



Know-how for Horticulture™

FINAL REPORT

HAL project: **National Industry Conference and Exhibition
2009**

Final Report – June 2009
Nursery & Garden Industry
National Conference & Exhibition

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HAL Project:

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June 19 2009

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Jacqui Gibbs has written this report as part of the reporting requirements of Horticultural Australia Limited (HAL). Industry funding from the Nursery Products Levy and HAL, and the time and energy provided by the members of the various state and national committees, is acknowledged.

~ Disclaimer ~

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1. Summary

The 2009 Nursery & Garden Industry National Conference, *Ingredients to a Brighter Future*, was held at the Canberra Convention Centre 18-19 February 2009.

The focus of this conference was to provide delegates with the tools, strategies and insight to ensure a sustainable and profitable future for both industry and individual businesses.

The program was developed by a team of industry representatives who focused on addressing issues which affected all of industry. This included cooperation between retailers and growers, chain supply management, attracting and keeping good staff and costing for profit. The conference structure included one and half days of plenary and half day visiting local nurseries or garden centres plus key local gardens such as Government House and Cockington Green.

The event was attended by 320 delegates from around Australia comprising a mix of retailers, growers and allied businesses. The event was sponsored by Yates, OAMPS, Australian Horticulture, Brunnings Gardman, Ramm Botanicals and Outdoor Design Source with another 20 organisations exhibiting at the event.

In an industry first, the conference followed on from the Greenscapes Symposium which was a one-day event designed to unveil the benefits of plants and green-life in the urban landscape and raise the profile of the nursery and garden industry within Australia.

Those delegates who also attended the GreenScapes Symposium reported it was extremely beneficial in providing industry a platform to emphasize the benefits of urban greening. International speakers, Adam Schwerner and Greg McPherson presented at both the conference and symposium and gave delegates insight into what has been achieved in the United States in this area.

The conference format was modified this year from a three to a two day event to allow delegates time to attend the Symposium and reduce the amount of time away from their businesses. To accommodate this change the number of social functions was reduced which many delegates felt restricted their time to network and changed the tone of the conference.

The inclusion of the Symposium boosted our trade exhibitor numbers to 20 - almost double the numbers of previous years. The feedback on the exhibition was not all positive this year causing us to review having an exhibition at the Darwin conference in 2010.

The Industry Awards Gala Dinner was also included as part of the conference. Held at the magnificent Great Hall in Parliament House the awards showcased the best of the best of our Industry. The event was successful in terms of sponsor support and industry recognition.

Feedback on the program content/structure recommends:

- Reverting to both plenary and concurrent sessions
- Having a greater percentage of presentations focussing on technical issues
- Including latest innovations and technology in the program

2. Introduction

The NGIA's conference is a traditional and much appreciated event. Running every year since the mid 1950's the conference is staged in a different state each year to support both the host state and provide delegates with an opportunity to explore the industry in other parts of Australia.

The conference provides industry the opportunity for:

- Communication about new information, ideas, practices and products
- Networking with others in the industry
- Showcasing products and services (by trade exhibitors)
- Social activity and fun
- Statutory meetings of NGIA and meetings of other national groups in the industry

The conference is open to all industry, though traditionally the majority of participants are financial members of NGIA. Also attending are staff of NGIA and State Associations, management and staff of sponsors and trade exhibitors, representatives of Horticulture Australia Ltd and management and staff of other organisations associated with the nursery and garden industry.

The primary outcomes are:

- Industry improvement
- Transfer of knowledge
- Exchange of ideas

3. Method and Activities

Conference Committee

The conference was organised by a Conference Committee comprising national industry representatives, NGIA Staff and a Professional Conference Organiser - Conference Solutions.

The Conference Committee included:

- Jeff Cooke – Ramm Botanicals (NSW) – Chair
- Lionel Sach – Aussie Colours (Qld)
- Bryan Merrick – Gardens R Us (NSW)
- Daniel Mansfield – Mansfield’s Propagation Nursery
- Kobie Keenan – NGIA Staff
- Dixie Holloway (Former NGIA Staff)
- Jacqui Gibbs – NGIA Staff
- Pat Napper – Conference Solutions
- Greg Vickers – Conference Solutions
- Mary Lee – Conference Solutions

The conference committee met in Canberra in early June 2008 to inspect venues and develop the itinerary. Two meetings were held in the NGIA offices with all other meeting conducted by teleconference.

The program was developed utilising the industry expertise of the committee supported by input gathered by them. Aside from representing three States the committee also represented growers, retail, media and NextGen.

The key objectives of the conference committee were:

- To develop a unified program relevant to all sectors
- To address the issues of staff, supply chain management and the value of plants
- To attract more delegates than previous years

Marketing Materials

The committee developed the following marketing/support materials to promote the Conference:

- Conference logo
- Advertisement for industry magazines
- Conference Registration brochure
- A conference website
- Fax Broadcasts
- Email Broadcasts
- Advertising in State magazines
- Exhibition Sales Brochure
- Program Brochures
- Articles in NGIA Clippings
- Articles in NGIA eCommPost

Marketing Program

Month	Media/Target Audience	Format	Quantity
September 08	Australian Horticulture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full page colour advert 	
	Greenworld Readers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference listed in Important Dates 	
October	Australian Horticulture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full page colour advert • Conference Registration Brochure inserted • Front Cover • Full page editorial – Adam Schwerner 	6000
	Greenworld	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¼ page colour advert • Conference Registration Brochure inserted 	7000
	Hort Journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full page colour advert • Symposium Registration Brochure inserted • Full page colour advert • Full page editorial 	5000
	Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website 	
	Clippings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Editorial 	
	E-Commpost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Editorial 	
November	Australian Horticulture Readers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full page colour advert 	6000
	Hort Journal Readers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full page colour advert 	5000
	NSW Association Magazine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full page editorial 	
	Clippings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Editorial 	
December	E-Commpost Greenworld	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Editorial • Full page colour advert 	7000
	Email Alert E-Commpost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGIA members • Editorial 	2100
January 09	Australian Horticulture Readers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 x Full page colour advert 	6000
	Groundswell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advert 	6000

4. Evaluation

The results of the surveys that were conducted at the conference amongst conference attendees and exhibitors are included in Appendix 12.

The response rate was disappointing however those that did respond provided some definitive feedback on areas where the Conference needs to improve.

The evaluation identified:

- The majority of people found the information provided by the speakers as useful to very useful.
- The Best of the Best segment within conference is highly valued and needs to be given more space within the program
- More time is needed for questions from the floor of speakers
- The Nursery Tours and Retail Tours were useful to very useful.
- It is preferred to have the Gala Dinner end the Conference
- There needs to be a better balance between social and formal sessions.
- The Growers want conference to address the technical issues of the industry in a more in-depth and informative environment and manner.

5. Implications

The key learning's for Australian Horticulture are:

- The primary role of a conference is the exchange of information or ideas. This occurs in two ways – teaching by an expert in a field and the exchange of ideas between two parties through networking. It is important that neither of these two options overshadow the other.
- Within our industry there are some very knowledgeable and talented individuals who can provide insight that no external party could. Those people need to be identified and given the opportunity to educate and inform their peers.
- Different people learn in different ways and it is important that the various modes are catered for within the conference program.
- The host State plays a critical role in the success of the conference

Challenges:

- The perception of the retailers by the growers and vice versa will always be an issue
- It is unlikely that conference will meet the needs of all of industry
- Industry is not receptive to new technology
- Attracting “new” blood to provide value to exhibitors as well as a greater penetration into industry.
- The destination can have a major impact on the attractiveness of the conference
- Economic actors do impact on conference
- Giving enough information to sell the program without giving it all away.

Opportunities

- Utilise the talent and expertise of the leaders within the industry
- To have Sponsors more involved in the lead-up to conference to increase the value for them and the delegates

6. Recommendations

As a result of this feedback, the following changes/amendments will be made for the 2010 National Conference in Darwin:

- The program content will be developed with greater involvement from industry
- The program will include more technical concurrent session addressing key environmental and technical issues
- The exhibition component of the Conference will be deleted and other alternatives sort to involve sponsors and new developments such as poster boards and five minute testimonials during the conference itself.
- The networking/social opportunities will be returned to levels of previous conferences.
- The costs to attend will be kept as competitive /attractive as possible.
- The finalisation of the conference program will occur earlier allowing more time to promote individual speakers and topics
- The timing of conference will allow sufficient time for marketing between end of January and the event itself

8. Appendices

These have been sent by post.

1. Advertisements
 - News Flash Flyer/Advert
 - Full-Page advertisements for Australian Horticulture, Greenworld and Hort Journal
 - Four-page advertorial in Australian Horticulture
2. Website
 - Home Page
 - Visitor Stats Jan 08 - Dec 09
 - Visitor Stats Jan 09—March 09
3. Promotional Brochure inserted in Greenworld and Australian Horticulture
 - Conference Program and letter mailed to members
4. Exhibition Promotional Brochure
5. Fax Alert and Email Alert
6. Conference Updates in NGIA Clippings
7. Conference Updates in NGIA eCommpost
8. Delegates List
9. Exhibitors list including final floor plan
10. Sponsors List
11. Pocket Program
12. Evaluation Forms