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Rooted in Success: How Branding Elevates Plant Value

Brands can generate value among customers through communicating the value proposition. Here, we discuss the importance of brands, how they influence behavior, and opportunities in the ornamental plant industry.



Figure 1. Examples of Ornamental Plant Brands.

Photo source: A. Rihn

Brands are names or logos that set apart or distinguish a business, good or service from its competitors (Thomson Reuters, 2024). Brands are everywhere (e.g. Nike) and represent a certain quality standard a customer receives if s/he purchases that good. In the ornamental plant industry, we have brands, but they are less ubiquitous than in other industries, such as fashion or restaurants. The ornamental plant industry has several brands that face the industry and end customers (Figure 1). But what drives the value of brands among end customers?

When considering end customers, it is important to understand that they all have unique internal drivers. Internal drivers include perceptions, attitudes and beliefs that exist within the customer (Figure 2).

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These are outside of our control; however, we can help guide customers' interests using external stimuli. External stimuli include the marketing mix (product, place, promotion and price) and provide the customer information that can influence their behavior. In turn, their response (i.e. purchasing behavior) reflects a combination of internal factors and how the external stimuli impact their needs. Brands can be used in all three areas to establish reasonable expectations via the external stimuli which ultimately impacts customers' level of satisfaction with their purchases.

Using the brand and marketing mix to set reasonable expectations is very important in the ornamental plant industry.

Satisfaction occurs when the product performs in a way that aligns with the customers' expectations (Dennis et al., 2005). If the product outperforms what the customer expects, **delight** occurs. **Delight** is an emotional reaction to an event (purchase) which combines surprise and joy. Conversely, if a customer expects a plant to perform in a certain way but it fails to meet that expectation, s/he experiences **regret**. Regret is a negative emotional response. In the grand scheme of things, satisfaction is the bare minimum of what a firm needs to deliver to the customer to avoid regret. Delight is what results in customers remembering the brand and is a precursor to loyalty (Dennis et al., 2005). Customer loyalty is important because it increases profitability, growth, repeat purchases, recommendations, and premiums. The goal is to minimize regret and foster loyalty through setting realistic expectations using the marketing mix toolkit.

How does a company foster delight? One of the key elements is clearly articulating the value proposition.

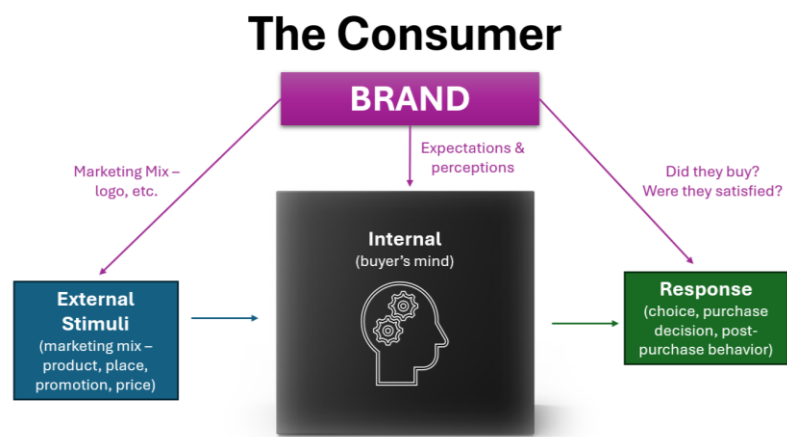


Figure 2. The Influence of Brands on Consumer Behavior.



Figure 3. Example of Brand Logo Demonstrating Plant Benefit Information (e.g. native, pollinator friendly, deer resistant).

Photo source: A. Rihn

A **value proposition** is the full mix of benefits the company promises to deliver to current/future customers if they buy that product (Armstrong et al., 2018). A value proposition should be clear and direct, aspirational, and feature descriptions. It should be consistent across all touchpoints, including the brand, product and experience. Highlighting exactly what the customer can expect when they buy that product increases their likelihood of being satisfied with the purchase. In turn, this paves the way to improve their experience and generate delight.

Consider your brand's value proposition and how that is communicated across touchpoints.

- What are the strengths?
- What are the points of differentiation?
- What is the brand's story?

Stories are sticky. People are more likely to purchase from brands that have personalities that are relatable (Maehle & Shneor, 2010). Similarly, intense brand attachments occur between customers and brands with similar identities, relatedness, and competence (Gómez et al., 2016).



Figure 4. Example of Brand Logo Demonstrating Plant Benefit Information (light foot traffic).

Photo source: A. Rihn

Once the value proposition is clearly defined, consider ways to elevate the customer's experience to generate delight! Some examples of ways to help generate delight in the ornamental plant industry include:

- Consistency across touchpoints
- Point-of-sale information (e.g. plant benefits, pollinator benefits, natives; Figure 2)
- Excellent customer service
- Experiential opportunities (e.g. uses, demonstrations)
- Unique plant experiences
 - Sensory benefits: fragrance, textures/shapes, edible/food producing
 - Responsive plants: sensitive plants, dancing plant
- Entertainment (e.g. events, child activities, wine and blooms)
- Gifts (e.g. stickers, temporary tattoos, treats)
- Spontaneous outreach
- Loyalty programs
- Invitations for "exclusive" products (testing, trials, etc.)
- Guarantees / warranties
- Additional services (e.g. design help)

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