



Nursery & Garden Industry
Australia

Grower Case Study

FINAL

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Next generation of green leaders challenging status quo

Kristian Spink represents the next generation of nursery growers. He is young, tech savvy and full of new ideas.

A carpenter by trade, Kristian made the decision to return to the family's production nursery after receiving a call from his family four years ago.

While it's taken time to understand the technical side of running a business, he's made a concerted effort to absorb years of knowledge held by family and staff, and believes that a 'fresh pair of eyes' has helped challenge the status quo to enable practice change.

Marlborough Nurseries has been in the greening business for 39 years under the reigns of Kristian's father Terry and uncle Gary Spink. Located at Redland Bay in Queensland, the nursery now spans five hectares of covered growing and employs 25 full time staff.

The business supplies to large retailers, Bunnings and Big W, right along the East Coast and into South Australia. Currently, it produces four crop lines – Anthurium, Bromeliad, Orchids and Spathiphyllum – with a focus on perfecting these through best practice.

"We've built a great relationship with our suppliers and have focussed on producing a high-quality product," Kristian said.

"We only grow a few indoor plant varieties, and in two pot sizes, but we strive to do them well and in big numbers.

"We see in-store plant quality as a win for everyone – the customer, the nursery and the industry as whole. Put simply, if people have a positive experience with a plant, they're more likely to buy again."

Kristian said putting a price on quality has resulted in good margins with the business recently finishing a three-year major upgrade to introduce automation across all stages of production including transplanting, potting and dispatch.

"Having a more advanced system in the nursery has boosted our production by 33 per cent on some lines. Everything we do now has a level of automation to it and we've found that it's paid dividends for our business and our staff retention is a lot better," he said.

"We're able to produce a better plant, faster. It's been less physical on our staff and this has boosted morale around the site. Once the team understand how these machines work, it just makes good business sense."



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It was the people management side of the business that Kristian wanted to improve when he first applied for the Growing Green Industry Leaders, a professional development program led by management consultancy, The Right Mind.

Funded by the nursery and turf industry levies, the course is aimed at young nursery growers and managers who want to take their career to the next level. Participants learn a range of skills from communication theory right through to behavioural change.

“If you don’t have staff, the business stops, and if you don’t have the right manager, then you’re not going to get the best result for the business. I’ve always had a thirst for knowledge and the Green Leaders program seemed like a good way to develop new skills,” Kristian said.

“The course has allowed me to see that everyone learns differently – some people are visual, auditory or list learners, whereas others learn from doing it themselves and repeating it back to ensure they’ve got it right.

“Understanding how different people take direction and process information is an essential skill, and it’s already started to pay off around the nursery. We want to take our staff on a journey with us and effective communication helps to build that momentum.”

Looking ahead, Kristian is focussed on future proofing the business from any downturns and looks to countries such as the Netherlands and the USA to keep up to date with the latest production and consumer trends.

“Currently, we’re producing four crop lines and in very large quantities. If for some reason that needs to change, it can take us up to three years to successfully implement a new variety or species,” he said.

“I want to be a great leader for our business and the industry more broadly. I’m always looking to improve my skills, which is a key reason that I took up the opportunity to be part of Green Leaders,” he said.

“The stronger the leaders, the better our industry can perform. I’d like to be more involved in the future, as it’s important that we come together and advocate to government and other key stakeholders on issues of shared importance.”

The Green Leaders program held its first workshop in Sydney during May with 30 participants from across the nursery and turf industries completing a workplace project. Participants presented their findings at the second forum held in Brisbane early August.

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