

Label Flexibility from Nursery to Customer[©]

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INTRODUCTION

Floralabels A/S was established in 2005 to provide flexible, customised labelling for nurseries, garden centres and other horticultural companies. The system enables users to create labels, tags, signs and banners, in colour, on demand and is available through our partners in most European countries, Africa, USA, and New Zealand.

The ideas presented in this paper draw on my knowledge from previous work in the marketing and packaging of what are known as “fast moving consumer goods” and my knowledge of recent research on consumer behaviour in garden centres and other retail outlets where plants are sold. I have supplemented this with non-scientific interviews with consumers visiting garden centres in Denmark, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LABELS

Labels are used on all types of products, from plants and flowers to shampoo, food, and drinks to cars and airplanes. You would not be able to tell the difference between one type of shampoo and another without a label, and many consumers could not tell the difference between two different plants without the labels.

Labels are used for many purposes. They give basic consumer information such as what the plant is and how much it costs, and, often, plant care information and planting advice. A label normally also contains a barcode for scanning at the cashier.

Labels can also be used for tracking purposes, so that companies in the supply chain can track the life of a plant from seed to retail shelf or even beyond if, for instance, the garden centre gives a growth guarantee. Current label projects even include an RFID tag to track Christmas trees over their life.

Anti-theft devices can now be built into the labels, so an alarm goes off if someone tries to steal a plant — these labels also have to be designed so that they cannot easily be removed from the plant. Anti-counterfeit systems can also be built-in in the form of hidden codes or holograms — this is useful if you need to be able to confirm that the plant is the genuine one as named and not a cheap copy.

Factors such as durability, material type, and thickness, the environment it will have to survive, whether it is to be permanent or removable, and the part of the product to be labelled (e.g., pot labels, hanging labels, loop labels, or adhesives), will play an important role in deciding what kind of label you want.

I have offered biodegradable labels for a few years at the same price and with the same characteristics as more traditional materials but, disappointingly, sales have not taken off. As so few pots are recyclable, perhaps growers and their retail customers feel that just changing the labels will have too small an environmental impact. I believe it's important to take care of our environment, so Floralabels will gradually move to produce most of its labels from bio-degradable materials anyway, at no extra cost.

USING LABELS, SIGNS AND BANNERS TO SELL YOUR PRODUCTS

Fast-moving, consumer-goods companies spend considerable sums each year on optimising labels and packaging to improve the impact of their products on the retail shelf — they treat labelling seriously. They know that 70% of purchasing decisions in supermarkets are made right there when the consumer is looking at the shelf, in about the time it takes to read this sentence.

I am not sure plants are fast-moving consumer goods, but one recent American study showed that only 5% of garden centre visitors know what they want when they arrive at the site. In other words, 95% buy on impulse which means we have plenty of scope to influence their decisions.

Consumers and plants are often left “on their own” in garden centres and in other plant retailer situations. If there is no one around to ask, the consumer’s decision can only be made based on the plant itself, its label, and any adjacent promotional material such as posters. The labels have to sell the plants especially during the times of the year when the plants are not in full leaf or flower.

So it is important to understand what gardeners are looking for. I have found two studies that show the importance consumers place on the different types of information on plant labels. In summarising these studies, consumers want to see a photo of the mature plant and they want answers to these questions:

- Does it prefer sun or shade?
- When does it flower and what is the flower colour?
- Is it annual, perennial, evergreen, deciduous, tree or shrub?
- How hardy is it?
- What are its water requirements?
- How tall will it grow and how much will it spread?
- How and where should it be planted?
- How should it be cared for?
- And, of course, how much does it cost?

And, of course, all this information must be written in the local language where the plant will be sold.

The job of selling the plant must be done by your labels and signs. Do your labels do all of this?

Growers are all plant experts. But it is important to understand the level of knowledge and interest of the average consumer so that your labels and promotional information will engage with them.

Studies have shown that, on a label or poster, consumers tend to look at images in preference to text, are attracted by colour contrast, and respond best to information that is easy to read.

It is therefore important to include a big picture, so the consumer can see the plant at its best. Remember, you want to sell your plants before, during, and after the time that the plant is looking its best. Combining that with the information listed in the previous section will go a long way to maximising your opportunity to sell the plant.

Symbols are popular as a means of conveying information but work best if placed alongside a short, precise text.

It is also interesting to note what gardeners do with the labels. They use them to make their choice in the garden centre or supermarket, of course; some keep them for a while to use the care instructions or as markers to remind them what the plant is when planted, or keep them as a reference for future purchases — but many just throw them away after planting.

Finally, remember that the vast majority of plants are bought by women. Does that make a difference as to how the labels should be designed?

THE IMPORTANCE OF TESTING AND FLEXIBILITY

It is important to continually test new ideas as there is no answer the question of what is the best label. For example, put labels of different styles or designs on the same type of plant in the same garden centres and measure the impact. Adapt your labels as you learn the results.

This kind of market testing is best done using a flexible label system so that you can design and print your labels, signs and banners. This lets you customize your labels and easily test what works best for your plants in your markets.

It also enables you to respond quickly and easily to your customers’ wishes. If they want their logo on the labels, you can print that. You can even offer to print their prices for them so each plant only has one label. You can also put the information they prefer on the labels. You may even be able to charge for that service.

A flexible on-nursery system also enables you to adapt the language to the countries

where you sell. Sometimes I see labels on plants in Danish garden centres written in English, German, or Dutch, not in Danish. Not very professional and will put-off some consumers, who may only speak one language. Some labels are printed in several languages but the amount of space this takes up means much of the information consumers want is cut. A customised label ensures the consumer gets the information he or she needs to decide to buy your plant.

A label that says the plant is grown in the country where it is being sold can be a strong selling point and suggests that the plants are adapted to the local climate. You can print that on the labels.

Flexibility also means being able to introduce new plants during the year whenever you are ready. You don't need to wait for the labels to be made. And you can print them in the quantity you need as sales takes off.

You can also print the labels when it suits you and your customers, such as the time you pick the orders or earlier. This way you never run out of stock of labels. You can say yes to rush orders and you don't risk ending up with huge quantities of labels for obsolete plants at the end of the season.

You can also print your own merchandising, signs, and banners that promote your products, all from the same system. And adapt to the branding of certain garden centres or help them with their promotional campaigns assuring they stock and sell your products.

CONCLUSION

Labels have many purposes, but make sure you include the selling aspect. Big consumer goods companies know the importance of the labels. They are often your only salesperson along with your healthy plants.

If you have the opportunity to use a flexible system, you can test and adapt to consumer behaviour and trends.

