeare, Editor



Timely Topics Draw Crowd for Roundtable Discussions

"Web Creative" was one of the nine discussion topics offered during the Roundtable sessions at the recent convention. Always well attended, the Roundtables engage members in a question and answer setting that is less formal than the lecture-type sessions. Amy Africa, Eight by Eight (in pink, upper left of photo above), served as moderator of this particular roundtable and also served as the presenter for the session entitled "38 Proven Tips and Techniques for Increasing Your Website Conversion Today ... Without Breaking the Bank!"



Shipping and Freight Issues are Ongoing Concerns

Escalating fuel prices directly impact transportation charges. And for direct marketers, such as Jeff Dinslage, Nature Hills Nursery (center, forefront of photo at left), this means a constant struggle to control costs. Dinslage, who operates a web-based nursery business, moderated this roundtable discussion.

The Growing Business of Web Sales

More and more consumers are shopping online for gardening products. Making sure your website content entices both existing customers and potential new ones to purchase from you can be an ongoing challenge. Attendees to the MGA Summer Conference had the opportunity during Roundtable discussions to learn from their peers tried-n-true tips for keeping website content fresh and and effective to help generate online sales.



What would you like to discuss?

If you have a topic of concern to your business you would like to suggest be discussed during a future Roundtable session, please contact the MGA office.

MGA Conferences Help Members Face Challenges Head On

All of us face challenging issues that impact our company's bottom line -- ever-changing postal and barcode regulations, annual rate hikes in postage and transportation costs, shifts in consumer interests, increase in paper and printing costs, supplier issues, competition from big box stores -- the list seems endless! And without a doubt, the challenges can seem overwhelming at times.

The Mailorder Gardening Association (MGA) Board of Directors and Executive Director understand the concerns facing its members, they are direct marketers too. This is why they work diligently to put together an impressive team of experts to conduct workshops at the two annual MGA conventions. "We strive to provide solutions and practical information conference attendees can put to use the minute they return to their office," says MGA Executive Director Camille Cimino. "Our conferences are not just for company CEO's. They are designed to benefit the employees involved in marketing, shipping, ecommerce, mail center operations and more."

The MGA Board of Directors encourages all members to attend the 2009 Winter Convention, in Baltimore, MD, January 5-7. Information about the conference will be distributed later this fall.



MGA President Expresses Thanks to Conference Sponsors

“The support of our convention sponsors is a win-win situation for all,” says Barbara Emerson, MGA President for 2008-2009 (above left). “Sponsorships enable our trade members to receive a variety of recognition for their support and, more importantly, they have the opportunity to visit one-on-one with current and prospective clients. From the organization’s perspective, the financial support of sponsorships allows us to offer top-notch programs and social events at a more reasonable registration price, which in turn benefits the attendees.”

Shown above with Emerson is Ashley McEwan, Media People, representing Organic Gardening Magazine. Organic Gardening sponsored the Welcome Back Reception.



Welcoming First Timers to the MGA!

Bill Boonstra, Bluestone Perennials (left) welcomes first-time convention attendees Dan McDonnal (center) and Worth Brown, both from Golden State Bulb Growers. MGA Board of Directors serve as mentors to first-time attendees to help familiarize them with the organization and to ensure they know we appreciate their participation and to encourage them to attend a conference again.

Thanks to all 2008 Summer Convention Sponsors

~DIAMOND~

Organic Gardening Magazine	Tammy Hobar	610-967-7943	tammy.hobar@rodale.com
Horticulture Magazine	Jill Ruesch	800-726-9966	jill.ruesch@fwpubs.com
Quad/Graphics	Gary Meagher	414-566-2064	gary.meagher@qg.com

~PLATINUM~

ZED Marketing Group	Jim Zuckerman	405-348-8145	jim@zedmktg.com
Fine Gardening Magazine	Lisa Riebe	203-304-3532	lriebe@taunton.com
Gardening How-To Magazine	Linda Reznick	952-352-7500	lreznick@namginc.com
LENSER	Michele Salmon	415-446-2511	msalmon@lenser.com

~GOLD~

Arandell Corporation	Rod Barbera	800-558-8724	RRBarbera@arandell.com
Berkshire Direct	Matt Storey	413-458-1721	matt@berkshiredirect.com
DHL	Kim Chapman	954-903-6300	kchapman@dhlglobalmail.com
Planto	Cor Heemskerck	262-752-4880	cor@bulbtrends.com
Wiland Direct	Brent Eskew	303-485-8686	beskew@wilanddirect.com

~SILVER~

Brookside Marketing	Roberta S Dolbear	217-734-9365	brooksid@adams.net
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Conference Comments

Feedback from convention attendees substantiates why YOU should attend the next MGA Conference.

- “Each session was an insight to what is key to what is happening in our business right now.”
- “Loved the idea of the catalog critique. It was very relevant to our members and it provides immediate, great take-aways they can use to improve their catalogs.”
- “I learned a great deal from the live consumer focus group.”
- “Got time with associates to deepen business relationships, made new contacts and many good ideas.”
- “Professional, relevant, well-organized and thought out.”

Presenting the Colors



These two young men were part of a Colorado Springs Cub Scout troop, that served as the Color Guard Thursday morning of the summer convention. The scouts presented the colors just prior to the start of the Catalog Critique Session that morning; a nice way to start the day!

75 Years & Still Growing!

Congratulations to the MGA on its upcoming 75th anniversary in 2009! The association continues to thrive in serving the professional needs of direct marketers of gardening products to home consumers.



Speaker Presentations Available on MGA Site

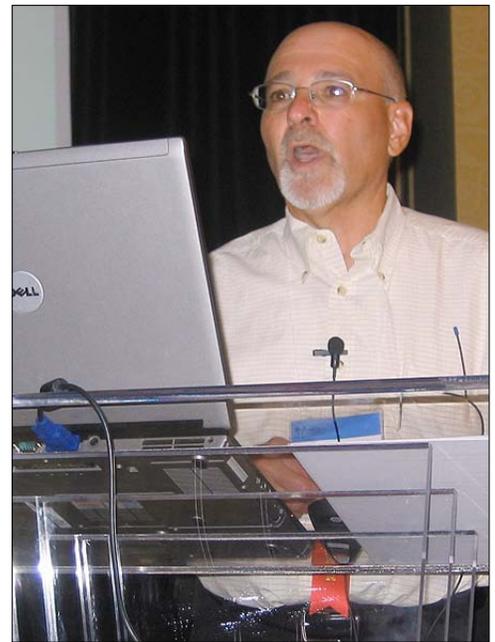
Here's a great way to review and retain valuable information that was offered at the MGA Summer Convention. To access hard copies of the following presentations, go to the MGA website: www.mailordergardening.com.

The presentation format is noted in parenthesis.

- *Meeting the "Do Not Mail" and Postal Challenge!* - John Lenser (pdf)
- *Clicks That Count* - Amy Africa (ppt)
- *Creating A Secure Online Presence* - Brandi L. Moore (pdf)
- *Catalog Critique* by Bill Licata (pptx 40.2MB)
Supporting Document by Bill Licata (doc)
- *Catalog Critique* by George Hague (zipped ppt 6MB)
- *Where Have All The "Gardeners" Gone? Strategy Workshop* - Kip Creel (pdf)

The value of the knowledge you can obtain at an MGA Convention is just one of the great benefits of a membership in the MGA. If you were to pay to attend an individual seminar on any of the above topics, you would pay as much (and probably more) as what the registration fee for the whole MGA convention cost.

Be sure to mark January 5-7, 2009 on your calendar and plan to attend the Winter Convention in Baltimore, MD. The MGA meeting is held just before the start of the MANTS Trade Show, which is also in Baltimore.



What Works, What Doesn't

Bill Licata, LCH Direct, was one of three presenters for the Catalog Critique Session. Licata, along with Roberta Simpson-Dolbeare, Brookside Marketing and George Hague, J. Schmid & Associates, critiqued MGA member catalogs prior to the conference and then shared their findings and recommendations with the attendees.



Back to the Classroom -- "Clicks that Count"

MGA convention attendees are eager learners, especially when they have the opportunity to gain knowledge from experts such as Amy Africa, web guru and founding partner of Eight by Eight, an internet consulting firm. Africa (standing at left in photo above) is well respected for her background and success in site improvements, traffic building and SEO to analytics and email marketing.

She commented that the transition from traditional direct marketing to web-based commerce has not been easy for many companies. This

is why it is important to understand how successful web businesses work.

Africa touched on the "must haves" for any website, sure-fire tactics for developing the perfect shopping cart, tips for designing navigation that works, how to increase conversion on the site, a guaranteed formula for effective emails, and knowing what things definitely should be tracked on a website.

A copy of Africa's power point presentation (which is titled "*Clicks that Count*") is available through the Convention News link on the MGA website www.mailordergardening.com.



Talking with the President

Yvonne Stokes, Stokes Tropicals (above left) visits with outgoing MGA President Dan Wells, New Growth, during the convention.



From a Woman's Perspective

Barbara Miller, (left) J. E. Miller Nurseries, and Jeanie Frasier (right), Dixondale Farms, may be chatting about business, and maybe they're just chatting. The two friends took time to catch up at the Welcome Back Reception during the summer convention.

Dealing Successfully with Postal Changes and Suppression Issues



Postal regulations and list suppression issues are in a constant state of flux. This is why it is so important for direct marketers to keep abreast of current information, techniques and strategies for offsetting these challenges. John Lenser, President of Lenser (shown at left), along with Michelle Huston, Vice President of Circulation at Lenser and Mike Stahulak, President of Computech Direct, reviewed with MGA convention attendees current suppression concerns. They also shared tools for utilizing advanced address hygiene

techniques to ultimately increase a company's bottom line. Specific topics included how to reduce postage costs through better sortation and automation, plus how to lower the number of undeliverables. The team of presenters examined actual case studies and real examples of catalog delivery situations.

A pdf file of Lenser's presentation is available on the MGA website www.mailordergardening.com. Click on the Convention News link to access the pdf file.

Understanding the "Changing" Consumer

Back by popular demand, Kip Kreeel, Standpoint Marketing, returned to the MGA stage to present findings from current consumer research regarding today's gardeners. Kreeel's talk identified facts that impact mail order operations, in an effort to help marketers understand the "changing" consumer.



Kip Kreeel, Standpoint Marketing

Kreeel also moderated a consumer panel of home gardeners at the convention's closing brunch. The lively interactive discussion provided insight about why consumers buy what they do, and what really influences their purchasing habits.

Kreeel's Strategy Workshop presentation is available as a pdf file on the MGA website, within the Convention News link.



Creating a Secure Online Presence

Alisa Keimel, Johnny's Select Seeds (center above) can speak from experience as a mail order company that has dealt with a breach in its online security. Keimel shared firsthand with MGA convention attendees what Johnny's encountered and measures the company has taken to protect itself in the future. Keimel's comments came during an educational session led by Brandi Moore, Director of Sales, Northwest Region, Ounce Lab. (Moore is shown at left in photo above. Also shown above with Moore and Keimel is Joseph Schwicke, who works with the FBI. Moore has an extensive background in computer security, including eight years with AOL's Security Awareness program. Her presentation focused on security basics as they apply to securing office infrastructures and

web sites, processing payments and what audit standards may be of concern. To download a copy of Moore's comments, go to the MGA website, and click on the Convention News link. The address is www.mailordergardening.com.



Your MGA Board Members

Michele Salmon, Lenser (above left) and Clayton Beaty, Beaty Fertilizer (above right) currently serve as members of the MGA Board of Directors.

Mailorder Gardening Association Consumer Panel Discussion White-Paper Summary Report -- July, 2008

Background

In July 2008, the Mailorder Gardening Association commissioned StandPoint Marketing Research (StandPoint) to assemble and conduct a consumer panel discussion about mail order gardening purchasing preferences and behaviors at its annual Summer Conference in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The 10 consumer panelists, all of whom were Colorado Springs area residents, were randomly recruited from lists provided by multiple Mailorder Gardening Association member companies. Participants ranged in age from 35 to 65+ and included a mix of male and female consumers and all own their home. The panelists also had a broad level of experience in purchasing products online and through catalogs across multiple product categories. This does not represent a cross-section of all MGA customers and is not intended to be statistically valid. StandPoint's Kip Creel moderated this discussion.

Research Findings

• *Reasons for Ordering Gardening Products through the Mail or Online Variety and Selection*

Panelists find a wider selection of plant varieties and gardening products through catalogs and online sources than what they typically find at garden centers or box stores. Another motivation for purchasing gardening products online and through catalogs is the ability to locate unique items, such as high-altitude, tropical or water-gardening related plants and products.

Information

Panelists agree that catalogs and online sources provide more detailed information about plants than do box stores. Specifically, these detailed high-quality images of the plants allow consumers to see how the

plant will look at different growth stages. Also, print materials available online and in catalogs provide very substantive information.

Panelists agree that often times employees at big-box stores lack appropriate knowledge about plants; therefore, they prefer to seek this information from other sources, such as online and catalog.

• *Specific Information Panelists Seek:*

- Size of plant at time of purchase and at all growth stages (height and width)
- Care instructions
- Planting instructions
- Zone in which plant performs best
- Soil type in which plant grows best
- Ways to solve a specific gardening problem
- Research on new plant varieties
- Resistance level to deer, rabbits and other animals

• *Process for Seeking Information*

Panelists explained the process they go through when they search online for gardening information. First, they typically conduct a search utilizing search engines (such as Google), starting with a broad term (i.e., roses) then narrow down to a specific type of plant (i.e., Knock-Out Rose).

Panelists prefer not to be required to register prior to entering a website. Additionally, when surfing individual websites, panelists stressed the importance of being able to locate contact information quickly and efficiently. Panelists look for information such as customer service email address, phone number, fax number, and mailing address. Panelists want prompt answers to their questions. Most will not wait 24 hours for a call back. They want answers within minutes, not days.

Five of the 10 panelists also said they subscribe to one or more gardening magazines.

Convenience

Panelists enjoy the convenience of being able to shop online 24 hours a day, while other stores are often closed. Many panelists admitted they don't have time to shop at garden centers or box stores and enjoy the flexibility of being able to shop online in the comfort of their own home.

Prices

The perception is that prices seem to be lower for plants and gardening products online or in catalogs versus at a garden center. This is likely due to the ability to comparison shop online and through catalogs. One panelist said that she started ordering vegetable and tomato plants online in order to avoid paying high prices at the grocery store for vegetables and tomatoes.

Shipping Charges

Panelists prefer to look at the "total cost" of their order, inclusive of shipping fees. One panelist compared it to Amazon.com, where you can look at the total cost of the order, with shipping included. It is important to note that gardening consumers do not want to be surprised by shipping charges at the end of the order. They want to know the shipping charge as early in the order process as possible and NOT after entering personal information (name, address, credit card number).

Tolerance for shipping charges largely depends on the total price of the order. Shipping should never cost more than the total product order. Panelists also recognize that by ordering through mail or online, they are saving gas money.

Promotional Giveaways

Giveaways are beneficial as long as the item being given away is of quality and value; such as a new pruning tool, for example. Gift cards are also welcome.

Continued

Quality

In some instances, panelists indicated that the quality of the plants sourced from catalogs and online was often higher than of those at the box store. As previously mentioned, knowing the exact size of the plant is very important to panelists. This is largely due to the fact that most prefer a larger plant. Panelists agree that larger plants are often hardier, stronger, have substantial root growth, have a higher survival rate, and perform better in areas with shorter growing seasons compared to younger, smaller plants. It is important to note that the majority of our panel members live in areas with short growing seasons.

Plant Warranties

Warranties are important for garden tools, but not as important for plants. According to our panel, if a tool breaks, and it's guaranteed not to break, the consumer will expect a replacement. Warranties are expected for plants, but actually taking advantage of plant warranties is not common. This is due to the number of variables such as consumer error, weather conditions, etc.

Most don't believe a plant supplier should be held responsible if a plant dies, due to the fact that the plant's health is out of their control once it leaves the nursery or greenhouse. Most panelists don't feel it's worth their time to ship plants back to the supplier.

Interestingly, these consumers would be more apt to take plants back to a big-box store that offers a guarantee, but not to a catalog due to the hassle of shipping. However, panelists do appreciate a warranty, and if a company refuses to replace a plant most will choose not to buy from that catalog again.

• *Mail-Order Catalog vs. Online Mail-Order Catalog*

The actual paper catalog inspired all 10 of our panel members to purchase from a mail-order company. Catalogs are also a great way for that

segment of consumers who don't use the Internet to purchase plants, product and to get information.

Panelists like the fact that a catalog is tangible and they can flip through it at their leisure. Another advantage to the paper catalog is the ability to comparison shop. Panelists also said catalogs give more detail about plant size and include more close-up images as opposed to online resources.

Some panelists said they also share their catalogs with family, friends and neighbors.

Online

For that segment of consumers who shop online and have grown accustomed to ordering products online, most feel ordering online and paying online is secure. However, most of the consumers on our panel said they feel more comfortable giving their credit card information to a recognized, reputable company.

In order to gain further credibility among consumers, it helps for that company to be a member of a trade association. *Of note*, none of the panel members were aware of the Mailorder Gardening Association, but believe membership in the Mailorder Gardening Association adds credibility to companies who supply garden products.

Panelists strongly prefer NOT to see banner ads on websites.

• *What Do You Order?*

Respondents said they order mostly plants and gardening tools; however, purchasing spans many product categories, including patio furniture, decorative pots, hardscape items and specialty fertilizers.

• *How the Segment Is Changing*

The members of our panel were unique in that they are largely gardening "hobbyists." The panel recognizes that they are becoming a rare breed, and notice a generational shift in gardening habits, from the "hobbyist" to the "occasional gardener."

About StandPoint

StandPoint is a marketing information company that serves a variety of clients in the home and garden, consumer goods and healthcare industries. As a small firm in high demand, StandPoint differentiates itself based on its high level of client service, solid research skills, and insights that impact organizational change. We employ a senior staffing model whereby all projects have strong oversight, clients have access to senior staff and recommendations are formulated by those with marketing management experience.

Our mission is to help clients make better decisions. We do this by acting as an intermediary between those who have a standpoint and translating that knowledge into our clients' decision-making process. We aim to become an integral part of our clients' strategic-planning process. Our insights and recommendations will always be presented with knowledge of industry and business issues. And, when it adds value, we will share lessons, examples, and strategies from other businesses and industries.

StandPoint is a unique company. As one of our clients put it, "This group has the mind of seasoned businesspeople and the soul of teachers. They are focused on our business needs, persistent in their quest for the right answers to our questions, the confidence to have a point of view, and have a passion for making us smarter."

For more information about StandPoint please visit www.standpointgroup.com, email Kip Creel at kcreel@standpointgroup.com, or call 770-270-4800.