

**National Nursery
Industry Development
Manager**

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Nursery & Garden Industry,
Australia

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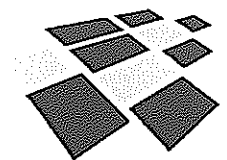
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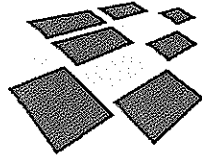
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*National Nursery Industry
Development Manager*

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Media Summary

Since 1 July 1998, the Nursery & Garden Industry has initiated, provided and/or refined a range of industry development tools and programs, including:

- An expanded Development Officer network servicing retail and production businesses in all states
- A retail accreditation scheme with 114 members
- An expanded production accreditation scheme, now with 215 members
- A more flexible and targeted industry communications package that enables participants to choose how they receive valuable business information
- A successful series of annual conferences
- A variety of Research & Development projects focusing on improving environmental performance, health and safety and business profitability within the industry
- An industry strategic plan and review process
- Stronger working relationships with government, organisations and community groups.

The National Nursery Industry Development Manager has provided a key support and/or leadership role for each of these activities. At the same time, Nursery & Garden Industry Australia (NGIA) has been able to build its financial reserves, which should be put to good use on the following industry development initiatives:

- A national production nursery award program that recognises and promotes production nursery excellence. This would compliment the current national garden centre awards program.
- A major 'Waterwise gardening' initiative to ensure close working relationships between the industry and water service providers in all states. The focus should be on education for water use efficiency in gardens and enabling mutually beneficial relationships to be developed between major retailers, water service providers, landscapers, industry members and gardeners.
- Maintaining and enhancing industry commitment to best management practices and professionalism via the existing accreditation and professional recognition schemes. These schemes need to further develop their environmental management and occupational health and safety components. They also need to be promoted to the industry, government and the community as evidence that the industry is professional and doing the right thing.
- Providing business management tools, information and training. The financial performance of businesses within the industry is not well understood, or even known, by many business operators. Simple tools to help capture appropriate information and provide financial analysis are required.
- Developing closer working relationships with landscapers and landscape designers. The proportion of nursery product sold through the landscaper channel continues to rise and in order to increase the value of our product, as perceived by the consumer, stronger relationships with this sector are required.

- Continuing support for marketing programs that capture community values and direction, such as Flora for Fauna. An increasing proportion of the community are responding to environmental issues and recognising the beauty and value of either solely or predominately native gardens. The industry needs to exploit this growing market segment.
- Working with government and community groups in tackling the environmental weeds issue. This issue can be used to the industry's advantage simply by helping to promote the replacement of easy to grow, or weedy, plants by alternatives professionally produced by our industry. The issue is complex and needs to be handled on a regional basis within a national framework.
- Training of industry leaders in the area of how to develop partnerships and strategic thinking. The eight separate nursery & garden industry bodies in Australia need to work better together, with government departments and other organisations. It should not be assumed that those elected to and employed in leadership positions have the skills and attitude to develop mutually beneficial partnerships and make strategic decisions.

Introduction

The Australian nursery and garden industry is characterised by having many small businesses (estimated 6,500 businesses with the majority having less than 5 employees), each carrying out vastly different activities and processes. There are at least 10,000 different varieties of ornamental plants in the trade, each of which can be sold at different sizes through different marketing channels and grown via remarkably different production methods.

The sheer diversity and independent nature within the industry creates difficulty in terms of developing universally agreeable industry development strategies. Improved technology, advances in supply chain management, pest and disease incursions, water shortages, increasing community environmental concerns and disparate industry representation structures are all real issues that impact on industry development strategies and ultimately business profit margins. Such is the diversity within the industry that advancing any one of these issues in a particular way is likely to result in some winners and some losers.

Despite the challenges, considerable progress has been made. The industry continues to grow and industry participants are making greater use of the variety of industry development initiatives available to them. Demand for Development Officer services have escalated, the number of accredited businesses continues to rise steadily, involvement in the Flora for Fauna marketing program is becoming more widespread, links with government and other organisations are getting stronger and more mutually beneficial, participation at national conferences remains high and enrolment in the new NGIA communications program is increasing.

In addition, a variety of business development tools have been developed, including:

- Publication of the revised Nursery industry accreditation scheme, Australia (NIASA) Best Management Practice guidelines in full colour
- Production of the first national NIASA directory
- Publication of the Australian Garden Centre Accreditation Scheme (AGCAS) manual in full colour
- Production of the *Nursery Paper* CD ROM, which contains 106 *Nursery Papers* searchable by keywords and subject.

This report details the 'facts and figures' of the work carried out by the Industry Development Manager between 11 December 2000 and 23 October 2003. It also provides discussion and recommendations for continuing the professional development of the nursery and garden industry.

Strategies and activities

The key development strategies and activities for the Nursery & Garden Industry are well documented in the industry strategic plan. The National Nursery Industry Development Manager completed the following between 11 December 2000 and 23 October 2003.

Facts and Figures:

- Edited and managed full colour production of:
 - The fully revised NIASA guidelines*
 - The AGCAS manual*
 - The *Nursery Papers* CD ROM*
- Ensured financially successful and significant learning opportunities at the 2001, 2002 and 2003 NGIA conferences.
- Coordinated, edited/wrote and published 132 pages of *The Nursery Papers*
- Wrote and published over 57 articles on various industry development issues in *Australian Nursery Manager*, *National Nursery Update* or *Australian Horticulture*.
- Organised, chaired/facilitated and minuted 24 major meetings involving NIDOs, NIASA committees and industry strategic planning workshops.
- Wrote and submitted funding applications to HAL and NHT for a variety of nine special industry development projects, total value \$1,200,564.00 excluding GST.
- Completed 44 milestone and final reports, total value of funding \$1,458,134.00 excluding GST.
- Major input into the IAC, AGCAS, industry strategic planning and the various nursery and garden industry R&D projects.
- Major input into the day-to-day and strategic operations of NGIA.
- Achieved all milestone activities and completed all reporting requirements for each project responsible to the IDM.
- Ensured the IDM and *The Nursery Papers* project were kept within budget.
- Represented the industry at numerous forums and continually dealt with ad hoc enquiries.
- Managed the introduction of the new NGIA communications program.
- Ensured the development of a strategic direction and marketing plan for NIASA.

* At the time of writing this report, these items were in the final stages of publication.

Outcomes and impacts of adoption

The measurement of outputs, or facts and figures, in relation to industry development is relatively easy (see previous page). However, the measurement of outcomes and impacts of adoption is much more subjective and costly to report quantifiably on.

Despite this, the following outcomes from the involvement of the National Nursery Industry Development Manager (IDM) in various activities can be justified:

- An interactive, informed and well-supported national network of Development Officers now enjoy professional recognition from both within and outside the industry.
- The new NGIA communications program will continue to provide valuable information to industry members enabling them to cope with change and grow their business.
- The 2001, 2002 and 2003 NGIA conferences were financially very successful, highly regarded by the vast majority of participants and valuable learning took place.
- The IDM has helped NGIA build significant cash reserves.
- The revised NIASA best management practice manual is a colourful, easily readable and valuable tool that will promote and lead to improved management of production nurseries.
- The funded strategic direction and marketing plan developed for NIASA will result in more accredited production businesses.
- The AGCAS manual, detailing best practices in garden centre retailing, will promote better retailing practices and result in more accredited retail businesses.
- Informal and formal links created between the accreditation and professional development schemes will help the industry demonstrate to government and the community they are a professional industry that does not require stringent regulation and provide valuable products and services.
- The IDM has created a valuable photographic library, which graphically depicts professionalism and help to enable the adoption of best management practices.
- The IDM has facilitated good working relationships between HAL and NGIA.
- The IDM has maintained good working relationships with the state based Nursery & Garden Industries.
- The IDM has facilitated the development of strategic directions and activities for the nursery and garden industry and impacted on the current review process.

Discussion

The National Nursery Industry Development Manager (IDM) position can provide a key leadership role for the Nursery & Garden Industry. The position itself is a difficult one. It requires; diplomacy (ability to bite ones tongue); extensive knowledge of production, supply chain logistics, retailing and marketing aspects of the industry as well as considerable mass media, report writing, networking, management and administration skills.

The position is designed to create and generate opportunities for and development of the industry. As a result by its very nature the position continually generates additional work, which needs to be carefully managed, and conflicting priorities provide a daily, if not hourly, challenge.

Judgement is placed on the position from a variety of people, including the NGIA Chief Executive Officer and staff, NGIA Board members, state based NGI staff and executives, accreditation committees, NGI members and industry members. While this is part-and-parcel of the position, it does create extra pressure, especially in relation to determining conflicting priorities.

Despite these challenges, Nursery & Garden Industry Australia (NGIA) has been able to significantly build its financial reserves during the period of this project. These financial reserves should now be used with other funding sources and put to good use on the following industry development initiatives. These initiatives are not in any specific order of priority.

Production Nursery Industry Awards

Garden Centres have for many years benefited from the national Garden Centre Awards program. Benefits include encouragement for and demonstration of retailing excellence as well as extensive promotion and media coverage implying that nursery retailers are professional. Production nurseries can also benefit in similar ways.

A national production nursery award program would enable recognition of and promotion of best management practices in production nurseries. It could operate via a system of nominations reviewed by state NIASA committees, inspections would then need to be carried out and state finalists determined. The scheme, with appropriate national planning and management, could attract several major sponsors.

Waterwise Gardening

In the last 2 to 3 years there has been much pressure on consumers in capital cities and many regional areas to reduce domestic water use, mostly as a result of prolonged drought causing water shortages and restrictions. This has serious implications for the nursery and garden industry, which must decide how it responds to this changing environment.

As an industry and as individual business owners, it's essential that we demonstrate a responsible reaction to this new situation. Major 'Waterwise gardening' initiatives need to be developed throughout Australia to ensure close working relationships between the

industry and water service providers in all states. The focus should be on education for water use efficiency in gardens and enabling mutually beneficial relationships to be developed between major retailers, water service providers, landscapers, industry members and gardeners.

The issue of waterwise gardening is one that if we demonstrate to government and the community that we are a responsible and professional industry, we will gain considerable flow on benefits including increased perceived value of our products and services.

Enhancing Accreditation

The existing accreditation schemes provide mentors and models of best management practice for all industry participants, including Development Officers and other NGI staff. They also demonstrate professionalism to others outside the industry, including consumers.

The industry needs to maintain and enhance its commitment to these schemes. They need to further develop their environmental management and occupational health and safety components. They also need to be more strongly promoted to the industry, government and the community as evidence that the industry is professional and doing the right thing.

Business Management Tools

Many industry participants are in the nursery and garden industry because they love plants. While this is a good thing, having passion for what you do, it doesn't automatically mean you also have all the business skills necessary to run a profitable and sustainable business.

Many industry members have focused too much on technical or retail issues and have not paid enough attention to basic business management issues, such as managing cash flow and stock control, profitability and enterprise analysis. By providing business management tools, information and training, the financial performance of businesses within the industry can be significantly improved. Simple tools to help capture appropriate information and provide financial analysis are required.

Working with the Landscape Sector

The community, and to a certain extent government, view the landscape and nursery industry as one. This perception will continue to increase as the proportion of nursery product sold through the landscaper channel continues to rise.

Therefore, to ensure the community and government do not receive conflicting messages we need to build partnerships, alliances and synergy. This should happen at an industry representation level and at a local level as more and more consumers want gardens made for them, not just plants sold to them. Such partnerships and alliances can increase the value of our product, as perceived by the consumer.

Marketing Linked to Community Values

Marketing any product or service is all about relating to the consumer. Producers wanting to continue producing what they like producing should have no bearing on any marketing plan.

Research has shown that the community is becoming more and more environmentally conscious and are responding to environmentally themed promotions, such as Flora for

Recommendations

Production Nursery Industry Awards

Develop a national production nursery award program that recognises and promotes production nursery excellence.

Waterwise Gardening

Initiate a major 'Waterwise gardening' campaign to ensure close working relationships between the industry and water service providers in all states. The focus should be on education for water use efficiency in gardens and enabling mutually beneficial relationships between retailers, water service providers, landscapers, industry members and gardeners.

Enhancing Accreditation

Maintain and enhance the existing accreditation and professional recognition schemes. Their environmental management and occupational health and safety components need to be expanded and they need to be promoted more strongly to the industry, government and the community as evidence that the industry is professional and doing the right thing.

Business Management Tools

Provide business management tools, information and training to the industry. Simple tools to help capture appropriate information and provide financial analysis are required.

Working with the Landscape Sector

Closer working relationships with landscapers and landscape designers need to be developed as the proportion of nursery product sold through the landscaper channel continues to rise.

Marketing Linked to Community Values

Marketing programs that capture community values and direction, such as Flora for Fauna, need to be pursued. An increasing proportion of the community are responding to environmental issues and the industry needs to exploit this growing market segment.

Tackling the Weeds Issue

Work with government and community groups and tackle the environmental weeds issue in a way that directly benefits the industry. The issue is complex and needs to be handled on a regional basis within a national framework.

Ensuring Industry Leaders have Appropriate Skills

Provide compulsory training for industry leaders in the area of how to develop partnerships and strategic thinking. It should not be assumed that those elected to and employed in leadership positions have the skills and attitude to develop mutually beneficial partnerships and make strategic decisions.

Acknowledgements

Past and present members of the national Development Officer network, current and past members of the Industry Advisory Committee, current and immediate past Chief Executive Officers of NGIA, Sarah Pennell and Libby Abraham from Horticulture Australia Limited and Heather Henderson from NGIA have provided considerable support to the IDM. Thankyou.

In addition, there are many individuals and businesses that have also provided help, inspiration and assistance for the development of our national and internationally recognised industry.