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Townsville Plant Wholesalers forges a path based on reliable data

Management of any production nursery, large or small is something that must be done with robust data-based insights and knowledge. To increase the usage of data on business management, the Hort Innovation strategic levy-funded project Nursery industry statistics 2016/17 to 2019/20 (NY17008) project has created a Benchmarking Data Tool to assist businesses in making strategic and operational decisions. Townsville Plant Wholesalers is one business that is reaping the benefits of data.

Kris Grundy was born in Victoria with nursery industry in his blood, but the path which led to him running the 2-acre Townsville Plant Wholesalers and managing a team of 8 was anything but linear.

Coming from a family that owned nurseries, Kris naturally joined the industry working at various small and large nurseries in a variety of roles until the age of 22, when he began running electrical and air conditioning businesses across the country.

Running a business focused on cooling houses, saw Kris chasing heat all the way to North Queensland. But as a keen businessman, Kris was always looking for new business opportunities and soon found himself back in the nursery game after purchasing one of Townsville's few production nurseries, Townsville Plant Wholesalers.

After a long period of time out of the industry, Kris found a lot had changed since he was a production manager in his early 20's. But after discovering the Nursery Industry Benchmarking Data Tool, it wasn't long before he was able to get back up to speed and begin making strategic decisions as if he never left the industry.

The tool is made of four key components which growers can use to get a sense of where they sit amongst their peers and make strategic decisions accordingly. The four elements are: a top-down view of trends over time, using past years' results; Sales insights, where growers can input their own data for comparison; Employment data and human resources costs; Industry sentiment which tracks the current and future expectations for the industry, based on grower feedback.

For Kris, the information from the benchmarking tool gave him the base level of knowledge and insights about his new business and the wider industry, to enable him to make immediate operating decisions and build a long-term strategy.

"Although I was returning to the industry, I was essentially starting from scratch. From day one I had huge gaps of knowledge in terms of where the industry was at, and where the new business fit into that," Kris said.

"By consulting the benchmarking tool, I was able to fill the gaps, understand our position and start mapping out how we would get to where I needed us to be.

"Whether it be understanding what varieties are being grown across the industry, the market segmentation of customers or understanding the workforce of the industry, the information that could be procured from the data was almost endless."

An example of how the tool has helped shape his business strategy is through learning and development. The tool gave Kris a window into the levels of training and education that employees of other nurseries were receiving.

Understanding the value of training, Kris leveraged the data in the tool and made the decision to invest in upskilling his staff. Although relevant courses are hard to come by in Townsville, Kris invested in putting some of his mature-age staff through an online Certificate 3 course in nursery. He expects his business to reap the benefits of a more educated workforce in the medium-term.

Throughout his working life, Kris has been an innovator. However, he has a long-held belief that innovation should serve a purpose and be backed up by a business or industry need. The benchmarking tool has worked as a guide for Kris as he decides how much innovation should be pursued. By referencing the tool, he can see how the sentiment of other similar businesses towards innovation and make calculated purchasing decisions accordingly.

In fact, it was through the consultation of the tool that he was able to justify the purchase of automated technology such as a potting machine, which has



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improved the efficiency of his operation and the bottom line of the business.

“Although the data is technically a ‘look back’ at the industry, trying to drive a business forward without consulting it, is like driving at night without headlights on. You probably know what direction you are going, but without the benefit of hindsight, everything up ahead is less defined and you’re more likely to get lost along the way,” Kris said.

Since purchasing the nursery, Kris Grundy has moved to expand the leadership team to help consult on major business decisions, something he expects that the benchmarking tool will also continue to play a major role in.

“We’re looking forward to continuing to engage with this project as long as it’s running. We contribute to the survey component every year as we know that the more accurate the data is, the better it will be for the entire industry. And we will continue to mark our calendars each year when the tool comes out to help provide credibility to the strategic decisions we are making to keep Townsville Plant Wholesalers productive and profitable.”

For a snapshot of the outcomes of the *Nursery Industry Statistics 2018-19* please refer to [Facts at a Glance](#)

For more information, please contact Greenlife Industry Australia at: info@greenlifeindustry.com.au or on 02 8861 5100.



Kris Grundy, owner, Townsville Plant Wholesalers.

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